Zora Rashkis
1/11/01

RG: ...in the year 2001, and this is Bob Gilgor interviewing Zora Rashkis at her home at 415 Clayton Road in Chapel Hill. Good morning, Zora.

ZR: Good morning, Bob.

RG: Let's start out the questions this morning with just a broad question of where you grew up and what life was like for you growing up.

ZR: That's a good question. Well, I was born and brought up in Cleveland, Ohio. I was the fifth of six children that Mother and Dad had, and it was a wonderful time to be in Cleveland because it was a large city, but it was not a gigantic city, and I loved every little bit of school. I remember standing before my family when I was two years old saying, 'Guess what, I'm going to be a teacher.' I don't even know if I knew what a teacher was, but that's what I was going to be, and by golly I was. I had all the support I needed from everybody around. They thought if I wanted to be a teacher, okay, I would go to college and learn to be a teacher. And the interesting thing was that I loved every single minute of school, and that's the way I've always approached my students in the classroom. I take it for granted that they love every minute of school. And I have a feeling that if all teachers would approach their students that way, the students who might not have originally had that feeling would have imbibed it unconsciously, and at least come to that class loving the idea of going to school and being learned. So school has always been fun for me.

RG: Where did you go to get your secondary education to be a schoolteacher?

ZR: Well, I was in the first gifted child class in America. They chose 30 of us from all over, and we happened to be most of us in Cleveland, and Virginia Lyle was our teacher. She sat us all on the floor, we were five years old, all 30 of us, and told us that we were going to be gifted by having an education where the 30 of us would always be together, and some of us might finish sooner and some of us might finish later, and we would take courses that were right for us, in other words we all didn't have to take the same courses. And it was wonderful, because we had the best teachers and we had the most fun, and I never looked at going to school as a drudge, or something difficult, it was always a privilege. And the boys and girls who went to school with me became very dear friends. It was like a family; you left your home for one family and went to school where there was another family. And I've always tried to incorporate that feeling in my classroom. I wanted each class that I taught English to, to be the family for that period, so that when I started here and I left Cleveland and came here, it was the year that they were integrating the schools, and the kids had never before been in a black and white mixed classroom. And I went to the school—

RG: Okay, before we get into that, can I go back over this gifted class and when, was that college, or was that high school, or—

ZR: We went from kindergarten through high school, and then all of us immediately went on to college.

RG: So the gifted was from first grade on?

ZR: From kindergarten on, yes.

RG: And in what year was that, when you were first there?

ZR: Oh heavens, I don't remember. Let's see. Well I was born in 1913, so the first grade, I would have been five years old, it would have been 1918.

RG: And was this an integrated school?

ZR: The one that we went to? No, no this had nothing to do with integration, it was before integration started. And we had the 30 of us had been chosen because of test grades or remarks or whatnot, and we were pretty much alike, we all loved school, we were boys and girls from practically the same kind of families, middle class families, we took it for granted that this was a special thing, we never took education for granted. And Virginia Lyle was a remarkable woman who taught us that we were going to be as good students as we put into ourselves to be. If we decided we wanted to be great, we'd be great. If we wanted to know everything, we'd know everything. If we couldn't care less, we wouldn't last very long in that class. The nice thing about being a member of a class like that is everybody loves school. Your neighbor sitting next to you loves this, and your neighbor sitting in back of you loves that, and we don't all love the same thing, and we were not all given the same courses. But she was able to siphon off from our class those who should be doing this, and those who should be doing that. And that, of course, can't happen in the public schools. We're all given English and math and science and whatnot, but her idea, of course, was to find out what our strengths were and to work on those so that those strengths would be really tantamount to greatness. If we took something that we didn't like, she also made us realize that if we didn't like it, it was our fault, not because the subject wasn't good. So she put the responsibility for liking school on us, not on a good teacher, not on a good course of study, but on us. It was up to us to find out what was in that program, in that subject, and find out how wonderful it was. Now when we finished that, we might say, well you know that was wonderful, I really liked it, but that's not really what I want to do, which is all she wanted to hear, so that she knew which of us wanted to go on to do science, which of us wanted to go on to be teachers, which of us wanted to go on to be aesthetes. It was wonderful, and we all had a good time.

RG: So you finished high school in this remarkable environment, then went on and got four years of college?

ZR: Uh-huh, at Western Reserve University.

