

**Southern Oral History Program Series:
Long Civil Rights Movement Project**

Transcript – Bonita Emerick

Interviewee: Bonita Emerick

Interviewer: Elizabeth Gritter

Transcriber: Emily Baran, September 2005

Interview Date: August 2, 2005

Location: Louisville, Kentucky at the Gallery House Bed and Breakfast

Length: 2 cassettes, approximately 125 minutes

Interview note: Elizabeth Gritter refers a few times to the life history chronology that Ms. Emerick prepared for her prior to the oral history. Ms. Emerick provided clarifying comments to Ms. Gritter via an e-mail on October 14, 2005.

START OF TAPE I, SIDE A

EG: [This] is Elizabeth Gritter interviewing Bonita Emerick on August 2, 2005 in Louisville, Kentucky. I just had a few quick follow-up questions [in regard] to your life history [chronology] and then I thought we could delve more into your experience in regard to busing and world view and so forth. And these were just kind of technical questions. Where is Shively?

BE: Shively. It's actually, it's more in the South End of Louisville. It's just up from—I'm trying to think—it's like there's, the city's pretty much adjoined by, there's Northwestern Parkway, Southern Parkway, Eastern Parkway, and it's kind of like, Northwestern Parkway is down in the West End and if you come up that and come around. Then you turn onto Dixie Highway and as you're going toward Fort Knox and that area, that's Shively, Pleasure Ridge Park, Valley Station.

EG: Oh, okay.

BE: Yeah, through there.

EG: Yeah, I was in the Pleasure Ridge Park area—

BE: Shively is just north of that.

EG: Okay, when you moved there it was a predominately White area?

BE: Uh huh.

EG: Where is Cane Run Road?

BE: That's also kind of on the edge of Shively and Pleasure Ridge Park area as well.

EG: Sure.

BE: It just kind of runs on up the river going south.

EG: Oh, okay. And let's see, Saint Matthews?

BE: Saint Matthews, that's in the East End of Louisville and that's probably pretty much where Doctor K'Meyer lives. She says she sends her daughter to (), and () is in Saint Matthews.

EG: Oh, okay. We just were there the other night because Joe, my colleague, he had dinner over at Tracy's place and then he left something over there, so I know right where that is. And Breckinridge Lane?

BE: That's also Saint Matthews.

EG: And Cedar Creek Road?

BE: That is out [in?] the South End. If you went out Bardstown Road going towards Bardstown, Kentucky—

EG: Okay.

BE: Right at the Gene Snyder Freeway. That's Cedar Creek Road right past the Gene Snyder out there.

EG: Okay, and I was wondering too, in terms of your brothers, when their dates of birth were.

BE: Let's see, well my oldest brother, Randall, he goes by Garrett also, his birthday is May of 1952, I think it's May 26.

EG: Okay, May, 1952. And Tony?

BE: Tony is June 28, 1953.

EG: Okay. Wayne?

BE: Wayne is March 23, 1956.

EG: And Donnie?

BE: Is November the 27 of 1956.

EG: Oh, so you're the youngest.

BE: Uh huh. I have two sisters besides them.

EG: What are their names?

BE: Becky is, her birthday is June the 17, 1953—wait a minute, Tony's '53, Becky's '54.

EG: '54?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Is that B-E-C-K-Y?

BE: Yeah.

EG: And then you have another sister?

BE: Lottie, L-O-T-T-I-E.

EG: Okay.

BE: And her birthday is September the 19, 1960.

EG: Okay, great. I just wanted to put on tape that I think future researchers should consult the life history form that you prepared for us because that's very valuable and has some material that we would normally cover in oral history, but we won't since that's all prepared, so that's great. I guess I want to start off asking you about: before all this busing took place and when you moved around from area to area and dropped out of school, what sort of views did your parents raise you with in terms of Black people?

BE: Well, we were raised not to trust them. We kind of had a fear when we first moved up from the country, you know, there were no Black people basically in the country, which is Grayson County, Kentucky, where I'm from. And when we moved up here, we moved right in a neighborhood, and it was pretty much predominately Black. I can remember there was an elderly lady named Pearl who went to the church across the street. It was like a charismatic Black full gospel church, and you could hear the singing and music, and I've always loved music, and so I had my mother get me a tambourine and I wanted to go to church with Pearl. And my mom, you know, would not let me go to church with Pearl. That was just not acceptable.

EG: Right.

BE: It grew worse as some of the violence escalated during the civil rights era, you know like the Martin Luther King stuff. For instance, when Martin Luther King came to town, my uncle, which was my dad's brother, went down as part of his group of friends, and they had eggs and they threw eggs at Martin Luther King. And so that was applauded in the family, that was something--. So they were pretty racist, and you know sometimes it was justified and sometimes it wasn't. The idea that you should get a job just because you're White, because you're superior, you know that somehow even wealthy Blacks were below us or something, that was just kind of their idea.

EG: And was that your viewpoint too when you were growing up?

