U-84

Interview

with

FRANCES BLOOM

August 3, 2005

by Elizabeth Gritter

Transcribed by Emily Baran

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Transcript and tape on deposit at
The Southern Historical Collection
Louis Round Wilson Library

Southern Oral History Program Series:
Long Civil Rights Movement Project

Transcript – Francis Bloom

Interviewee:	Francis Bloom
Interviewer:	Elizabeth Gritter
Interview date:	August 3, 2005
Location:	Louisville, Kentucky
Length:	2 cassettes; approximately 100 minutes
Note:	At times, Ms. Gritter refers to the life history form that Ms. Bloom prepared for her for the interview, which provides a chronology of her life. Also, at one point, Ms. Bloom refers to herself as "Frankie."

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

EG: This is Elizabeth Gritter interviewing Francis Bloom on August 3, 2005, in Louisville, Kentucky. I just had a few questions first from [your life history chronology], because I'm not familiar with Louisville. At least not a detailed knowledge of it yet. The High Gate Springs neighborhood, where is that?

FB: It's in the East End, near Hikes Point area.

EG: I don't—

FB: Yeah, if you're not familiar, it's just kind of East End.

EG: Okay, and was it a predominately Black or White area when you were living there?

FB: At the time I was living there, it was predominately White upper class.

EG: And the Dundee Estates neighborhood, was that also in the East End?

FB: Yeah. I've always lived in the East End.

EG: Okay, you've always been there.

FB: Just different parts of it.

EG: Sure, okay.

FB: Dundee Estates is probably the, it was a little more affluent than High Gate Springs area. And it again [was a] predominately White area.

EG: And the California neighborhood is the same thing?

FB: No, California neighborhood is in the West End of town and that was a predominately Black—

EG: Predominately Black neighborhood.

FB: I think there were some Whites living there because I certainly had White students, but it was predominately Black.

EG: Okay, great. [The tape recorder is] picking up fine, so that's good. And I was wondering what your parents did for a living.

FB: My mother was a homemaker and my dad was a contractor.

EG: Oh, Okay. And what are your earliest memories of Black-White society?

FB: I think I was mostly unaware [laughter] of any differences maybe until I got to, I guess, high school and then there were a few Black students in the school. And I hadn't really seen that, but I can recall up until high school, junior high anyway.

EG: Sure, sure. That makes a lot of sense. We found that with other interviews that we've done as well. And you went, you say here, to Atherton high school [Gritter is referring to her life history form]. What was that experience like?

FB: As far as?

EG: In terms of, you said you encountered Black people for the first time.

FB: Oh, there were a few, there were some at Seneca because that was, I think Seneca was -- where I went to junior high school, seventh, eighth and ninth grade --

probably a little more racially mixed that Atherton was. Atherton was still predominately White, with literally a handful of Black students.

EG: Okay, sure.

FB: At the time that was in the old city school system and kids pretty much had a choice of where they wanted to go, you know, as long as you got there. You were on your own for transportation.

EG: Oh, okay.

FB: So the Black kids that wanted to come to Atherton had probably the greater hardship getting there than most of the White students because they'd had further to travel, coming from downtown.

EG: Right.

FB: Or the West End. And, you know, it might involve multiple bus changes on public transportation. At Seneca there was, the Black students at Seneca came from the Newburg area, which was a fairly, I think at that time, a fairly new subdivision, but it was still a Black subdivision.

EG: Yeah, that's something, I talked to Ken Rosenbaum, and he was emphasizing to me how Blacks were bused, you know, before busing took place, and saying how it wasn't a new thing really. I mean it was definitely a new way of doing busing in 1975, but—

FB: Well I think in 1975 they went wholesale. [laughter] A much grander scale. But I think even before that, you know the busing that occurred wasn't a mandatory thing. It was still within your attendance zone.

EG: Right. And that's what another person I interviewed, I don't know if you know Phil Mahin at all—

FB: No.

EG: He was talking too about how the city schools were integrated. It was the county schools that were really the lily white schools.

FB: Yeah. And I kind of, I mean I started out in a city school at Belknap in elementary, and then moved to a county school with Melbourne Heights. So, you know, it was like, and if there—and I don't really remember those early years of school, first and second, third, I don't know. I don't think there were any Blacks in the class but I couldn't swear to it. I just don't remember seeing any.

EG: Sure.

FB: And you know of course, Melbourne Heights and Seneca were both, I don't remember seeing them at Melbourne Heights in elementary, but certainly when I got to Seneca, I was aware of Black students in class, and had classes with them.

EG: Sure. What would you say were your parents' views on race?

FB: My parents were fairly liberal-minded. You know, it's like they didn't really care who lived next door, you know, as long as they maintained their property [laughter]. That kind of thing, it's like, "Well, they got the money, no problem." But they were pretty liberal-minded about most--. In political issues.

EG: Sure. And what made you decide to want to be a teacher?

FB: I think I always wanted to be a teacher, from a very young age I think that's all, that or nursing, that was all I ever talked about. And I think when I got to high school and I realized how much science I'd have to take, I decided, "Oh, I don't think so." [laughter] Because I really, you know at that point I think I was kind of drawn more to teaching than I was to nursing.

EG: Yeah, my mom actually, she too, she was either going to be a teacher or a nurse, and she went the nurse route but I, sometimes she wishes she—

FB: I don't think there were a lot of options for females.

EG: Yeah.

FB: You know, it was teaching, nursing, secretarial work. You know, that was pretty much it.

EG: Yeah, that's right. You mentioned here—well I guess I'm going to back up a little bit from what I was just going to say—so you started teaching at Wheatley Elementary, and how did you come to teach there?

FB: I had done my, and I was trying to remember the name of the school when I driving down here this morning, I thought, "I need to remember the name of the school now," but I did my student teaching in a predominately Black inner-city school. It was on Hancock Street, down near where U of L is now, the medical center is now. That's pretty much, you know, that's where I did my student teaching. And it was racially mixed, it was maybe sixty-forty percentage-type split, but you know, I'm guessing. I didn't do a body count.

EG: In terms, the place where you were student teaching, sixty-Black and forty-White?

FB: I'm thinking it was probably sixty-Black, forty percent White. I wouldn't want to swear to you, but that's a perception. You know, it was a mix, and you got what you got. When it came time, as far as applying for a job, I can remember going in for the job interview. The personnel director just kind of said, well, you know, "These are the schools we have open. Which one would you like?" And I guess it was more the grade level than any other thing, I really wanted, I didn't want to teach first grade. I was a little leery of

older kids at the time, so it was an opportunity for a third grade classroom, so that's what I chose, and it was Wheatley. And I stayed there for a little over a year, because I started in March, finished out that year, and then did the next year, and then went on a leave of absence.

EG: To the University of Maryland, I see, and then you came back and you taught at Kennedy Elementary in the DuValle neighborhood.

KB: That was on the edge of two housing projects.

EG: Okay, so were both these schools, Wheatley and Kennedy Elementary schools, predominately Black and the socio-economic makeup, what was that?

FB: I think Wheatley at the time had a probably, a slightly higher socio-economic level, because there weren't any housing projects that the school drew from. Most of the people that went to that school lived in that neighborhood in shotgun-type houses.

EG: The California neighborhood?

FB: Yeah.

EG: Okay. And then what about the—

FB: Kennedy Elementary was on, like DuValle neighborhood over here, the DuValle homes projects was this way and Cotter was this way, and Kennedy was right here.

EG: Oh, okay, so it drew from the housing projects.

FB: It drew from both, yeah. One hundred percent.

EG: Wow.

FB: And I think I could count on one hand the number of White teachers in the building.

EG: Right. How big a school was it?

FB: It was pretty big, a pretty good-sized school. I don't know what the population was at the time. I just don't remember. I know that there were two, probably two or three classes in each grade plus the number of kindergarten classes.

EG: Okay.

FB: So it was probably, I'm guessing, maybe five, six hundred students.

EG: Did it go through the fifth and sixth grades?