RG: And then did you start teaching immediately?

ZR: Then after my four years at Western Reserve University, Dr. Toesch came to me, and he was the head of the English Department at Reserve, and he said I need an English teacher for the freshman and sophomore classes. Would you be interested in doing that? And I said, well I never thought about being a teacher, I was always so busy being a student. And he said that's exactly what I'm looking for, so I will hire you for two years and you won't have to pay tuition, that will be your salary. So I never had to pay tuition for those two years of college, and that was my salary. It was wonderful, because I didn't want to impose any, you know, monetary punishment on my parents because I was going to college early. And it was wonderful, because when you have college given to you as a special bonus, and you have students in your class who are just adorable and anxious to learn, then you realize that learning is a beautiful thing. And I've never thought about learning as anything else. Never drudgery, never ugh, never I wish I didn't have to take that, but always a privilege. And when you're raised that way, then you expect all the students in your classes to feel privileged being in your class. And by golly, fortunately for me, they seemed to feel that way. And my classes became not six different classes, but six different families.

RG: So when you were going to college, you were at the same time teaching? Full time, or a couple of classes?

ZR: No no, I taught the regular schedule. After all, to teach English when you've been in the gifted child program all your life is not hard, because you love what you're doing. And it was exciting, it was real exciting. See, I never thought of learning as drudgery or a compulsive thing, I always wanted more than I could possibly get, and I always hoped that when I taught school my students would feel the same way. As learning was a privilege, and they wanted more than they saw so they were always seeking new worlds, new places to study, new things to grab onto.

RG: So where were you doing the teaching, at the high school, grammar school, junior high school?

ZR: When, then? Those two years?

RG: The first two years of college.

ZR: I was teaching at Western Reserve University.

RG: You were teaching at the college level while you were going to college?

ZR: Yeah, but I had graduated from high school. And yes, that was no trick, that was wonderful.

RG: Um, tell me about your work after you graduated and had your teaching degree.

ZR: Well after I had my teaching degree, I didn't care where I taught, I just wanted to teach. And no matter what school I taught at, I always loved the kids. Now I could have taught at college, I could have taught high school, I could have taught junior high, but my natural feeling was that I wanted to teach ninth grade, ninth grade being the first year of high school. And it seemed to me that kids at that time were ready to grow up and to think for themselves and to make a plan, in other words not to just be given a course of study and saying this is what you have to do, but try to individualize the class, so that if I had 20 kids in a class, that didn't mean we were all studying the same thing or reading the same literature, but we would have the same basic rules for learning how to be a good student and how to have a good language background. But we, I tried to let them see that each of us had a different approach to learning, and one boy may be all excited about chemistry and wanting to invent a new type of balloon, some girls who of wanted to be homemakers and were only interested in that type of aesthetics, and it was wonderful, because we learned from each other, and when each of my students got up to give his half-hour report on the studying he was doing, everybody in the class was taking notes, so that it was as if they not only had done their studying, but this young man had done this, and that became our property. In other words, we were all not reading the same book at the same time.

RG: How long did you teach in the Cleveland area, and when did they integrate the schools?

ZR: Well, I don't remember not being integrated. You see, in Cleveland, there was none of this integration, non-integration business. When I came here to Chapel Hill and found that this was the first year the schools were integrated, I was absolutely flabbergasted. It never occurred to me that you didn't go to school, just you went by your neighborhood, and whoever lived in your neighborhood was your classmate. And it never troubled me one way or another because it wasn't a problem up there, you see.

RG: So you had taught in integrated schools.

ZR: Oh yes.

RG: For how long?

ZR: Oh, I don't really recall. I taught for an awfully long time. I taught for, well from the minute I got out of college, I just taught forever. Naturally I had always wanted to be a teacher, it never occurred to me to try to be anything else. So to me, teaching was the most noble of all professions, and if we could only get kids today to look on teaching with pride and with joy and as an opportunity to do something for your community, you'd have no problem getting teachers. Except today, of course, the problem is, as things have gotten more expensive, they want to live decently, even as teachers, and they want to get a decent salary. And in Ohio I got a really fine salary as a teacher. And I came down here where the salaries were anemic, to put it mildly. And it never occurred to them that teachers should be making more of a living than they were. And it was my object to see if