BE: As I was growing up it somewhat was because that's what you're around. One thing when I look back during the—I'm maybe digressing away from the subject here but it's kind of the mindset of—I can remember, like when I was in the first grade, it was the election of Nixon and Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace, and somebody had given me some stickers with George Wallace and this man paid me to go around and rip down all the Hubert Humphrey stickers and posters and stuff and put George Wallace posters and stickers, you know, wherever I saw one, I was to put a George Wallace over that, and this man paid me. I had met him at the bar where my dad tended bar. I'd go there after school and you know, go in and so, and in the process of doing this, this big Black guy probably in his twenties at that time, had a big afro, which was the style then, he caught me and he wouldn't let me go until I told him who had put me up to that. And so he went back to the bar and started a fight with that man, and they called the police in and everything. I went over and started playing with a little girl, a little Black girl who was in my class, and it turned out that that guy who caught me was her brother, and it's kind of like we stood over to the side and watched these people fight. You know, they were my classmates and the ones that I knew I learned to like, but yet there was that "them and us."

EG: So you were only six years old when you were pulling down the signs.

BE: Yeah, I would do anything for money when I was a child.

EG: Sure, and were your family and the people in your community that you associated with mainly Wallace supporters?

BE: Well, not everybody. I mean my dad and mother were die-hard Wallace supporters that year. Like our neighbors, they were White and they would teach me not to

say the n-word, they would say, "That's not polite." They taught me more in manners and how you should act socially than my parents did as far as that goes.

EG: Did your parents know that they were teaching you?

BE: Yeah, my dad would get mad about it sometimes, but I still went over there and played with their children, and they would tell me, "You don't say this," and "You don't," that they're people and they're God's children too. So not everybody in our neighborhood accepted that view that Black people were inferior.

EG: Right, and you were saying too when you moved into the West End, it was predominately White and then—

BE: It gradually—

EG: Gradually, as you were there, became more African-American, and I was wondering how your family and parents reacted to that?

BE: We, my dad just started trying to find a way to get out of the West End. The trouble was with seven children and being able to rent a house that you could afford that had enough bedrooms, because there were housing codes that you were supposed to, like if you rented a home to a large family, that there's supposed to be like say three or four bedrooms, and then whenever you got into that and you got into the better neighborhoods, it could get quite expensive.

EG: So that was a reason, because that was one of my questions when I looked at your chronology and how you talked about the violence and the neighborhood becoming Black, was why it took so long to move, until 1971. It was with the—

BE: The financial thing and the fact that a lot of people who have homes didn't want to rent to someone with seven children.

EG: Right, yeah sure. You did initially go to predominately Black schools, you were saying, and you said yet there still was a barrier between “us” and “them” or I was just wondering how that experience went, if you could talk more in-depth about that.

BE: I could remember in my first grade year that there was one White teacher in the first grade and her name was Miss Murray and then my sister and everybody said they hoped I got her. She was really nice. I can remember that that’s who they assigned me to in the first grade and then I remember that -- because my parents didn’t ever reprimand me for saying cuss words either -- after that class that day, I was relieved and I told my mother, I said, “I’m so glad that I got Miss Murray and not some g-d nigger [muffled], you know N-I-G-G-E-R.”

EG: Oh, uh huh.

BE: So my mother thought that was cute and she went back to my teacher and told her this. So the next day they transferred me to Ms. Williams’ class, who was a Black woman.

EG: Really?

BE: Yeah so I guess the school thought they were going to get me to learn to accept it. Ms Williams was a wonderful lady, sweet. Every day she’d grab you and kiss you and hug you as you went out the door. My dad, he thought it was funny, because I would always dart under her arm. I wouldn’t let her hug and kiss me, but all the other kids would. So it was like two or three years later, I saw her when I was in the third grade, and she recognized me and she ran up and hugged me and kissed me. At that point I was able to accept it and I’ve learned to accept she was one of the best teachers I’ve probably had, and that she was dealing with the race thing at the time too, and she was really a good teacher.

EG: Yeah. Did you make friends with any of the Black students?

BE: I can remember making friends with a few, like the little girl, Monica, that I was talking about, that her brother and that White man got into a fight that day. I made friends with her. I made friends, there was a little girl named Yvonne. I started making friends and realizing that not everybody wanted to beat me up because I was White.

EG: Right, and you had put in the life history [form] that you were beat up or accosted a lot and so were your brothers. And you listed some of that in there. I was wondering if we could talk more about that.

BE: One of the main incidents that I can remember is when I went to Shawnee. This was like in the third grade just before we moved out to Shively. This girl came up to me and she had a gang of her friends. She started pushing on me and said that she had heard I'd been talking about her and I really didn't even know who she was. She just started pushing on me and was like, "Meet me at the flagpole. I'm going to kick your little White ass," is what she said. So then, silly me, I went out to the flagpole and of course she had a bunch of her friends, and they all started pushing me and kicking me around. My teacher came out and saw what was happening and then she got me and took me inside and called my mom to come and get me. There were other incidents, maybe like whenever we would go to--. There was a drugstore a block away from our house called Oak Drugs. I can remember I'd walk up there, maybe get a candy bar or a Coke or a bag of potato chips. One day, this Black guy, he was—you know when I was probably about seven or eight—he looked to be at that time probably thirteen, fourteen, and he came up and he said, asked this little sister, "Can I see that bag of potato chips?" Then, silly me, I just handed it to him and he took off running with it. There was another time that I had a bicycle in the garage at our house and looked out and there was a Black kid across the street that was riding my bicycle up and down the street in front of me. My dad, he never did anything