FB: Sixth grade.

EG: Sixth grade? Okay, sure.

FB: Maybe more, I just, you know, it was two floors. It was a pretty large school.

EG: Yeah, I can see that. And so, how did that go being one of the few White teachers at the Black school?

FB: I can remember, there were a couple of times there were some issues as far as the parents responding to me, or that kind of thing. But I think I got along well with everybody, you know, the faculty there and the kids and principal and you know, the administration. It was just, didn't have a lot of problems, actually. If you did your job, you worked hard, did your job, treated the kids with respect, you were okay.

EG: When you were at Wheatley Elementary, where there more White teachers there?

FB: Yeah.

EG: Okay. What was the balance of the staff there?

FB: I'm not real sure. There were quite a few more White teachers.

EG: Okay, sure. And did you notice, well a theme we've come up with in the oral histories, and Laura Kirchner is the only other elementary school teacher I've talked to so far, about the city schools not having as many resources as the county schools.

FB: Yeah.

EG: So what was your experience with that?

FB: I think, yeah, I would agree with that. I think we certainly encountered the same problems at the, you know, there was a perception that the county schools, were much more affluent in their resources, between PTA. money that was raised and what they got from the state, than the city schools were. You know, by and large our kids were pretty poor, and just, parents just didn't have, it wasn't that they didn't want to do things for their kids or have the best, they just didn't have the resources.

EG: How did you, like Laura, she talked about a lot of creative strategies she did for getting the lesson plan across and making due with not as many resources as would be ideal.

FB: I know I spent a fortune every year just buying supplies.

EG: Out of your own pocket? Wow.

FB: For my classes because I just thought, gotta have it. And, you know, did a lot that we could do on the board, but just did the best we could with what we had. You know, with ditto papers and things like this, a lot of times we'd use front and back, rather than just running it on one side of the paper.

EG: What are ditto papers?

FB: Just things that you would call a xerox copy now, worksheets, that kind of thing. We had to make sure we used the back side of it rather than just one-sided.

EG: Yeah, different ways to be economical, efficient, and make do with what you have.

FB: You just learned to do it. You figured out ways to find the materials.

EG: Did you feel that the kids at the school, even with the creative strategies that you and undoubtedly other teachers did, didn't have as good an academic environment or—

FB: I think we did. I know, I think there's a lot, because I think the faculties tended to be a lot younger. I know they were in the schools that I was in, you know, they tended to be a lot younger than some of the East End schools or the more affluent areas. You know there wasn't the turnover, and I think because we were younger and maybe dumber, we were more willing to try things and experiment and be a little more creative with the kids and in doing things, and just, I'm trying to think--. I can remember making a lot of games and work stations and activities for the kids to learn with or use in learning, for instruction. But I think that academically, we were probably working as hard as we could. And I think that one of the biggest differences is when the kids start out behind. Playing catch-up is nearly an impossible game to to win. It's very very difficult when you're playing catch-up, and you're trying to compensate for some of the lack of experiences that the kids had. And we tried to provide those experiences as much as we could.

EG: Was that common for kids who were coming to these schools to start out behind?

FB: I think it was, with the Title 1, that was one of the premises behind the Title 1 programs, is like when I sat down I told you, there's a lot of waste initially. Because I think what they did initially with Title 1 money is they just bought equipment and nobody knew how to use it, so it sat in storage closets. And it took them a couple of years to gear up and figure out that they needed to train teachers and to tie it into some programs that were, put the emphasis on instruction and using the money and the materials for instructional purposes rather than just buying things that people may or may not be able to use. I mean,

it was obviously, I think some of things they bought were great, but you know if nobody knew how to use them, or use them effectively, it's kind of a waste.

EG: Right. Did you find—I'm going to come back to that—but in terms of the educational qualifications of the teachers in the city schools, were they adequate or—

FB: When I started teaching, there was a program called Teacher Corps, and that brought a lot of folks in, and several of the schools I was in, Wheatley was one them, were Teacher Corps schools. And these were people who had a degree in something, but not the education certification or the background in education classes, and what Teacher Corps did, it paid them a stipend and they worked in the schools, and went to, you know, classes in the evening, where they would get their masters degree in education. So as far as equal training, no, I don't think there was. Not when you're bringing basically emergency-certified folks in, and just throwing them into a classroom, until they've had some kind of education background to know how to do the lesson plans and management, within the classroom, no. It's kind of chaotic. I think the intent was good, but it was, I think a lot of times a very difficult situation.

EG: That sounds like teachers were ill-prepared to teach.

FB: I think initially, yeah. I think maybe probably the first year. Every team of, or group of interns, was assigned to what they called master teachers, or certified teachers, but you might have two teachers and five or six interns working together. Which is not, I mean you have the interns work with very small groups of kids, it's where they would get maybe six, eight, ten kids, but it was still, until they understood the flow of the sequence of instruction--.

EG: Was this because it was very hard to get teachers to come and teach in these schools, that they really recruited the Teacher Corps people?

FB: I think, yeah, I think so. It was at the tail end of a shortage. And we're kind of seeing the same sort of thing today with a lot of emergency certifications now in the schools, because what they're doing is they're hiring retired teachers to mentor. You know, the emergency certification, same thing, they didn't have an education, but they've got a degree in something.

EG: The Teacher Corps sounds a little bit like Teach for America. A friend of mine has done that in New York. And it's interesting too, what you say about the kids starting out behind. As I told you, I worked for the Department of Health and Human Services, and one of the things we looked at was Head Start, and how that can make such a huge difference.

FB: And I think, well Head Start came in at some point during this time, but I think there were a few years where we didn't have, you know I think Head Start came in in the mid-70s.

EG: In Louisville.

FB: I don't know for sure, I just don't remember.

EG: Yeah, sure. So when you were teaching the third grade, were you still feeling like you were playing catch-up with some of these kids?

FB: Yeah, to some extent. I think because I had a degree in elementary education, I might have been slightly better trained but still fairly inexperienced. And at the time, some of the other teachers weren't, some were very helpful, others were less helpful, in saying, "You're in there. You've been hired. You deal with it."

EG: Oh, yeah. Not what you want when you're asking someone for advice.

FB: Yeah, no it isn't. Not when you're just like, "I don't know what to do about this. Help me out there." You know, there was a lot of supervision. I mean supervisors would drop in, but they were kind of more evaluating, rather than helping.

EG: Helping out, yeah. And when you taught reading at Kennedy Elementary, was that for all grades or one grade in particular?

FB: No, we worked with all the grades, primarily the lower grades. I mean the majority of the kids would be in the lower grades.

EG: Okay, so that's where too you felt you were playing catch-up with—

FB: I think part of the idea there was if you get it early, there's less of a gap.

EG: Yeah, exactly.

FB: The further in school you go, the greater the distance becomes, that they have to cover and make up.

EG: Yeah, and so what grades were you teaching that?

FB: I know I had all six grades, because I worked with teachers in all six grades. I was a reading specialist at that point.

EG: Was it K through six?

FB: The school was K through six. I did not work with kindergartners.

EG: Okay.

FB: It was first through sixth. And there were what they called classified, or teacher aides that worked with me, so you know, we might have fifteen, twenty kids, for fifteen to twenty minutes at a time, that we would work with, you know, in small groups or individually. DP, I was diagnostic, prescriptive inventory, which meant that we would test them, teach them, and test them on specific skills, and then move on to the next skills. We worked with the classroom teachers so that we'd all we working off the same page and

reinforcing the same skills. And I think we saw a lot of progress with that, I mean the kids, because it pretty much keyed in on what their needs were.

EG: Yeah, and again, I just see so much in relationship to when I did work with the government and what were talking about, how the emphasis now on getting those reading skills up and cognition and how important that is, and so—I'm going to just turn it off a second. Alright, so I see here that you have a lot of vivid memories of, you said of the experience being bused, and that you were transferred to the Valley Station area, which I know is in the South End, right? Which I know also was the heart of the resistance to busing, and you're nodding your head vigorously.