somebody couldn't do something about it. Of course, I, as one person, could never do anything. And fortunately, by the time I got down here, I was married and I was able to teach and have a home to come to. But a teacher has to have a background of not only having had an excellent background, so that she or he feels capable of handling not only the subject, the subject matter but the subject he or she was teaching—the person—but had to have so much of a background that he had a wealth of knowledge in how to handle people. And I'm afraid that many of our educative systems don't do that; they don't talk about the psychology of being a person, of feeding each soul so that he's able to produce at the top rate of his ability. The idea of making your students feel so special that you trust them and you're going to do everything you can to make them a whole person, 'cause everybody doesn't come from a whole-person family, when there's so many other things that fathers and mothers have to think about, they don't realize that this child doesn't do this, and this child hasn't had any upbringing on how to get along with others, and this child is selfish and can't think about anything but himself. The psychology of being a person has to come within the family itself as the child is growing up. And I tried to do that in my classroom. I try to make each period a family. I would say to the kids now, you know, you're my first period class and you're my family, and I'm shutting the door, and what goes on in this class is your business and mine, and nobody else's. And of course when I came up here to North Carolina, it was the beginning of integration, and the teachers were uneasy, and you can't blame them, and the students were uneasy. And I carried off the same philosophy, I shut the door and said you're my family, and what goes on within the context of this period is ours and nobody else's. If you have any problems, we're going to solve them here. Furthermore, the interesting thing was that when I came here, there were no Jewish people around in the public schools that I could see, and I am Jewish and proud of it. And I went to this school system to teach realizing that I was the only Jewish teacher and the only Jewish person around, because everybody else, I don't know what happened to the Jewish people, there weren't many Jewish people in North Carolina at that point. So I had to know how it felt to be an individual in a society that not necessarily didn't like you, but didn't understand who you were. So I told my students, you know, there are 30 of us in each of my classes, and we're all going to get to know each other so that we will be 30 different families. And if any of you has a problem, any of you feels that we're not treating you properly or they wish that we knew more about you, then we'd talk about it. And it was really wonderful, because the first period in the day, we would be a family. And we had that time together to get acquainted, and in all the years I taught, I never had a problem, ever, with any of my students, or they within the classroom had any problems with anyone in that particular classroom. And because I told them that they were a family and they'd better behave, and they didn't dare, not knowing me very well, know what would happen if they didn't behave. And the presence of six black kids and 25 white kids in each class made an interesting discussion. We would talk, how does it feel to be black, how does it feel to be white, are you jealous of being, not being white, what do you think is going to happen when you get out of my classroom and go into the other classrooms where they might not feel the same way. And they talked about all their fears and all the things they liked, and I taught them that the important thing to do was to like yourself enough

so that you were able to treat yourself with dignity. If you treat yourself with dignity, other people will treat you the same way. But if you go cringing around the corner, or are rude to someone, or can't speak up when you feel that you would like to say something, you're not going to be treated with the respect that comes to someone who does like himself. So my aim with all my homeroom students and my classes was to let them like themselves, and make them feel that there was something important about each of us.

RG: So Zora, please correct me if I'm wrong. You had about 30 years of teaching experience when you came to Chapel Hill. You started teaching in Chapel Hill in 1965, was it? The first year that any of the white schools were integrated.

ZR: Any of the schools.

RG: Any of the schools were integrated. And, um, I'd like to hear you talk more about what you saw during that time, regarding how the teachers, how the other teachers responded to having black students in previously all-white schools.

ZR: Well, I think the important thing about that was the...teachers have always had my respect. I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was two, as I told you. But um, I think that each of them wanted to do a good job. I'm not saying that any of us knew how to do a good job in this new milieu where you didn't have the same background that you grew up in. But the important thing was that we were taught to have pride in our profession. Unfortunately, in North Carolina and I don't know what other states were, the salaries for teachers were just abysmal. They evidently thought that teaching was something that was on a lower scale. Or maybe they didn't have the money and they didn't know how to manifest the need for that. So that a lot of people went into teaching wanting to teach, but then not able to stay teaching because it didn't offer enough of a background of security. The important thing about teaching, it seemed to me, is that the teachers who did teach were all very special people. I, there was something that evidently has to be born in a person before he or she decides, I want to teach young people and I want them to grow and be secure. And on the whole, I think that teachers are a very noble group of people. Um, wonderful. And if they find after teaching that it isn't within their scope to handle it, many of them drop out, not because they don't like teaching, but because they don't like themselves in that position, and they haven't learned how to make it work. Today, more and more men are going into the public school teaching, and that makes me excited, because some of these boys and girls come from homes where they're all boys or all girls, and they haven't learned to get along with the opposite sex and realize that they're just like a brother or sister if you treat them decently. So I think if everybody could have a year of teaching after he or she graduated from college, in order to learn how to get along with people and make them all feel special, and make each of them feel the important thing in life is to determine where your interests lie and if you choose something that isn't right, get out of it and get into the right thing. And after you flounder around for a little while and find the right place for you to be, then learning is the most exciting experience you can possibly have. And you don't hear people saying, 'Ugh, I don't like that professor, he's so tough,' or 'Oh,