about it. There were more incidents like [that] concerning my two brothers, Donnie and Wayne. They seemed to get the brunt of it. Tony and Garrett were older, and Tony was big for his age. He looked like football player material so they didn't really ever bother him. There was one incident where he got into a fight with this guy, just a neighborhood kid. His name was June Bug. Somehow June Bug was cussing him and Tony, he was really easy-going, but when he got mad it was kind of like he didn't have any sense. So June Bug was throwing rocks and bricks and stuff at him and [Tony] was just batting them off, and they [some elderly women in the neighborhood] called the police--some of the neighbor people did--and when the policeman got there, the policeman asked him [Tony] what was happening, and he [Tony] said, "Well, this guy up here keeps trying to start a fight with me but he [June Bug] keeps running." The guy [the policeman] said, "Well I don't blame him, I'd run too," the policeman did. You know we used to get a lot of vandals in the neighborhood. We had one house with a nice Black lady who lived across the street from us, her name was Betty, and during the racial stuff, like right after Martin Luther King's assassination, they said they was going to burn down all the White houses in the West End, you know and things like that. So those were the rumors and we were afraid. Betty would come over--apparently they were having some sort of meetings--and she would say you need to put this color light bulb in your porch, that anybody that doesn't have this they're going to be targeting. Or one time she came over and she took like white shoe polish and painted soul sister on our window. So she kind of acted on our behalf and helped us because she knew we weren't there to cause trouble, we were just trying to get by. Apparently she was going to the meetings but she was kind of helping us. There was one time that my mom, the least little noise she heard, she had a .38 police army special, and she would open up the door and just start firing. So one night, the policemen come to

the house and said, “We had some reports that there was some gun fire going on here.” She says, “Well I didn’t call, but I was the one doing the shooting and if you think very much of these niggers, you’re going to [have to] come down and baby-sit with them, because I’m going to get me one before the morning if they keep tapping on my door and running like they’re doing.” He says, “Well do me a favor and don’t ever call and then start shooting.” She says, “I won’t call you and then start shooting. I might call you to come down here and pick up one of their Black asses.” And so the policemen, they was riding four in a car at the time because of racial tensions and stuff in the West End-- [The policeman] brought her back a cap full of bullets.

EG: Oh my God.

BE: So, you know, that just goes to show that the policemen just kind of sympathized too with the racist point of view.

EG: Wow, that’s really something. So the racial violence intensified, obviously, with Martin Luther King’s death. And you had mentioned too that, let me see here, the park—

BE: It’s called Fontaine Ferry, we pronounced it “fountain ferry,” like the natives here always call it “fountain ferry” even though it’s Fontaine Ferry.

EG: Yeah, and that there was an incident there. Is that park a neighborhood park?

BE: It was. It was an amusement park. They said back in the ’40s and ’50s that they actually had like big name people come in there to perform, like big band [leader] Tommy Dorsey. Then like each weekend, they’d have a different county as their focus, like Grayson County days or Breckinridge County days. It’d be kind of like a reunion of all the people who had moved to Louisville who wanted to get together there. It was a neighborhood park, but yet people came from all around. It had a swimming pool. There

was a dude ranch to the back, like where you could go ride horses and there was an old roller coaster and lots of amusement rides and things like that. I've heard that the carousel is actually at Six Flags in Illinois.

EG: Oh really? They moved it? Sure. Now, when you said it was looted and burned, was that still, do you think, in the aftermath of King's death [where] there was still that anger a year later or was that dealing with something else?

BE: It may have been just only since because I've done some research since then--. For instance, I didn't even know--. A lot of them had on bib overalls and white t-shirts. I only know from Doctor K' Meyer's class that that was like SNCC [the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], that they tended to wear the bib overalls and the white t-shirts. I read in the papers at that time [that] there were some tensions with the students at U of L and the student unions and those kinds of things that year, so it may be as much related to that. And Fontaine Ferry Park had always been--this is also [something] only that I know it from my research--known as predominately White. They didn't allow a Black person in there. I think it was 1964 that the first [Black] person came in, so it may have symbolized something to them and that may be why they chose to have the riot there that day.

EG: Right. Well that's a great thing about history is then you can have a better understanding of why these things happen and make sense of them. How at the time did you view things?

BE: I was angry. I just thought that me as a poor little girl--. We could go down and the guards knew us. They would let us in even if we didn't have any money. The people felt sorry for us and would let us ride the rides and things. In my view at the time, I just thought they had taken it away from us. It was just an anger that you feel as a child that well--. That's kind of what parents had said, "Well they've taken it away from you."

EG: That's interesting because, well my specialty has been civil rights movement history, and some scholars have recently done more work on looking at the White perspective, and that's one of the common viewpoints -- that when Blacks make civil rights gains, Whites feel that their rights have been violated and they've had things that have been taken away from them. Was that kind of a viewpoint of your parents?

BE: It was. I mean they just viewed--. For instance, they didn't view the Black people as coming in and trying to better themselves. They viewed it as, and my dad always--. A lot of times he would call it communism and this kind of thing, that they were just coming in and taking over and that the NAACP was hiring these people to come into these neighborhoods and take over. That was more his view rather than it was just that they were just trying to get by and better themselves and move into better neighborhoods as well as us.

EG: Right. So he viewed the Black people who were moving into the neighborhood, and the ones who were going to these places that once had been predominately White, as this was a sign of taking over—

BE: Yeah.

EG: And invasion. Yeah that was common. I've run across that again and again, people associating the NAACP with communism, or the Black civil rights people with communism. It must be fascinating for you now to learn about history.