FB: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. [laughter]

EG: So if you would just, I guess we'll use that as a segue.

FB: One of my earliest memories there was I had gone out with the math teacher, or we had both been, both of us being White, were sent out to this area, and—

EG: You mean the Valley Station area?

FB: Yeah. And we needed to go back to Kennedy to pick up supplies. And some of the materials that we were, you know, moving from Kennedy out to Stone Street and to Dixie. And I can remember just, one of the memories is driving, the signs and the protestors and seeing that as we're driving down Dixie Highway. I don't, I guess they must have somehow, I guess because we pulled out of the school, somebody apparently recognized that we were, or knew that we were teachers, and I just remember seeing some guy hold up a shotgun and it's like, "Whoa." That kind of thing. When I was at the first day of school at Dixie, I was there in the afternoon because I split my day, half mornings were at Stone Street and the afternoons at Dixie that first year.

EG: And what were you teaching?

FB: Reading.

EG: Okay. The same thing ( )

FB: The program went out with the, basically with the kids, but because we didn't take hundreds of kids to each school, they, the program was opened up to everybody who qualified by test score for the program. So we did have some area kids in the program, although most of them were still from the Kennedy school.

EG: That's what you were saying out front, you were bused with your students, your students went with you.

FB: Or we followed the kids. But first day of school, the principal's plan, and I'm still trying to think where his head was, because again, being out at Dixie Highway in the Valley Station area, it was just a hotbed of resistance, and his idea was we would escort the kids out to the bus, put them on the bus, and then we would just stand there, like in front of the school. I'm like, "I'm going to be a target?" [laughter] I don't think so. [laughter] And that made me very uncomfortable.

EG: Did you have to do that?

FB: Yeah. You know, when the principal says to do something, you pretty much have to do it.

EG: Oh my. And did you feel personally threatened while you were standing there?

FB: I don't know that I felt threatened as much as I remember feeling very uncomfortable and very relieved when it was like, "Okay, time to go back in the building." And I think I tried to stand as close to the door as I could be.

EG: Because when you walked out then, were you faced with protestors?

FB: They were across the street. They weren't right there in front where the buses were, but everybody had to take their last class out and put them on the bus. I remember

the first few days of school the buses coming in from the Kennedy area pretty full, but from the neighborhood, pretty empty.

EG: So the kids were being boycotted?

FB: Very slow coming, very slow reporting into school at first. I can remember conversations with some of the teachers that I just thought, you've been teaching fifteen, twenty years, and you're asking a question like this. I was sitting at lunch and this teacher says, or was talking about one of the Black kids having taken off their shoes and wanted to know how she should handle that, because she'd never taught Black kids. I said, "What would you tell a White kid?" "Well I'd tell them, but she's a—" "Tell the Black kid to put the shoes on. Same thing." And I remember thinking, what an idiotic question. That you would think you'd have to treat a Black child differently from a White child just because the skin color's different. And I don't think that's what parents wanted.

EG: Right.

FB: I think that the Black parents certainly, I think their goal, and I think they bore the brunt of hardship, because those kids were facing being bused out of their neighborhoods for ten of the twelve years they were in school, whereas the White kids were bused just the opposite. A year or two at the most. And you know a lot of kids, a lot of private schools opened up very quickly to accommodate the parents that didn't want to send their children to public schools and face busing. Especially if they knew their child was going to be bused that particular year. There was a system, I think it depended on your last name, and the first letter of the last name, and which years you'd be bused. So a lot of parents would plan and pull their kids out for private schools. I think the Catholic schools were a little more supportive in that they would not take kids who were fleeing busing. You either went or committed to the eight years in elementary, because the Catholic

schools were one through eight, or they wouldn't take you. But there were a lot of other schools that opened up. Some lasted, some didn't.

EG: I heard that there were some Christian academies that opened up.

FB: And that's when we saw them, when the schools opened up. I mean it's just like it was a religious thing; I'm like, "What's religious about equality?" [laughter] I think there was some resentment from some of the faculty members initially, especially when they saw that I was White coming out to the school.

EG: How so?

FB: Well because some of their White teachers had been sent to Kennedy.

EG: Oh, and they just thought it would be a Black teacher who would come in.

FB: And I mean I thought it was a little odd myself that I was a White teacher leaving a Black school and going out to a White community, but it wasn't my choice. We were pretty much sent by the Board, and we were told where to go. At least I was then. I didn't have enough seniority to make any choices.

EG: How did you feel about being assigned to a different school because of busing?

FB: I think it wasn't the fear I had, I mean I was little concerned about going out to Valley Station area simply from the reputation, and I wasn't familiar with the area. It was way on the other side of town where I grew up. It wasn't anywhere near the neighborhoods I had worked in, and I was comfortable, pretty comfortable in the neighborhoods I worked in because they were familiar. And I think it was more being uncomfortable with the unfamiliar and a new situation than busing.

EG: Yeah, that makes sense.

FB: And it's like you go into a new school, it's like, oh gee, you gotta prove yourself all over again.

EG: Right.

FB: And I think that was more the anxiety I felt.

EG: How long did you have to stand out with the students as they got on the bus?

FB: It was just until they got on the buses. It was just a couple of minutes.

EG: And was it just for a few months?

FB: Probably a couple days.

EG: Oh, just at first.

FB: It was just that first week, and then he, our principal, became a little more comfortable and thought, "Okay, nothing's going to happen. We don't have to do this."

EG: These students—

FB: But I think other teachers were a little more mouthy about it. I didn't have any experience, I mean I didn't have the years behind me.

EG: Yeah, you were new and don't want to cause waves.

FB: Yeah. [laughter] You know you can't really cause waves until you're tenured. [laughter] I didn't have tenure, and—.

EG: You mentioned the one instance of the teacher asking a very ignorant question about--. Was that common to encounter teachers like that?

FB: I had several other comments or questions about, and I think they got the message after awhile, because I have a feeling that there's a tinge of sarcasm in my response. But I was trying to be respectful. These people were more experienced than I was, and I was still pretty young, and it's like, why would you, I guess I must have looked kind of like, had this expression on my face of "Why would ask a question like that?

EG: You were only twenty-six, right?

FB: Yeah, I was in my early twenties and I mean I hadn't been teaching long, and it was like, "Well, that's kind of a dumb question." [laughter]

EG: It's hard sometimes to hide when you know someone says something really dumb.

FB: I mean ignorance like, oh there were questions about, "Well how do you talk to the parents?" I said, "The same way you talk to any other parent." You want to control the education-ese, and not use a lot of the terms that we would use in education, just talk normal. It was those kinds of issues. I heard a number of comments because there was a couple times when we would go, either send a school bus down to the neighborhood or go down there if we needed conferences with parents, or we'd go down in a car after school, but a lot of teachers were very, especially the older White teachers that were out there, were very unwilling to go to the Cotter DuValle neighborhoods to conference with a parent.

EG: Did they still go? Did they have to go or did they get out of it?

FB: They found ways to get out of it. I went a few times. A lot of times they would handle it over the phone. And I think that's kind of different, I think face-to-face really works. Parents want to see and know, meet the person, open house. They want to meet the teachers.

EG: Yeah, they want to get a sense of the person and not just this voice over the phone.

FB: And the sense of the classroom and the atmosphere in the room, and what's going on, and how you're going to treat their child. I think most parents, I don't think it's a

racial thing at all, want you to treat their child with respect, teach their child at their level, and move them on, give them a little progress.

EG: I'm just going to check the tape a second—okay, we're fine. Sometimes someone says something brilliant and the tape runs out [laughter]. So now I'm trying to change it over before it runs out, a good stopping point, so we're fine for this side for about ten minutes more, and then I'll switch it over. These instances that you ran across initially of White teachers holding these, not knowing what to do and prejudicial views, did you observe a change over time?