nobody in my class talks to me,' or 'Oh, I wish I liked school,' but today, people who have a choice of going to the college they want to go to are thrilled because they know already what that college has to offer, they have a feeling that that's what they want to learn to be and do, and if they find out after four years of it that it isn't the right thing for them, they can always go on to another division of learning. In other words, if they learn that to educate one's self starts when you're born and ends when you die, then you don't think of college as a limited four-year or six-year or eight-year experience, but that learning is a complete life experience that goes on every minute of the day you breathe.

RG: Zora, were the students or the teachers given any preparation for the integration of the school?

ZR: Well, that's a good question, because I wasn't in every classroom to know what was going on. I know that the announcement was made that there would be integrated classrooms, and that we hoped everybody would learn to get along with one another, period. Because there were some white people who had never so much as spoken to a black person, not because they didn't like them, but they weren't put in a situation where they even met one another. So it became an individual process of learning, and I think that it was a little bit tenuous for some people. Others were a little bit fragile and a little bit frightened, but I think on the whole that it went well.

RG: Did you see any taunting or abuse, physical abuse in the hallways or schoolyards or in the classroom?

ZR: Well, there might have been, and there, even in classes that I went to when I went to school myself. I never made it a point to get involved in any of that. If I saw something I didn't like, I just avoided it if I knew I was unable to handle it. But I think today, the boys and girls are taught to be gracious to everybody, and if there are those who aren't gracious to everybody, I think teachers have been educated now to say to them, now you know we're one family when we're here learning and we want to learn to get along with everybody. And that's the only philosophy that I can give you.

RG: You mentioned that you asked the students to talk about themselves and what their fears were, and other emotions. Can you recall what kinds of things you heard from the white students and what kinds of things you heard from the black students? And did you feel that they were really open and honest about what they felt?

ZR: Oh yes, my students have always been honest and open with me because I've always been honest and open with them. And I'm a little woman, and they have nothing to be afraid of. But I would always have the parents over to our home, first period parents would come on Monday night, and I'd have them in, and the women would sit in a circle and the men would go around and shake their hands and introduce themselves, and then we'd play games, the parents, and then we'd have, I'd serve them something to eat and talk about things, and it became like a

family, so that there was never any, no prejudice and no fear in my families. I, unfortunately or fortunately, was the only Jewish person here at that time, so I guess they didn't even know what it was to be Jewish, but they knew that I was different from them and that I expected them to treat me decently just the way that I was going to treat them decently. We never had, never had a problem, ever. And I think that if you could have time, see teachers today don't have time to do that kind of stuff, they have so many papers to mark and so many classes to attend and so many thises and so many thats, they can't take that extra work on themselves because they go home and they have a family to take care of. Fortunately I came here and I was free to do this sort of thing, so that I really did feel that they were part of my family, and now I will tell you, sometimes the doorbell rings and there's a big, tall, husky man with six kids standing by his side, and he'll say class, I want you to meet, or, family, I want you to meet my favorite teacher, Zora Rashkis. And they all look at me and they grin, and I go and shake their hands, and they come in, and they're used to having had a father who loved his teacher. Well, then, how are they going to treat their teachers? The same way that he treated his teachers. And it makes a difference if the parents can, today, can say, I want to do everything I can to make my child's experience in public schools a good one. And I understand that the teachers are overworked, true, and that they have more to do than they can possibly accomplish, true, so I think I'm going to volunteer my time. And many parents today who have full loads at home and plenty to do without doing this, volunteer to come to the school, maybe for 20 minutes one day a week, maybe for one morning one day a week, and help the teacher either read to kids who need special lessons, or take them on special little excursions, and become a part of the family of that teacher's class. And it has such a difference in making the child's attitude toward school an exciting one. After all, this is this just an enlarged family that he's going to.