BE: It is because that's my major. When I was sitting in Doctor K'Meyer's class, it was like, well, you know I've lived through all of this that she was talking about, and it was kind of--. I've taken as many African-American literature classes as I could because I wanted to understand the other side, to realize--. I guess it's a healing for me and a forgiveness because I had been raised to hate Black people.

EG: I wanted too to ask you, beyond the racial views of your parents, what were they like? What were their personalities, what they liked to do?

BE: Well my dad was a musician, that was his dream was to play music professionally. He did in Texas play for, I don't know if you ever heard of Johnny Horton back in the 50s, he had a song called, "Battle of New Orleans"—

EG: Oh, yeah, I've heard of that song.

BE: He played on the Louisiana Hayride with him. He had an offer to go on the road with Loretta Lynn to play guitar for her. My mom said she wasn't going to stay at home and raise seven kids while he was out on the road. They both had been married before and they each had three children, and I was the only child that the two of them had together.

EG: Oh, so they were divorced, or did—

BE: Divorced, they had each been married and divorced. Daddy had lived out in San Antonio and New Mexico. He's originally from Grayson County, Kentucky, but he had moved out there and then once he was divorced in '57, he came back here. He was basically a truck driver and then he played music. I don't know if I even put this in history that I sent but he was beat and robbed in the West End. This was after busing.

EG: The 1980 incident?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, you did mention that.

BE: He was disabled at that point. He was disabled from driving a truck anymore. So he went to work at a florist in town called Rasmussens, which grew roses wholesale for all the florists, and then he went to work from there to at a factory, and then he retired from the factory. My mom, she was a waitress. She sang in some different bands, bands that my

dad had. She also basically did various types of factory work and then like normally when I was a child, they both worked two jobs. He tended bar and then he drove a truck. And she waitressed and then she worked in a factory. They would go to sometimes parties on weekends with some of their friends, you know kind of drinking-type parties. They would, but they would be parties where we could go too. I'm trying to think, they weren't church-going people when I was small.

EG: I wondered about that, if they were religious.

BE: No, like there again, the neighbors who lived next door to us were Catholic and they taught me more about God and Jesus and those kind of things. My dad was raised Catholic but he didn't care for the Catholic Church. He was born out of wedlock, and he didn't like the way he was treated in the Catholic Church. So anyway, he, him and my mother started going back to church once we moved out to Shively, and both started going to Baptist church at that point.

EG: Did that have any influence do you think on their racial views, going to a Baptist church?

BE: I don't think so. I mean actually the one we were going to was kind of in a mixed neighborhood. It was down on Algonquin Parkway, at Seventh and Algonquin Parkway. On one side there was like projects and you would get a lot of Black people who would come from that neighborhood. Then if you went south, then the White people, it was more of a blended-type church at one type [The church, Harmony Baptist Church, consisted of both white and black members.]

EG: It's interesting to me how your parents held such racist views but yet there was a lot of interaction between them and Blacks with the church and the neighborhood [in which] you were raised, and how the one Black woman wanted to protect you from the

violence. Did I assume they didn't really have any friends who were Black, or were they on friendly terms with some people?

BE: Some they were. I mean my dad worked with a Black man at the one trucking firm he worked at, and his name was Tom Grant. I can remember him always talking about him and he really liked him. He played music with a man who played saxophone and his name was Carl Woods, and actually we were playing music, this was years later of course, maybe their views had matured to this point, but this would've been in the late '70s. Carl Woods was playing at this bar dance where my dad and them were playing. This was down in Grayson County, and Carl Woods went out onto the dance floor with a lady to dance and some other couple that my mom and dad knew got off the dance floor. They wouldn't dance on the floor with him and my mom and dad were upset that they acted that way towards this man.

EG: Did Carl Woods go on the dance floor with a White woman?

BE: You know that I cannot remember for sure.

EG: Okay, sure.

BE: But you know, they were upset with this particular couple, so they didn't totally believe that they shouldn't be allowed to eat in a restaurant the same as us or you know, those kind of things that--. Like I said, we experienced so much violence, I don't know at what point those things shaped their views as far as just wanting to get away from them.

EG: Right, well I think it'd be good now to—and we can come back and address more of what we've been talking about later if we have time--address the whole matter of them pulling you out of school and then really kind of it almost seems panicking, moving

from place to place, not wanting to be caught by the truancy officer and I was wondering how they explained that to you at the time.

BE: Well, at one point they did ask me did I want to go to school, and of course [if] you ask a fourteen-year-old child if they want to go to school, your answer is no. And so, they just didn't send me. Their view on that and my view at the time, there again my dad called it communism, like they were moving in and trying to tell us, tell him what to do with his children. I think it was as much just fighting the system as fighting the Blacks. Of course we in our mind thought that the Blacks wanted this, wanted to come in and take over. My dad was angry. I think Judge James Gordon was the federal judge who ordered busing. My dad would call him a communist, and I think he would make comments that he wished somebody would kill him, you know, as much or more than he talked about the Black people.

[Emerick's editorial comment on the following excerpt: My mother was talking to the truant officer and was referring to the reports on the news where the reporters had interviewed parents who were not sending their children to school. The parents said that they were not holding their children out due to prejudice or racial issues, but instead, they feared for their children's safety. My mother told the truant officer that she was holding me out of school because of "damned niggers, monkeys and apes." My mother then told the truant officer to get off of our property, and she (my mother) told the truant officer that the only reason she did not beat the truant officer up was that the truant officer was old and looked like my mom's mother.]