FB: Yeah, I think they became more comfortable as they got to know the kids. It wasn't as threatening to them. And again, I think a lot of it was just the unknown, fear of the unknown. It was something they'd never encountered or worked with, and their expectations were that they were going to have all kinds of problems. Yeah, these kids are poor and they had a whole host of issues from poverty, versus the affluence that they worked with out in the South End of town. I mean Stone Street was a fairly affluent area. Most of the parents were White middle class working neighborhood. And Dixie was a little bit poorer, but not much, just from the neighborhoods where they drew their kids. And then to get, I guess, an influx of kids that they felt weren't going to do as well. The expectation was that these kids can't do well, and I think they found that yeah they can with enough support. And you might have to work with them a little harder. There were some issues with fighting, or "My mama told me to do this," and "My mama told me to do that" and we didn't have that, or you didn't see that with the White kids, that I guess—I don't want to say belligerence—but that a lot of kids had a real chip on the shoulder and I think it was a defensive mechanism to constantly defending themselves in relationship with other kids.

EG: So you're talking about the interaction between other students?

FB: Yeah, and I think we saw the kids, I mean the Black kids for the most part initially hung out with Black kids, and White kids hung out with the White kids. And you might see a few mix. Depending if they were grouped together in class for instructional purpose, like in the same reading group, they might work together, but given a choice, they'd pull back. Like if I allowed kids to just choose where they wanted to sit in the room, and you walk through my door, "Go sit where you want," you would see a natural segregation. And if I assigned, and a lot of times I would, it just depended on the situation and what I saw going on and the dynamics of the group, you would see a little more mix. But I think there were a lot of things to learn from each other, and up until then, I think for the most part, there wasn't a whole lot of mixing of the races.

EG: So was this, the Stone Street school, a county school that you were at?

FB: Yeah, oh I'm sorry, yeah.

EG: Oh, okay. I should have asked that at the beginning.

FB: Dixie and Stone Street were in the county—

EG: They were both county schools—

FB: They were in the county system. The city system was—

EG: Well, then the merger I know took place at that time.

FB: It was at the same place with busing, we had mergers. It was just a lot of upheaval.

EG: Yeah, I remember when I talked to Ken Rosenbaum, he said he called it "merger desegregation" and really emphasized how it wasn't just desegregation, it was the merger, and how he wished they had been separate.

FB: It would have been a lot easier transition had it been separate. I think had we been allowed to merge and then desegregate, or desegregate—of course, I guess you couldn't really desegregate first, if you're crossing school systems. Because we had two different school systems, and one of the first issues they had to do was equalize the pay, because we weren't paid the same. Again the books we were using, those weren't the same. So there were a lot of other issues going on.

EG: Sure. And I see that you were at Stone Street then full-time, and that you were there until 1979.

FB: Yeah, I asked for that transfer.

EG: Oh, to go to Stone Street?

FB: No, I asked to go from Stone Street to Coleridge Taylor.

EG: Oh, okay.

FB: And primarily it was--. It had nothing to do with anything other than I was tired of driving forty-five minutes to get to work. And Coleridge Taylor was downtown and it was like a fifteen-minute ride. And what made me decide that was there was a day that we had an ice storm during the school day, and they dismissed school early, and I can remember driving the length of Dixie Highway on a sheet of ice, sliding the entire [way] from Valley Station into the Waterson expressway, and I thought, "That's it. I'm done. I'm asking for a transfer." [laughter] I don't want to drive this way again. And Coleridge Taylor, again it was on the edge of a housing project right across the street from Central High School, which is traditionally a Black high school.

EG: Sure, and how long did you—

FB: I was there for a year, and the school didn't qualify any longer for the Title 1 services, so then I went out to Indian Trail.

EG: Okay, and where was that?

FB: Indian Trail was an old county school. It's on the edge of Newburg, with kind of like across. It was a little further away, it wasn't really in the Newburg neighborhood. Poplar Level Road kind of borders Newburg and it was between Poplar Level and Preston Highway, and I remember the Indian--. [pause]

EG: ( )

FB: I'm trying to think, I mean it was just basically an Indian, they had their own subdivision. And you know, so that's where it was.

EG: Okay.

FB: I stayed there for a year, and again they didn't qualify any longer for Chapter 1 services, or Title 1 services, so I moved again. And that's when I went to Brandeis—[laughter]

EG: Yeah, so you got your—

FB: By the time I got to Brandeis, that was an old city school, and it was an old school, old building. Seventeenth and Saint Catherine [Streets]—no, no, that was Wheatley—I'm thinking Brandeis was around 22nd, but it was in a fairly rough neighborhood, but there wasn't a housing project attached but the parents were pretty poor, as far as socio-economic level.

EG: Right.

FB: By that point I was pretty tired of moving around. I thought, "I really want to find a school that was reasonably close to my home, that I could just kind of stay." And that's when I asked for the--. I was also at that point working mostly with first graders, and I really didn't like first grade. Working with remedial reading in first grade, colors, shapes, those basics is where it gets real old. So I thought I'd like to try middle school, and

by then they were moving into this middle school, where the elementaries had lost the sixth grade, and we had moved those into middle school. So I asked to ( ), which was about three miles from my home, but in the Newburg neighborhood.

EG: Which is the Black neighborhood?

FB: Yeah.

EG: Okay, Newburg one. So you were there for—

FB: Seventeen or so years.

EG: Oh, Okay. So your plan worked [laughter]

FB: Actually I found I really liked middle school. I liked that age group, and I thought, "Well, this is cool."

EG: Oh, because I've heard from other people, I mean it has the reputation as being a hard grade to teach.

FB: Oh it is. It's not easy, because those are the crazy years. But I really liked it.

EG: For myself, those were maybe my favorite years of school, were my middle school years. There was so many activities to do, and I didn't have to be at that level where I had to qualify, like you do in high school for sports, so I could do sports even though I wasn't great at them.

FB: I enjoyed teaching.

EG: I'm wondering at Stone Street, what then were the percentages of Black versus White students?

FB: Uh---

EG: Your estimate.

FB: You know I really don't remember. I know it fit within the court order, and I think maybe twenty percent Black.

EG: Yeah, that seems to be, it was—

FB: It was a low percentage, and I'm thinking maybe around twenty, give or take a few points one way or the other.

EG: And was that the same at Dixie too and then these schools that you later taught at?

FB: Yeah.

EG: Okay.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

EG: But, I've never done that before. I'm not too worried about that.

FB: I would. [laughter]

EG: When you were at Thomas Jefferson, were there more Black students then?

FB: Yeah.

EG: Okay. You mentioned too at first about how initially at least there was segregation of the students. Over time, did you observe a change?

FB: Yeah, over time I noticed that there wasn't as much of this natural, what I would call natural segre—you know, where the kids do it to themselves. And there was more of a mix, and I really, and again as I moved on, and especially in middle school, that was pretty common by then.

EG: Okay, sure. Well you mentioned that there was some tension between the Black and White students, with the Black students reacting in kind of a defensive way. Did you observe any change in that over time?

FB: Probably a lessen--, yeah not much of a lessening, because I think that defensiveness is kind of a environmental thing, when you're growing up and you're living

in a tight community like a housing project, it's pretty much a--. You take care of yourself anyway you can. And I think it would change more as the economic level changed of the students. Certainly, I know in elementary I probably saw less disputes that I would say were racial.

EG: Oh.

FB: Than in [middle school.] Now we started seeing some again in middle school, but not as many. I mean a lot of disputes that we saw were just personal, and it's just personal stuff, "He said this about me," or "He took my stuff," you know that kind of thing. There were maybe a few that were racially motivated, but not a lot.

EG: At the middle school, and then even at the beginning?

FB: Yeah, I mean I just, maybe I'm just ignorant and didn't notice it, but I think most of the disputes that I encountered with kids were not of a racial basis.

EG: Yeah, well it makes sense that it would be less so at the elementary school level than the high school level, because, with talking to people who taught high school, were in high school, [we] heard about a lot of racial disputes.