RG: Zora, how many other teachers did what you did, by inviting the students and parents, black and white, to their homes? From every class?

ZR: Well my, no, this is just my, Zora Rashkis' teaching.

RG: No, I mean for every one of your classes?

ZR: Oh yes, I did six classes.

RG: So you had six of those classes here at night to meet the families.

ZR: Six different evenings, that's right. And the, them, I didn't have the students come with their parents, I had the parents come, oh the parents had to learn to know each other and to feel comfortable with them, because I explained to them that each of my periods was a family. Well, you can't be a family if you don't know each other. So, Mel will tell you, we played games like little kids on the floor and had a wonderful time. And at the end of that time there was no such thing as a stranger among the parents of each class. But what went on with the others was not my affair.

RG: Did you feel that you got to know the milieu, the background of your students when you did this?

ZR: Yes, I did. I got to know them quite well and realized that they came from different groups, and different religions, and different classes. And the only one situation that was very bad, there was a girl in the class who used to sit in the back corner, and she never talked to anybody. And I realized that she had just come here, hadn't known anybody, and nobody sort of welcomed her. And I had to send her to the office one day, and when she was gone I said to the kids, now if I hear that any of you spoke to her about Mrs. Rashkis talking about how to handle her, I'm going to be furious and I'm going to put you out of my class. This little girl is very shy, she's very quiet, she doesn't have any way, knowledge of how to make friends, or what to do, and I notice that when you all dart out of here and go to your next class, you go with someone at least. I want each of you, for one week of the year, you'll come up to her and say, you know, I'd like to get acquainted with you this week, and I'm going to take you from my class with Mrs. Rashkis and take you to the next class, and we'll talk, and then I want you to sit at the lunch table with me. And you may not like what we talk about, or you may not like what we eat, but I want you to live with our family this week. And so I gave her a week with each of the 30 kids in the classroom, and she knew that many kids enough so that she could go down the hall and say hi to them, which is, you know, a great step forward when you're shy and you don't know how to say hello to anybody.

RG: Was this a white student or a black student?

ZR: Yes, it was a white student, but there were black students in the class, and—

RG: And the black students had to do the same thing.

ZR: Exactly the same thing, right.

RG: When you had the parents over here, from your classes, did you get good attendance from black parents as well as the white parents?

ZR: Oh yes, everybody had—there was no choice, it was like, it was like being a member of my class and you'd better come or I was going to put you out of my class. And they came, and everybody met everybody else and shook hands and got acquainted, and maybe for the first time in their lives they were in the same room together at the same time, and they realized by golly, this is fun, there's nothing wrong with this.

RG: Did you feel any resentment on the part of the whites?

ZR: Oh no, no. There was one man who was a little bit, he wanted to be sure he did the right thing because he had been brought up here, and he realized this was a different experience, and when the evening was over he came up to me and said, how did I do, Mrs. R? And I said you were magnificent. And he grinned like a

little two-year-old boy. So, it works. All you have to do is let people know you respect and love them, and they'll come through no matter what.

RG: I'd like to discuss specifically the black students in the class, like how you saw them. I mean here they were, coming into a brand new environment, many of them from lower economic circumstances, and surrounded by a group that was economically, you had to say, advantaged, a lot of them.

ZR: Well maybe, maybe, some of them were, many of them were not advantaged, but the important thing was that they were talking to each other, and doing this, hi, and feeling that they were part of, and you know, my business of having my door shut, 30 of us sitting together talking like a family, it became very intimate and we liked one another and we were sworn to secrecy, we were not to talk about what went on outside of that individual class period. Of course it was no trick for me, because I'd been brought up in Cleveland where there was no such thing as class difference, or who cared what color you were, or, maybe they cared what religion you were, but at least they respected you.

RG: What were the kinds of things that you heard coming from the black students?

ZR: My students only had good things to say. I think they were afraid—

RG: Their fears?

ZR: Pardon me?

RG: Did they have fears?