There was the one incident where the truant officer came to our house. This was before we started moving. There had been a lot on the news that--. At first it showed that there were a few reports of boycotting and such and that attendance was down, but then

slowly the newspapers started saying there were more and more [more people giving in and returning to school]. I had some cousins who were going to school at that time and they'd say the classrooms were empty. My dad would say, "Well that's propaganda. The newspapers [were] just saying this to urge people to get their kids back into the school." You know, it was more of a distrust of the system. This truant officer came to our house. My mom says I've been seeing on the news and in the paper that all the people that you've asked about sending their children to school, if it [was] for fear of the violence or if it was for fear of the Black people because you didn't want your children going to school with Black people—and excuse my language that I'm about to say—but my mom told the truant officer that day, I can still remember this, [my mother] says, "I would beat you up right now except you're as old as my mother." The truancy officer was an elderly lady. She says, "I'm here to tell you that I'm not sending my children to school because of damn niggers, monkeys, and apes." And said, "We just moved out of that mess and I don't want my child to go back to that." So she says, "You can go tell Judge James Gordon and whoever else has sent you down here to all go screw yourselves." Except she didn't even say it that nicely, but you know, it's a--.

EG: What was the truancy officer's reaction?

BE: I guess she started to fear that my mom could go ballistic or something and at that point she left. Then they started sending her a few things, like a summons, that if they weren't in compliance in so many days that there would be a court order sent and things like that. My mom and dad had stalled them that much. We moved in January of '76, busing [had] started in [the] fall of '75. So they were able to stall that much that we moved to Grayson County at that point and we stayed down there until the fall of '76. At that point, my dad wasn't able to get a good job still; there's not much in the country, like little

sewing factories and that sort of thing, where he had always done truck driving work. So he moved back up here and resumed his job in Louisville, at Royal Crown Cola at that point, and we moved in with my grandmother. My mom got-- One of my cousins was going to school to be a schoolteacher. My mom has a paranoia thing going on too, so she started getting nervous that some of them might turn us in, and so she decided to move out and she told them that she was sending me to school, you know she would tell our relatives that she was, and she wasn't. And then like [with] the neighbors -- I never really looked my age -- she'd tell them I was sixteen and they'd look at me [and say], "Well she doesn't look sixteen." If she felt like that they were getting suspicious at all we would move again. We moved several times within just a few months and so then like in the two-year period, I forget how many times it is we moved, but it was a lot. Once I was sixteen, things kind of started settling down and didn't hear much about race until the incident with my dad. Then, it's like we were all angry enough to just go down into the West End and start shooting anybody we saw. [Re: the second to last sentence, Emerick clarifies: When I turned 16, it was no longer illegal to hold me out of school. So, the issue of busing was no longer an issue to my parents, and we proceeded to get on with our lives. My parents did not say much about black people during this period until my father was beat and robbed while delivering soft drinks in the west-end of Louisville.]

EG: Any Black person?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, sure. Now I was wondering what happened with your brothers and sisters during this time? Were they also taken out of school?

BE: Well, see I think Donnie had just turned sixteen—I'm trying to think, he was born in '56. My brother, Wayne, had joined the army and Donnie was already out of

school, whether he had quit or what, I really can't remember on that. I know the last grade he completed was the ninth grade. My sister, Lottie, she would have been in the age group to still be going, but she got married in '75. She got married when she was fourteen, going on fifteen.

EG: Wow.

BE: In '75. That was still legal to do at that point if both parents signed and consented, and so she just got married. They're still married.

EG: Wow, that's impressive. So you were really the only one that your parents had to deal with the busing thing with?

BE: Yeah, my oldest brother, Tony, challenged my parents on it. He says that moving away was not going to answer the problem and that they should just put me in school, that it wasn't right or fair to me. He's always been more liberal.

EG: Okay.

BE: Of all my brothers, he's very laid-back, easygoing, and he has a really liberal viewpoint. Actually, when we moved to Shively, he was still going to Shawnee High School and he chose to go back to Shawnee because that's where his friends were and that's where he wanted to graduate.

EG: Yeah. How did your parents react to that when he challenged them?

BE: They would just say that he was being brainwashed in school, and that--. He's always had different views. He from kind of what they would call the hippie generation. He would always listen to the psychedelic music and all that stuff. Him and my dad had been at odds at different times on political viewpoints and things like that.

EG: That's not too uncommon in families to have children with very different political viewpoints from their parents.

BE: Well there's seven of us and every one of us is different. My oldest brother, Garrett kind of has an Archie Bunker mentality. [laughter] Tony, he's totally the opposite of--. Free spirit, live and let live, and that kind of thing. My brother, Wayne, he's just kind of straight-out redneck. You know, Donnie, he's an interior decorator and he's--. You know everyone of us has a different--.

EG: Sure. Was there ever any instance of any of your family, parents doing interracial dating at all?

BE: My nephew, I mean this has been since busing and all of that, but my nephew, my sister Lottie's son, was dating a Black girl in the country, and my sister wouldn't even let her come to the house.

EG: So this was much later.

BE: This has been probably ten years ago.

EG: Okay, sure. I saw too when looking at your life history that when you were at Butler Junior High School, you made a lot of friends there, and I was wondering what happened with those friendships when you dropped out of school.

BE: Well, I've lost contact with--. There was one friend, Marla, who lived across the street from us. I've contacted her through classmates.com recently. She lives in Ohio, but, as far as any of my other friends, I tried to do research to try to find them and haven't been able to.