FB: Yeah, I just think that it was hard, I think in elementary school for the kids to become really close friends, in mixing races, because they didn't live in the neighborhood, and you tend to be really close with those you see after school as well as those [who] you see in school and then you see them out of school. So they didn't have that mix after school. They'd come in, go to school, go home to their own neighborhoods. So you didn't see that. Now T.J. was not a bused school. I don't think Indian Trail was either. And I'm trying to think if Brandeis was. I know Coleridge Taylor was because the kids that came from Coleridge Taylor were very affluent East Enders.

EG: The kids that were bused in there?

FB: Yeah. The kids that were bused in were very affluent.

EG: Wow.

FB: You know, a lot of money. They came, like--. Most of their parents were professionals, a lot of money, and school. I think the parents became real active in the PTA there and they raised a lot of money for the school.

EG: So when—

FB: A lot of the parents that went to Coleridge Taylor, I think they bought into it and they chose to keep their kids there, they voluntarily kept them at Coleridge Taylor. I'm trying to—I don't think Indian Trail was a bused school. I think it was enough of a desegregated neighborhood that it didn't have to be, and I know T.J. was—

EG: Not a bused school.

FB: Not a bused school.

EG: Because the neighborhood was integrated.

FB: Yeah. And I think we have found more and more schools that were just, you know, Black parents who moved into this school zone, their attendance zone if they could, because they preferred to be in a home school, rather than being sent, shipped across town, because that created all kinds of transportation problems.

EG: So you did see an impact on housing patterns as a result of school desegregation?

FB: Yeah, yeah.

EG: At that time, what were your views on school desegregation and busing?

FB: I guess I questioned the need for such wholesale busing, you know, because it was a huge expense. I'm not sure, I guess, that I saw major differences, major changes in the academic performance other than the kids were spread out and I think they had more

educational opportunities because everybody wasn't at the same level. You know, they would see kids that were performing much better and maybe strive a little harder, some kids would. Others would, they would just totally give up. I think it had its successes but I think busing also had some failures to it. You know I think it was a colossal amount of money that was spent on transportation that could have better been spent providing in the schools.

EG: What do you mean by that?

FB: I guess, okay, if you want to spend that money, maybe put extra teachers in, make the classes smaller so we can give more individual attention, because the more kids—I guess I've always been a believer in a smaller class, you get more attention from the teacher than you do in a larger class. And if you can give more personal attention to a child, they're going to do better in school. And, well, of course, that was part of the theory behind the reading programs, was we pull the kids out, work with very small groups, and see some progress. You know, you just kind of get lost in the shuffle when it's a large group of people. So I guess, and in that respect and—but again I guess part of me, I was kind of, I guess [I had] mixed feelings about it because I didn't have a child that was affected. Other than being moved personally from school to school, I was largely unaffected. I pretty much worked with kids that I work with. I chose to work with the Chapter and Title 1 programs, and I certainly chose some of the schools I was in, and about midpoint in my career I had the seniority to go anywhere I wanted in the district and still chose the schools I was at because I liked the kids I was working with. I don't think a lot of people really thought a whole lot about it. By the end of my career, we didn't hear a lot of discussion about busing. And I think by the end it was pretty much finished. I think there were some schools where they were clustering the kids and that was mostly elementary. By

the time I was finished with teaching, high school kids could go pretty much anywhere, any school they wanted, and the transportation would be provided. Middle school, there were a lot of magnet schools, and again transportation was provided for those. There were a lot of choice schools, where the school district would give some money from a program, because we started out as a choice, T.J. started out as a choice for communications. Parents would have to provide the transportation but we were allowed to recruit district-wide. And it was an opportunity to bring more White kids into what was traditionally a Black neighborhood. Now in elementary school, I'm not sure what they do now. I think you're within a cluster of schools and you go to which ever school has an opening. I think that's the way it works, but I'm not real sure.

EG: Yeah, we've been looking a little bit at the different requirements and rules and it seems quite confusing.

FB: It is. I mean they really do make an effort to keep a racial balance pretty much district-wide in the schools. Because I can remember doing body counts the first couple days of school, we'd have to do a body count, you know of Black-White, male-female, and then make sure that the classes were balanced. And there might be a little shuffling to balance classes.

EG: At the time what did you think were the goals of busing?

FB: I think it was to provide an equal education opportunity for every child. And I think they, the courts who I guess made the decision or the who people started the lawsuit, saw the county system of the White schools as having more opportunities than the inner-city schools had. And they wanted to equalize that, and I think that's where it began, wanting those equal opportunities for their kids.

EG: Do you think it fulfilled its goals?

FB: [sighs] I don't know. I think for some kids, it probably did. I think for some kids, they would have fallen through the cracks no matter where they were. I think it's hard to take kids out of their neighborhood. It, I thin, decreases the opportunity for a parent to become involved in the school and I think that's a major factor in a child's success, is how involved the parent is. That's Frankie's opinion. If parents aren't involved, the kids are going to be less inclined to achieve at a high level.

EG: Did you observe that at some of these schools where the kids were bused, that the parents seemed less involved than the schools where—

FB: Well they couldn't help but be less, I mean transportation was a major problem for most parents of the inner-city schools. They depended on public transportation and if it took too many bus changes to get out to the school where their child was, they just wouldn't show.

EG: And you mentioned too how some of these White teachers wouldn't even meet the parents.

FB: They're not going, they're not going. The parent has to come to them.

EG: Have your views changed over time in terms of how you see busing and school desegregation?

FB: I think I was probably more optimistic initially, that yeah it would equalize things. I think over time, I've maybe moved back toward the middle, like I'm not sure it did, looking back, I'm not sure it really did equalize things. I think certainly it gave some opportunities to kids that they might not have had to see other neighborhoods, because a lot of the kids that went out affluent schools had never seen, been out of their own neighborhoods, to see what the possibilities are and ( ).

EG: And for some of these affluent White kids, probably had never seen some of these inner-city neighborhoods?

FB: They lived very sheltered lives. I think the biggest success that I can see from busing is there's probably a lot more acceptance of other races and equality in hiring, or it's more readily acceptable to have friends of other races, whereas they may not have—

EG: If not for—

FB: Had it not been for busing, there would not have been that mix.

EG: You've touched on this a little bit, but if you had been able to be in control of all this and wave your magic wand and do a system where desegregation went well and smoothly, how would you have gone about doing that? You had talked about making sure there were smaller class sizes?

FB: I guess I would like to have seen smaller classes and maybe more materials that the kids could use. I don't know that looking back, saying "Gee, this would have worked better," or "That would have worked better," I don't know. I wasn't in charge. I didn't make the decisions. I think it takes a community and I think after initial resistance, I think the community, basically it's small pockets of people that didn't accept it, but by and large, Louisville and Jefferson county did merge, did accept the changes and embraced it. We certainly saw that with a lot of White kids whose parents were choosing to leave their kids in the school because they wanted that continuity. I mean there was a, in a lot of cases you'd lose--. A kid would go for a year, come back. I mean that was very disruptive to the process because in a school you get to know the kids and the family of kids. And that was hard to get to know a family of kids. You get kids of the same family, well one might be here and one might be somewhere else.

EG: Did you feel that with these long bus rides, that the kid's academic performance was affected by it, that they would have maybe have been more alert in the classroom or that they were tired after getting up early?

FB: I think some kids certainly were affected. I think yeah, they might have been a little more tired because they had to get up early, because those bus rides were pretty long initially.

EG: I know some of them had to transfer and then get on another bus to come.

FB: They do now. I've got friends that have kids that are going to magnet schools. I mean it takes them an hour and a half to get there. Now some kids will sleep on the bus. Some of them work, study, they take a book. Of course if it's dark out, which for part of the school year in the morning it is, they can't really do a lot. And it's noisy; school buses are noisy.

EG: Were you able to make friends with some of the teachers?

FB: Oh yeah.

EG: Of other races?

FB: Yeah. We, the faculty I worked with at Kennedy, were very close, partied together. You'd get together after school, do stuff, same thing at Coleridge Taylor. I mean we'd go out every week as a group, and we pretty much stuck together and I'm still friends with a lot of them.