ZR: Well, they may have had fears, but I told them they had fears whether they told me or not. I didn't want anyone to have one of these sessions where you confess, I wanted them to feel I expected them to be decent citizens of the class, this was our family, and if they had any problems they should come and talk and during that homeroom, period, which was ours, we would discuss it among ourselves, nobody else. And I said that's what happens in your home, isn't it, when you have a problem, don't you sit and talk with your mother and dad and resolve that problem? And I'm sure that a lot of them never did that, but maybe they started to do it at home. We never had a problem, Bob. Never. And that was because I didn't intend to let a problem happen.

RG: Were you aware of the economic status of your students?

ZR: Oh yes.

RG: Was there a difference?

ZR: Oh yes, there was a difference. Not necessarily all the black kids were poor, not necessarily all the white kids had money. There was a low level of productivity in the various families, but it didn't matter. I explained that someday they were

going to be married, and some of their children would be brilliant and some of them wouldn't be. Some of them would be gorgeous, and some of them would be just nice. But that the whole point as a father or a mother in a family is to make each of your children be successful, so you find out what that child does best or is best suited to do, and you help him achieve that. And I expect each of you in this class to help the other person become as good a member of this first period family as you could be. And that's how they treated it.

RG: How long did you stay on there at the junior high school, Zora?

ZR: Well, I've taught for an awfully long time. I taught um, I don't know how many years. I must have taught at least 45 years. Loved every minute of it. And I can't understand anybody wanting to be anything but a teacher, because I loved it so much. And if you love teaching, you're going to be having a classroom that is so exciting that kids are going to want to come into your classroom. There'll be no doubt, the kids will say, Mr. or Mrs. or Miss So-and-So has such a nice classroom that I can't wait to get there, and if I have trouble learning, she sees to it that there's some aide to help. A lot of the parents will volunteer to be aides, supposing there's one particular child in this class that's having trouble l earning to read, that teacher will say, may I come every Monday from 10 to 10:30 and take so-and-so out, and we'll see what we can do about teaching that child, and that became part of that child's class. I don't know, of course I'm so imbued with the love of teaching, and thinking that there can be nothing wrong with education that you can't solve yourself if you work at it, that maybe I'm not a good person to do this talking. But I had to do something that satisfied me. And if you're in a profession that makes you grow, and while you're growing you help others to grow, you've got it made, there can be nothing wrong with it. So even in Chapel Hill where the salaries have been not very good, you also have that benefit of learning to grow yourself, of improving y our own self while you're helping others. And it's a good philosophy to live with, that by helping others you are doing more to help yourself than anything else you could possibly do.

RG: Let's go back to junior high school, and the years of integration. The first few years. Did you see changes within the school, among teachers or the students, in their attitudes?

ZR: Well I have to hand it to the teachers, I think they were a wonderful group. It must have been very difficult for many of them to change their attitude of feeling superior, or better, or to feel sorry for. And in other words, they had to learn to approach all people as if they were family. That was what my mother used to say. If you love your family then the great world outside becomes your family. And if you're a teacher, then everyone in your classroom becomes your family. And it's true, it really truly works. If you see this child who's sitting there all by himself and nobody's paying any attention to him, you're going to say as soon as you can to the whole class, now how would you like it if you were Robert sitting over there, he's just as nice as any of you, and he's a little bit shy. Well, you weren't born shy so you don't know what I'm talking about, but this little boy is shy and he wants to be a part of the family. Now supposing you pretend you're Robert for

a whole week. I want each of you to pretend you're Robert for a whole week. And you treat him the way you'd want him to be treated by you. It worked. And of course in the bosom of a family of 30 people, instead of 160, it will work if you take each class separately, treat each class like a family. And I was a tough teacher, don't think for a minute that I was easy. I expected them to produce, and they did produce. And every one of them who comes back to see me say with pride how much they learned. And that's not because I'm an unusual person, but because I had expectations that everybody was going to learn, whether he or she wanted to or not. End of lecture. (tape shut off)

(Beginning of Side 2)

RG: ...to go to school with Zora Rashkis and watch her teach. And she spent a half an hour with an elementary school class and it was remarkable for me to see, in that she involved the whole class with the Socratic teaching method, questions and answers from the, questions to the students, answers from them, and this entire class was wrapped up in her palm. She also taught values, during this half-hour session. And you could just feel the interest of the students, so it's easy to see why she was a loved teacher. I just had to interject that in this interview with her. But now, let's go on with the interview, and um, let me give this to you, Zora. I wanted to you talk more about this family of students you had, and the expression of what they were feeling in your classroom. The fears that they had, and if there was a different among the blacks and whites in the classroom.