EG: So when you moved away, that ended it effectively. You said too that your mom would lie to the relatives and say you were in school. Who knew what your parents were doing?

BE: Well all of my brothers and sisters knew and two of her sisters knew. My aunt Laverne and her sister, Virginia, they both knew. I mean because there were two or three

instances, I cannot remember for sure, we lived with my grandmother, which is my mom's mother, and of course it was obvious to them at that point I wasn't in school. My cousin, Debbie, who was going to be a teacher, she was pretty much wise to it. She'd ask me well what was I going to do when I got grown, and of course I was naive enough to think I was just going to be a professional musician and that was all that I needed. I didn't need the education or anything, and that's pretty much what my dad told me. He said, "With that you don't need anything else."

EG: Yeah, so they didn't do any sort of home schooling?

BE: No, most of what I learned--. I would get *Reader's Digest* and read them from cover to cover. When I got old enough I started going to the library and getting things on my own. As far as math and stuff, of course, I stayed away from math. I would read a lot of history. I've always been fascinated with like civil war history and that kind of thing, so I always would read biographies, histories, and just literature. But that was basically whatever education I had. I became self-educated.

EG: Sure.

BE: I didn't my G.E.D. until 2000.

EG: Did you feel that you were missing out on anything by not being in school?

BE: At the time I didn't, but then after I started working, I went to work at Target, and there was this time when they had me set up to go into what they called round robin interviews to go into the executive level. I had lied whenever I went to work there, said I had a high school education, and at that point I was afraid that I would be found out and I chose not to go on into the upper level because I felt inferior and often felt intimidated by people who had college degrees. I somehow felt like I was sneaking in the back door, that there was this one thing that people didn't know, that I didn't have the education.

EG: Did anyone ever find out that you didn't have the high school education?

BE: No, like when I married, my husband knew and people at our church and people like that knew, but like wherever I worked I never confided in anybody.

EG: Right, that makes sense. Did you have—the period when you were out of school, when you should have been in school—a peer group at all? Did you have friends?

BE: No, that is one of my biggest regrets, is the social interaction, because I only interacted with my mother and father's friends, which were in their thirties to forties at that time. And so like recently, one of my friends said that she wanted to home school her child, and I says, "That is something you absolutely should not do," I said, because my parents held me out of school and I am very socially awkward as a result of it. I've only recently started to catch up in some of the social graces.

EG: Sure. So you weren't at all, that period when you were out of school, connected to the school? I mean it would have been risky to have any sort of, go to any sort of school event or—

BE: Or have friends my own age because maybe they would say, "She's not going to school. Why do I have to?" or you know those kinds of things.

EG: Right. And you put here too that you and your family played at rallies, promoting the boycotting of Louisville's schools, and by boycotting you mean as a protest, people taking their kids out of school?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Did they see that as a temporary thing? What was the end goal of the boycotting?

BE: Well they thought if enough people stuck together and held their kids out of school then they would have no choice but to see, well, this isn't working and there's not

enough jails to hold everybody who's not sending their kids to school. So my mom and dad became angry at like her own brother, who chose to send his children. She got mad, She even told him--he was a World War II veteran--she said, "I always thought you were a brave man." She says, "But now I realize you only went to war because they told you you had to. You're not really brave at all." She was angry at him because he went ahead and sent his children to school.

EG: Sure. How often did you play in these rallies?

BE: It was over that summer in '75. I mean we played at a few at the Jackson Democrat Club, of course, that was for more political it turned out. These people would promise, some of them, that there would be no busing if they got into office and this kind of thing. They really had no control over it at all anyway. [Emerick clarifies: These were really more political rallies or campaigns for the various candidates in the Democratic Party who were running for offices within Jefferson County. It is important to note that the only person who ever promised my parents that I would not be bussed was Thelma Stovall. She was running for, and won, Lieutenant Governor at this time. Although I was young at the time, I do not remember Ms. Stovall making busing a part of her official platform. However, she was a close personal friend of the man who played bass in my parent's band (They had worked together at Brown & Williamson where she was a union steward many years before). She sat and talked with my parents and promised that I would not be bussed, and that if she was elected, they would not be prosecuted for holding me out of school.]

EG: What was the Jackson Democrat Club?

BE: It was actually a club over on Cane Run Road in the South End, and it was--. Like some of the major politicians at that time, like Todd Hollenbach, who was, I think, a

County judge at that time, Harvey Sloan was the mayor, they would come over there and speak at political rallies. It was just a club for Democrats and [the] Democratic Party.

EG: Who were still conservative back then.

BE: Yeah. Thelma Stovall, we'd play for her over there—

EG: I'm going to turn [the tape] over.

BE: Sure.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

EG: Okay.

BE: Thelma Stovall, and that surprised me in recent history because it turns out she was pretty much a proponent of civil rights and things, but she was lieutenant governor back then.

EG: Of Kentucky?

BE: Uh huh.

EG: Okay.

BE: But she was friends with my mom and dad and some of the people who played in the band. She had promised that there would be no busing but it had just turned out it was a political promise that didn't have any foundation.

EG: Right. So if you could talk more about who the people were who were at these rallies, that there were these high-level politicians there and what other types of groups?