EG: Sure.

FB: Still keep in touch.

EG: You mentioned the one administrator who wanted you to stand out when the kids were being bused in front of the school. What about the other administrators and how they handled the situation?

EG: I think the principal at Stone Street was an older lady. She was very fair, and basically just expected a lot of from her kids, from the kids that went to the school. And I think those expectations are very important because you pretty much get what you expect. I know the principal at Kennedy Elementary was a very demanding principal. The principal at Indian Trail was a super principal. They set the tone for the school as far what was going to go on. I think some of the questions I encountered, the really dumb questions from faculty members, were at Stone Street.

EG: Well that makes sense because that was the more affluent and White school. We always draw up a list of questions ahead of time, and often I don't look at them so much, but there was one in here that I thought was really good. I just wanted to make sure I had it worded right when I asked you. How would you evaluate the relative power or influence that teachers and administrative staff exerted over the course of desegregation? About how it actually happened, how well it went—

FB: I think that they had a lot of power. I think most of the faculties, I think there was some resistance to the change, but I think everybody recognized that we were there to do a job and our job was to teach kids, and that it didn't really matter which kids you were teaching. One principal said, "You get what you get. And these are the kids you're going to work with and you give them your best." And I think that was an attitude that most teachers had. And I think there were some, they were older, White women, who were nearing retirement who just really had a difficult time and I think that might have helped them to move on into retirement. They might have stuck out a few more years. But I think they just couldn't make that change. And I think most teachers are in it because they enjoy teaching, and after awhile, you don't really look at the color of somebody's skin.

EG: This is something that also has come up, what you just said about, Laura Kirchner brought it up and so did someone in another interview that one of my colleagues did, about how long it took before you thought teachers or yourself just didn't notice skin color really anymore.

FB: I don't think it took a long time. I think we were very aware the first week of school because we had to balance the classes, so you were very aware. But after that it was kids. I mean once that first year of busing, and even, not even the whole year, basically it took a few months initially for teachers to get over the fears and the changes and like, realizing that kids are kids. They're going to do the dumb things that kids do. And you don't treat children differently based on race. And I think that came pretty quickly for most people.

EG: Did you observe at all a difference in how teachers treated boys versus girls? Or how boys and girls—

FB: I think [there] probably was a difference, maybe in expectations. We certainly expect boys--. I think we--. I saw teachers that would expect boys to have more learning difficulties, they were probably less inclined to read and more inclined to perform. I think most, initially a lot of discipline problems were with the boys in acting out. A lot of boys would cover up.

EG: You're talking about Black and White boys?

FB: Yeah. Would cover up, you know, academic lax with inappropriate behaviors. Like, "Well I can't do this so let's see what kind of trouble I can get into." [laughter] "Because I know I can't do it." But I don't know, I think there were teachers who favored boys and preferred working with boys more than girls. And teachers who liked working with girls more than boys. I think there was more of a difference in how boys and girls

fought, I mean girls can be vicious, it goes on forever, whereas boys throw a few punches and they're done.

EG: They let it go.

FB: Yeah. It's gone, it's over with.

EG: Don't keep a grudge. What about in terms of Black boys versus Black girls, did you see a difference in terms of how teachers treated them or how Black boys or Black girls, how they interacted with White boys, White girls?

FB: Not really. I really didn't notice that until I was in middle school, teaching in middle school, where I would see more of an interaction between the boys and the girls. But up until then, boys really didn't have, at elementary they didn't have a whole lot of times for girls, and girls didn't have a whole lot of time for the boys.

EG: Still grossed out by the—

FB: I mean they would, "That one's cute" and that kind of stuff. Especially like fifth and sixth grade, I noticed it much more in middle school, and I think that if there was a mix of races, the girls that hung out with Black boys pretty much, the White girls that hung out with the Black boys were pretty much ostracized in some cases by the other White girls initially. I saw the first few years and then I really didn't notice it as much. It was pretty much, they'd hang out in groups and they were all friends.

EG: Well that's interesting. Did you observe that—I'm trying to get my thoughts together in my mind—

FB: It's hard to think aloud [laughter].

EG: It certainly can be. You said that the White girls were ostracized, the White girls who hung out with the Black boys. Did you see the reverse at all?

FB: I think Black girls were more resentful of the Black girls who hung out with the White boys that--. Not nearly so much as in the reverse. I didn't really see them ostracized. I wouldn't say I'd see them ostracizing, I mean they certainly had their friends and ( ). I mean they might make some comments, it wasn't like, "You're hanging with them," type of an attitude.

EG: And what about the boys? Did they feel any sort of, observe any sort [of] resentment?

FB: I didn't notice any.

EG: Yeah, again that gets at the differences between the boys and the girls and how they relate to each other. That makes—

FB: That wasn't something I noticed.

EG: That makes sense. How would you say—well this implies that you were changed by the process—do you feel that you were changed by the process of school desegregation?

FB: I think somewhat. I don't know that I was in a large degree because again, I basically taught the kids I taught, that walked through my door. And I didn't have children that went in school and I just, I don't know. Yeah, I just don't think my attitudes toward kids changed a whole lot.

EG: Did it make an impact on your teaching at all? Or did that remain pretty much consistent as well?

FB: I think the biggest impact as far as teaching, I mean I think initially the first few years I taught, the schools were so poor, had so few resources, that as years went on, I was in schools as they gained more resources. I mean T.J. had a parent organization that worked hard. It was a neighborhood school, the parents worked hard. They raised a lot of

money for the school and they gave faculty money to spend on the school. Saw the same thing, I think at Indian Trail did the same thing. I saw that at Coleridge Taylor.

EG: That these affluent White parents—

FB: Not just the affluent White parents, but I mean the parents at the school were far more active and involved as far as raising money, doing things for the school, and I think that affected the kids more than anything.

EG: In terms of providing them with more opportunities and resources and so forth?

FB: Yeah.

EG: Well yeah, sometimes people say if you throw money at things it doesn't make it better, but sometimes it does.

FB: I think it helps if the money is spent wisely.

EG: Yeah, not like with the Title 1.

FB: If you make good choices. I think if you make good choices and look at what your needs are, and satisfy those needs, I think that makes a big difference. I know when I was at Coleridge Taylor, we didn't have to spend a lot of money on transporting kids on field trips because so much was downtown we could walk them.

EG: Oh, right.

FB: So they probably had more opportunities to do cultural things in the downtown area than like at Stone Street.

EG: Yeah, I agree.

FB: Because it was so far out. And at Wheatley, parents just didn't have the resources to partake in some of the events and take the kids to plays and concerts and the cultural things that enrich their lives. You know I think with, I came in with KERA—

EG: Pardon?

FB: With KERA, the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

EG: Oh, okay.

FB: Where money was provided for kids, they were on free or reduced lunch. Money was provided for them to go on these field trips so then it wasn't an economic decision.

EG: When did that pass?

FB: I'm thinking, oh gosh—

EG: Another date question, I know.

FB: I'm thinking it was like the early 1990s.

EG: Oh, okay. So that was sometime before that.

FB: I may be wrong. I know that some of the schools, they would have money for kids on field trips that couldn't afford it.

EG: They would have money?

FB: Yeah, some of the schools, I mean they would provide the money even before KERA, they would provide the money for kids as much as they could. Once it ran out, it ran out. That was it. But I mean you provide these opportunities for kids to enrich their learning experience.

EG: Right. I'm looking over my list to see what else we haven't covered. Is there, while I'm doing this, is there any topic that you think is really important that we haven't discussed yet?

FB: I think one of the biggest differences or impacts on education has not been race, but economic status.

EG: Yeah, why don't we talk about that. Because when I talked with Laura Kirchner, she really emphasized that.