ZR: That's a good question, because not being black, or for the other color not being white, it's hard to know how they actually feel. But I figured out long ago that to treat each of my classes like a family was the only solution. And today, as you pick up a television or read in the paper, there are quite a number of families who have picked up a black child who was alone in the world and adopted him, or the people who go off to China to adopt some little Chinese girls because the Chinese people don't believe in keeping girls, um, it means that, to become a part of a family means that you are wanted and loved and treated like an individual. It doesn't matter to whom you were born, of course it's nice to know that you've, in your family you have the people who've come from yours and your husband's or wife's stock, but it also is interesting to know that a family is anyone who's treated with such warmth and respect that he can belong to a group of people like a family if he has no other one to call his own. In this world, it seems to me unfortunate that there are so many orphans who are left to just, God knows what, in the orphanages, and many of them don't live very long because there's nobody to take care of them. And I wish there were some kind of a law that says you can't bear a child unless you have the wherewithal or the future plan to see that that child's taken care of. Because even today, it certainly isn't true. Many of the people have children and they don't want them, and they abandon them, or they just neglect them. It's sad. But somebody's going to have to do something about that, and it certainly isn't you or me. It's somebody else.

RG: Do you think that the other teachers you were around during the mid-'60s had the same philosophy of the classroom being a family, or do you think this was something that only a few had?

ZR: Oh I don't really know. I wouldn't ever attempt to put my philosophy to work with somebody else, unless they saw the way I was doing things and they liked it, so they wanted to copy it. Many of them had ideas of their own that were probably different from mine and better than mine. The whole thing that each teacher should examine his or her own personality and figure out how best he or she handles people. Or if he doesn't know how to do it, let him learn how by watching and observing and seeing what gets the best results. It seems to me that if a child is put in your class, it's up to you to develop that child to his fullest. You may only have him for a half a semester, or a semester, or two years, or five years, but he should have left having taken the best of you with him. And there are any number of people who have remarkable insight on how to deal with children, and they don't know they have it 'cause they've never tried. Or if they've tried it and found that it didn't work, they realized that was the wrong way, let me do it the right way. It seemed to me that in the classrooms at the university level where you're training to be a teacher, there should be more emphasis on learning how to respond to different personalities. Or finding out the background of the children in your class so that you'll know that this little boy needs special attention because his father was killed in a burglary, and he's still missing that father and may miss him the rest of his life. Or a mother that's overwhelmed with duties, she has more to handle than she can possibly handle, and the child has never learned to take some of the responsibilities of the household. I think that going to school you should learn all these things. And you'll say, that's ridiculous, in school you have to learn subject matter of the subjects you're studying. Well, probably the most important subject matter that you're going to study is yourself. And you have to figure out what's good about you, what needs remedying, what you need to be developed into, how you learn to appreciate things that you don't learn in your own home. It's a world that you go to when you go to school. And you may go to one elementary school and get one world, and then go on to the next, and you're always learning. You learn from the minute you're born until the minute you die. And you may have some good teachers and you may have some bad teachers, but the learning process will go on as long as you make up your mind you're going to ferret out the things that you need, pay attention to them, and develop into the kind of person you want to develop. In other words, it isn't always up to somebody else to develop you. You have to be smart enough to say, oh I wish I were that kind of person, and find out what that kind of person does that you don't do, and learn to do that. Um, it's exciting, and if you're able to accomplish it, isn't it wonderful when you've developed into the kind of personality that you want. And if you haven't developed, then it's up to you, possibly when you go to college and you learn all about psychology of self, to find out what it is that's lacking in your own upbringing and make yourself responsible for learning to be that kind of person.

RG: So Zora, how did you go about learning about the backgrounds of each of your students?

ZR: Um, I found out by having the parents come to visit. I would have that first meeting where I met all the parents at our home, and Mel was right with me, and then at the end of that time I would have gotten a little taste of them and realized where that child comes from, and made it a point during the year to learn about those parents. Many times they came to the classroom to help develop the child. And it's possible, it's not an impossible thing to do. You make up your mind you want to learn about people, you learn about people.

RG: Thanks very much, Zora, I appreciate your time.

ZR: Well, I enjoyed your interest. I think it's wonderful that you want to do this.

RG: Thank you.