BE: Let's see, I was still fairly young so of course I was more caught up in the playing aspect of it than remembering. Like I know my cousin, I mentioned the point that she tried to get [my parents] to join with the KKK and play some rallies and like I said, for some reason my parents didn't want to be involved in that. Of the politicians who were

involved at the Jackson Democrat Club, like I said, I know that Harvey Sloan and Todd Hollenbach made political speeches there. The content of them I honestly couldn't tell. Thelma Stovall, she even told us that she would take us on the road with her, and it was more for campaign purposes for her election than it was--. She just made the promise separately to my parents, but as far as in her speeches or anything, I don't really recall her saying anything that you wouldn't be bused or--. It was just a personal promise that she made to my parents. I'm trying to think of any other prominent people there. I mean there was a man, his last name was Green, who was running for sheriff. I can't think--.

EG: Were there other places that you played aside from the Jackson Democrat Club gatherings?

BE: No, like I said my cousin wanted us to play, and this was actually a Bullitt County rally, which was going to be the KKK, that they were going to garner all this support and make an action, a plan to come in and do something, and my mom--. Then, whenever they'd talk about such violence as blowing up buses and things like that, [my parents] didn't see that that would solve anything because some innocent children could be on those buses.

EG: Right. So they were kind of doing non-violent protest—

BE: Right.

EG: Against it, with playing with the band—

BE: The boycott.

EG: Advocating boycotting and then taking you out of school also. Passive resistance in opposition to the civil rights movement [laughter] passive resistance, countering that.

BE: My mom and dad often said that the one thing they saw where the Black people were going to win was because they would stick together and that the White people wouldn't stick together.

EG: Interesting.

BE: That's what they came away from this with.

EG: You [said] too that your neighbors slowly gave in and sent the kids to school, but were there other people, cases that you know, that happened like with your family, where they just took their kids out of school?

BE: Well, my cousin, the same one that wanted them to get with [the] guy with the KKK, they initially held their children out for a few weeks and then they chose to, I think they moved to Bullitt County or close enough to the Bullitt County line [so] they were able get their children into the Bullitt County school system.

EG: Sure. And you also mentioned on the phone to me about the Christian academies that you remember popping up at that time, if you would talk more about them.

BE: There were. Some of my own research I did, like there was Beth Haven, which actually opened up in, I think it was in '71, and it's still in existence. It's out on Johnsonstown Road out in the South End of Louisville but it actually opened up in '71. I guess that was probably at the time they were talking about the merger of the school systems. And then there's Ninth and O Baptist Church, which was right over by Churchill Downs, right off of Taylor Boulevard. It has since closed and moved out to Breckinridge Lane, but the school is not in existence anymore. I had some friends who went to school there, at Ninth and O, that I had gone to church with, that I met later on who had gone there. A couple, like the preacher's son went there, one of the deacons, well two different deacons, sent their children to Ninth and O Baptist Church. Faith Baptist Temple, which

was a break-off from the church we had gone to, Harmony Baptist Church, the pastor's name was Fred Lowery, and he actually has a church down in Florida right now, but he opened up Faith Baptist Temple in that year, and he had broken off from Harmony and started Faith Baptist Temple, and we had moved out there and started going for a time. They wanted all of the parishioners to help finance the church, like everybody go in and open up a personal account and like three thousand dollars or whatever, you know, give to help build the church and all this. My parents started feeling like they were just more in it for the money. But like I said, Faith Baptist Temple. I think Evangel Tabernacle, and it's still in existence, the school is, but it opened up in that time period. Christian Academy is still in existence, but it merged with Northside Christian Church at that time.

EG: When you were moving from place to place trying to, when your mom thought people were suspicious of you, did you keep going to church at that time or was that even something that she thought might cause suspicion?

BE: We didn't and I can't really say that it's for the purpose of suspicion, but we had just dropped out of church at that time. We did go occasionally to my brother's church in the country, which was like a full gospel Pentecostal church. We didn't not go to church for that reason. We just didn't go to church during that time period.

EG: Sure, and why did you think your parents didn't want to play at KKK rallies?

BE: I mean my dad would stand up and say that he believed in everything the KKK stood for, but I think it was the fear of the violence or possibly the fear of being put in jail. I don't think he would be one to physically go up there, even though he would think it was neat that somebody had burned a cross in somebody's yard, I don't think he would have had the nerve to have gone and burn a cross in someone's yard [laughter]. Or like, I think there was one point where somebody did burn a school bus, there was no children or

anything on it. It was like at night and the bus drivers at that time actually leased their buses out, and I think somebody just went in somebody's yard and burned the bus at night. But you know I don't think he was into vandalism and some of the things that a lot of people, the KKK, seemed to do, you know church burning and those kinds of things.

EG: I mean he obviously had some sort of contact with the Klan if they approached him for you to play with the rally, do you remember him being friendly with any people in the Klan? Or did he just kind of seem to not want anything to do with them?

BE: Not knowingly. Like I said the lady that, my cousin, my mom's niece, is actually who introduced us to that man—

EG: Oh, okay.

BE: So, you know as far as him ever being involved with them in any other ways, when he was younger, he would have never been accepted into the Klan anyway because he was Catholic at that time.

EG: Oh, right.

BE: And they didn't, I think, accept Catholics. I think there are some in there now, but that back then that wouldn't have been acceptable.

EG: Did your mom have a religious upbringing too?

BE: She did. She was kind of, I mean it was Protestant, like basically Methodist, and then there's a lot of Pentecostal influence on my mother's side, like what they call the Holy Rollers and that kind of thing.

EG: Oh, uh huh. Sure. What were their personalities like?