FB: And it's more a case of the haves and have-nots. And the have-nots really I think suffered more academically than the kids who had, because it didn't matter if you were in a poor school whether you were White or Black, race didn't matter. It was more a matter of you didn't have the resources to give those opportunities, the enrichment and the extra things that go along with them. Your parents weren't as involved, they were more focused on getting the money to provide the necessities of life than in making sure you did your homework. A lot of times a lot of the kids came from single-parent homes, and mom or dad wasn't there when they came home, and kids were left to raise themselves. I think that had more of an impact on academics than race did, and I think that's an issue that has not been dealt with, and probably never will be dealt with, is equalizing schools on economics.

EG: Why don't you think it will ever be dealt with?

FB: I think it's something that, I don't know, I just don't think there are very many, I guess there's not enough research. I don't think enough people have proposed that or brought it to light. Maybe it will one day and I'm just being a pessimist about it. I just think that it just makes a big difference. I mean when you look around at the schools today that are in trouble, and I mean I can look at the schools that were listed today in the No Child Left Behind report [she is referring to an article in that day's *Louisville Courier Journal* that lists "failing schools"], and T.J., breaks my heart, is one of the four schools that are in deep trouble. And what happened was about eight years ago they redistricted the school and took away the more affluent kids and put them in another school and gave T.J. a poorer neighborhood to draw their students from. Southern Middle School is another one.

It sits right in the middle of a housing project. Every kid in that school is one hundred percent free and reduced lunch.

EG: That the other one that was listed as—

FB: Yeah, that's the other middle school. I didn't look to see what the elementary--. I think there were two elementaries but I'm not real sure. But again, I think it's more of an economic thing. You have parents that don't have the resources, aren't interested in coming into the school to work or to volunteer their time, don't show the interest, and kids are left to their own devices, they're going to go nowhere. And I think that's what we've seen, that these schools are floundering. Not only that, I mean the faculty, the older faculty is hitting retirement, has been retiring for a number of years so what they're getting are young, inexperienced teachers, many of whom are not certified. So they come to school with two strikes against them.

EG: How would you address that if you could?

FB: [sighs] I'm not sure, again, how you equalize the funding, because then you're saying, well, some schools are more equal than others, and it's not really that. It's more some schools have a greater need. Well every school's going to argue, I mean we've got schools like Ballard and some of the high schools that have huge surpluses of money and other schools that run in the deficit and have nothing and just literally scrape by to provide the opportunities for their kids.

EG: Yeah it's really, I personally too think that that's horrible, and there should be a measure for these schools making their funds as equal or more for the ones that are in poverty.

FB: Yeah, I think there is some way, some formula they could figure out for, if a school has a certain percentage of free and reduced lunch, they get this much extra money

from the district, not just from the federal government, because a lot of that is mandated on how it gets spent, but from the district. Let those schools have some smaller classes because that is the only way they're going to make up some of those deficits. If teachers had fewer kids to work with—

EG: And maybe—

FB: And can focus more time on them.

EG: Having some incentives for teachers who have qualifications—

FB: Exactly.

EG: To teach at these schools.

FB: And again, that's a contractual issue, and I'm not sure that the teacher's union will allow something like that, to have a higher pay rate or a bonus paid to some teachers and not to everybody. But I think certainly, if you're going to attract better teachers to some of these schools like Southern or T.J., you're going to have to pay them more, to get more experience. Because people realize, "Oh, gee. No I don't think I want to go there."

EG: Right, with all the problems.

FB: It's too hard, it is too hard.

EG: And you all along have wanted to be in, I mean you chose to work in these poverty schools and that must be kind of unique that, you know, most teachers wouldn't want to deal with those sorts of issues. What were reasons you had for, you mentioned one was the location?

FB: I think I chose several schools based on location and it wouldn't have mattered what the popula--, what the racial balance was. I don't know, it just didn't matter to me.

EG: The socio-economic--. One thing that came up when I was talking to Laura Kirchner was she said, "You know people say there weren't drugs back then but in these ( ) there were drugs."

FB: Yeah. We'd see it in the windows when I was at Kennedy and watch them do the drug trades out on the street corner. I mean, it was very common.

EG: And did you feel, she felt that well—I think this was more in relationship with how school desegregation played out—but she felt she had to kind of mother the kids or protect them, just kind of monitor how things were going.

FB: I probably, I think the first year or so, I probably did tend to be more of a mother-type figure to some of the kids that came from Kennedy because I knew them, I had worked with them, I had worked with their families. So I probably had a better relationship with those kids and tended to be a little more protective and jump to their defense, than I probably would have ordinarily. But I mean I found that when I was at T.J., as I got to know the kids, I mean so many times I was in schools for one year. You don't really get to know anybody. And after spending seventeen years at T.J., I knew families. I mean I had every kid in the family.

EG: Sure.

FB: So, I knew the parents and I could call them up, "Hey! Got a problem here. Let's talk." [laughter]. You know, you can do that. You break down some of those barriers because you know what the parents want and how they're going to respond.

EG: Did you have any contact with the kids or the parents outside of the schools at all? I know you did the conferences.

FB: Yeah, sometimes I did. There were times when I was at Coleridge Taylor, we took a group a few times in the year, one of the teachers wanted to take kids like to a

haunted house, so we'd go down after school, pick the kids up at home, and took them to the haunted house, took them home, I dropped them all off at their homes. That kind of thing. We would frequently do that after school, take them different places. Or sometimes I'd go and do a home visit and talk to the parents at home if I knew they couldn't get to school, they had some reason why they couldn't get there. I'd go talk to them at home.

EG: Did you ever try to get some of these parents who weren't involved in their kid's education, try to get them more involved?

FB: Yeah, I mean I always had suggestions for parents, ways they can help their child at home and again, by going to the home, it's a less threatening environment than the parent coming to the school. And a lot of those parents weren't very successful in school themselves, so their experience with school was kind of negative. And I tend to be a fairly positive person, and you know it's like trying to make parents understand we're a team. I can't do it alone, they can't do it alone. We have to work together. We'd talk about things, issues going on with the child and how it affects their learning. And try to work those things.

EG: Did you run across a lot of kids with learning disabilities?

[conversation breaks off as doorbell rings]

EG. I think that's maybe the doorbell.

FB: Oh wow. Oh, learning disabilities—I don't think I saw any more than I would have ordinarily.

EG: In terms of the kids being from impoverished backgrounds?

FB: Yeah. I don't think poverty has anything to do with a learning disability. I think there are a lot of teachers who would try to recommend kids for testing who were impoverished or a discipline problem. I did see that, and then like, of course, as a reading

resource if there was a child I worked with, I'd be part of that committee. And I would come to their defense because if I didn't feel that, I mean there are certain classic symptoms that you would look for, and a lot of times I'd be the one to recommend a child be tested or the teachers would work together, "Well, what do you think about this child?" I'd say, "No, I don't think so." I'm sure that was a disappointment to some people but by and large, I don't know that I saw a whole lot of that type of discrimination.

EG: Yeah, because I'm aware from reading about Louisville how sometimes the Black students were placed in like this alternative program.

FB: I think a lot of teachers tried, but depending on where they were obviously some were successful.

EG: Yeah, and some being placed in special education when they weren't supposed to be.

FB: Yeah.

EG: Or tracked and so forth.

FB: Yeah.

EG: Did you experience that kids would come to school hungry?

FB: Yeah.

EG: A lot, and that that affected their learning?

FB: By this point, I think had, the schools had a breakfast program. So the kids would go and have breakfast, or free lunch, [the] lunch program. I think there was a stigma that a lot of kids felt was attached to this program, and I think some schools worked really hard to erase that so that the kids weren't always aware of who was paying and who was getting a free one.

EG: That's smart.

FB: But some schools made no different, made no accommodation for that. Lot of times kids wouldn't want to eat. I usually kept a jar of peanut butter and crackers in my desk. A lot of kids would come in and I guess they knew [laughter]. I think if a kid's hungry, they're going to eat. If they're really hungry, they're going to eat.

EG: Yeah, they're not going to—

FB: Sometimes if they'd come to me and it's like late in the morning and say, "Gosh, I'm so hungry," it's like well let me give you a cracker and peanut butter and you can hang on, or some crackers or whatever.

EG: And that was a discrete way to avoid the stigma.

FB: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, poverty too is such a complicated issue, and it's intertwined with race.

FB: I think we certainly had as many poor White as we do Black. Poverty doesn't necessarily mean Black.

EG: Exactly, and a lot of people aren't aware that there are more White people who are poor than Blacks.

FB: That was an issue, like when I went out to Stone Street, they were saying like, "If you're Black, you're poor." Well, no, you're not always. That's not a fair analogy to make.

EG: Exactly.

FB: Or assumption. I would talk to them about schools like in Portland, you know Portland Elementary, Roosevelt Perry, I think certainly you saw enough, there were plenty of poor Whites at Brandeis and at Wheatley, Breckinridge, you know there's lot of schools that are poor White.

EG: So in these schools [were] you running across poor Whites and poor Blacks?

FB: Yeah, I think the biggest difference is economic level more than race.

EG: Sure, that makes a lot of sense. Let me just review my list here, see if [there are] any major questions I've missed that I'm supposed--. We have a protocol that we're supposed to ask the different people and sometimes I think I might get a little off track [laughter].

FB: Sometimes a response directs you somewhere else.

EG: I think that can be very fruitful. Let's see here. Some people, when they start out with oral history, they think they're supposed to ask, you know, from just a questionnaire and just go down the list, and they soon discover that completely doesn't work, because you really have to go where the conversation takes you.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

EG: Was there anything more that you wanted to add about class?

FB: I can't think of anything.

EG: Let's see here. I guess we could talk too more about disciplining students and how that was handled after busing, and if you observed a difference in terms of how teachers treated Black versus White students.

FB: I don't know that I really saw a whole lot of differences. Teachers established the rules, and I think some of the Black kids may have had initially more trouble following the rules than some of the--.

EG: I'm just going to make sure this [tape recorder] is picking up.

FB: But I don't know that there were a huge number of differences.

EG: Okay, sure.

FB: But I mean I just wasn't aware of.

EG: I wonder how much of this is, most of the research we've looked at and that's been done on Louisville, has been done on the high school level. So we notice that in our research, that that did take place, that there were differences in discipline on the high school level. But maybe again, it was different on the elementary level.

FB: Well I think statistically over the years, we've seen that there are more Black students being disciplined than White students, and suffering harsher consequences than White students. But the offenses that they're committing pretty much justify the consequences. I mean, I think with the discipline code, it specifies how different things are treated and I think it changes from school to school. If a school doesn't want to have a reputation of having a high suspension rate, they get around it. They might do an in-school suspension or tell the parent to just come take your child home for the day so it doesn't go down as a suspension.

EG: Right.

FB: So there's ways around it, and I think the schools have become very creative in finding that so they don't have that stigma of a high suspension rate, which is what the powers that be look at.

EG: That brings to mind again about this No Child Left Behind Act and the regulations. What do you think of No Child Left Behind?

FB: I retired before No Child Left Behind. I wasn't particularly impressed with it. I think that there was a lot of stuff mandated and a lot of testing mandated that was redundant to what we were already doing here in Kentucky. I think it was underfunded and I think there were a lot of requirements put on schools without adequate funding to provide for them.

EG: Yeah, that's kind of the impression that we've gotten from talking with different teachers when we talked briefly about the No Child Left Behind. Let's see here, we've covered most everything, I think. With the organized opposition when you were traveling to the South End, did you have a sense of who was doing the protesting, if they were lower-class, working-class Whites?

FB: I had the feeling that they probably were but other than that--because this part of town I wasn't real familiar with myself. Just in general, I think that the socio-economic level of the South End of Louisville, the impression I had was that it was a lower level than what I had seen in the east, but it, I don't know that it really was. It was just kind of an impression I had. I'm not real sure it was. I think it was just a lot of folks that just didn't want to change, didn't want anything forced on them, and had some very strong opinions about race.

EG: Did you face that at both the schools that you were at initially in the South End?

FB: I think I noticed it more at Dixie than I did at Stone Street.

EG: Yeah. That makes sense, because we've heard a lot about Dixie or Dixie Highway and so forth, and not as much about Stone Street. And it seems to be the working-class, lower-class Whites—

FB: Yeah.

EG: That were doing all the protesting. I think we've done a really good job. [laughter]. Let's see. What were people in your community saying about school desegregation at that time, about busing, people in your neighborhood? Was it even a common topic of conversation?

FB: I don't think it was even discussed a whole lot.

EG: Oh, okay.

FB: When I first started teaching I was so busy, like taking classes and just trying to keep my head above water in the classroom, my friends that I hung out with were all young, single, we just weren't all that worried about it. Not all of them were teachers, so unless you were directly affected, they just really didn't care.

EG: And probably like you said, observed before with teachers a generational difference, perhaps.

FB: Yeah.

EG: Did you think by the 1980s that it was succeeding?

FB: Yeah, I guess I did. Or it was meeting some goals that they were attempting to meet. I don't know that there was much of a balance in the economic level of the schools. Certainly the schools that had money and resources still had money and resources, and the schools that didn't, for the most part, still didn't, unless they had a large group of--. Like one of the things Brandeis did, it was after I left, [was become] a choice or magnet-type program for writing. So they had a program to attract kids and keep them there for the full time that they would've been bused, rather than just coming in for a year and going back out. And I think a lot of schools were trying to do that, saw that at Coleridge Taylor. Kids that came to Coleridge Taylor stayed there the whole time voluntarily, rather than coming for a year and going back to their home school.

EG: Okay, so it wasn't as big an effort to get the schools desegregated by that time?

FB: No.

EG: People were more receptive to it, it sounds like.

FB: Yeah. And the district was making changes periodically in the busing pattern. And over the years, more and more schools became non-bused as the neighborhoods were integrated.

EG: But you said you didn't really see this having so much an impact on the socio-economic?

FB: No.

EG: So it was having an impact in terms of the desegregation but not on the socio-economic.

FB: Yeah.

EG: Do you think by that point the purpose of school desegregation had changed?

FB: Yeah. I think it became more just let's make sure we have a balance of Black and White, and I think by then, by the time I retired, you were just focused with getting every kid in the school moved along and achieving.

EG: So it wasn't, I mean, it's just seemed the consciousness of it having to be Black versus White has changed and that it wasn't as much an issue?

FB: I think again, the only time it was an issue was the first week of school.

EG: Yeah.

FB: When we did the counts to make sure the classes were balanced.

EG: Sure. So would you consider it to be an ongoing issue, the desegregation part?

FB: I don't know that it's really an issue.

EG: Yeah, it's—

FB: At least in my mind it isn't.

EG: Yeah, the socio-economic to you is—

FB: I see the biggest issue as, and difference is going to be the socio-economic level.

EG: Right, right. And I guess I have two more questions and then we can wrap up and just go over a few [proper] words and so forth. What lessons would you convey from your experience as a teacher and with desegregation and socio-economic?

FB: I think as far as lessons, you know, what do you mean by, treating people?

EG: Well, you know, like based on your experience, I guess. I know it's a very broad question. Like one person, I asked him, and he was like, "It just shows people have to get along."

FB: Well I found that in teaching I was far more successful, I think, in my classes because, and some of the teachers, and I think that was because the kids knew I genuinely cared about them. I respected the kids I worked with and I treated them with respect, and I treated them fairly. I didn't try to favor anybody and I really worked hard with parents and helped parents understand how important they are to the learning process.

EG: Sure. So the parent's whole involvement, and I guess the other thing you've conveyed, and I don't mean to put words in your mouth, but that the socio-economic is what needed to be addressed.

FB: Yeah, I think that and parental involvement. I think they're two key factors to a kid's success in school.

EG: Sure. Is there anything else that you want to add as we wrap up?

FB: I can't think of anything you haven't hit. [laughter]

EG: Okay. Well, I'm going to leave the tape on to ensure accuracy as we go over a few of these words.

[The interviewee/interviewer ended the tape confirming spelling of proper names]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran. September, 2005.