BE: They liked to joke a lot, they still do. They're fun-loving. My mom, since I've worked in the psychology field, I work at a mental hospital right now, my roommate, she's a psychologist actually, and so I've come to learn that my mom has a lot of personality

disorders, nearly what you would call borderline. While she likes to play pranks and jokes, she can go into these times of depression and has a lot of negativity like as far as the system goes and always wanting to take on the system in some way or other. My dad, he's always liked jokes, but he has a temper, he's always had a temper, and so it's like we learned kind of young not to ever challenge him. I can remember one time when I was going to Butler, some kids were picking on me because of my clothes and such, and I went to him. These were like tenth graders, there were like four or five of them. I went back to him and told him, and he said I should have beat them all up. I said that there was just one of me and he backhanded me because I challenged what he was saying and then because I didn't try to whip all those kids.

EG: Yeah, how would you characterize their views on government or politics?

BE: Well they're right now, it's an odd thing but they're still both, they claim to be Democrat. You know, they cannot stand Republicans at all, but he still thinks of the Democrats like as a Truman type of Democrat in his mind or something, or you know like the Wallace type of Democrat I guess you'd say. Because they're working class people, they don't buy into the Republican view, because Republicans tend to be more big business and more to the wealthy and that sort of thing.

EG: Right. Have their views on race changed over time?

BE: They have. My dad will still come off with the n-word a lot, and my mom will, but then it's like I've challenged her since I've been going to school. I've told her that a lot of things that they taught us just weren't right. She's come to admit that a lot of it, that they weren't right.

EG: Right.

BE: But that it was the way they were raised too.

EG: I think that in some ways that's remarkable when people who have those views and were raised with those views and it's so ingrained, are able to change like that.

Although it still seems they carry around some of those views, that they're saying the n-word. What about yourself? How did you come to have a transformation in your views on race?

BE: I think two of my teachers that stood out in school were both Black, and they were two of the best teachers I ever had. They were kind of strong-willed women who would look at you and [be] like, "You expect me to believe that?" You know, it's like you couldn't pass anything over on them and they were just really strong-willed and admirable women. And then when I worked at Office Depot, that's where I encountered more Black people. They hired a whole lot of Black people there and I learned to interact with them. One of them, well two of them were ministers, and they would come up and joke and just really cut up with me and stuff. I started learning that these were people just like anybody else. They're trying to work to support their family the same as I am. Every now and then you would encounter one who probably was like a protestor in the sixties and you could sense that militancy, and I still sometimes get turned off by the militancy, like whenever they wanted to turn everything to be a racist thing, in fact you don't always view it that way. I started making friends. Where I work at Ten Broeck hospital right now, which is a mental health facility, I have several friends there, nurses and, watch those nurses with those kids and I just really admire them and I love them to death. To think that anybody would be mean to them just because of the color of their skin, that makes me mad.

[Emerick clarifies: I work at Ten Broeck Hospital, which is a mental health facility. I have several friends there who are black. Some of them are nurses. I have observed these nurses as they work with the children at the hospital, and I admire their courage and their strength

as they work with the children. I feel a deep sense of love and respect for these ladies, and it is now hard to believe that anyone could hate these ladies simply because of the color of their skin. It would anger me to think that anyone could mistreat my friends for this reason.]

EG: Do you have any friends now who are Black that you socialize with?

BE: Probably not outside of work I still don't. But I really don't socialize with many White people outside of work either. I've been so busy with school and things like that, that I don't even get to socialize with family. My mom has really been angry, they're not supportive of me going to school now. She doesn't understand like whenever you have to study and take the time to read and don't have time to go visit everybody in the family.

EG: Sure. I'm going to turn it off a second. [tape stops and restarts]

EG: So why aren't your parents supportive of you going to school?

BE: They think I would be as well off to just have stayed in like as a receiving manager at Office Depot or at Staples, and just be content with that. And it's like I want to do something different, something that I enjoy. I'm still not sure exactly what it is I want to be when I grow up but I've really enjoyed the learning process.

EG: Sure, and how much education do your parents have?

BE: My mom, the last grade she completed would've been the eighth grade. She was schooled in a one-room schoolhouse in Breckinridge County, and it's like where everybody from the first through the eighth grade were all in the same class together. And my dad, he's actually intelligent but he's not open-minded. The last grade he completed formally would have been the tenth grade, I believe, and he went to Clarkson high school in Grayson County. He joined the Air Force, I think it was, in 1947 or '48, and so he went to a police academy in Houston at one point and he was a rookie on the Houston police

force. I mean this is racism of a different sort, but their racial issue out there was Mexicans at the time.

EG: In the early fifties?

BE: Yeah. And he actually tells this story and I assume it's true, I've heard of similar things since then. He said the reason he quit was that the man he was riding with carried switchblade knives underneath his seat, and that if he pulled over a Mexican or somebody like that and they gave him any lip, he would shoot him and put one of those in his hand, and he said he couldn't live like that. And yet he said he was afraid to turn them in or anything of that nature because they would just get him too.

EG: Yeah, that's completely understandable why he would not want to be in that sort of a police—

BE: But then he said he realized that you couldn't be a Christian and be a policeman too. So it's like on the surface they come off with a lot of racial things but then some of these deeper convictions, they realize that some things just aren't right like that.

EG: Yeah, it's really interesting. I don't know if you've seen this at all with your reading [of] civil rights movement history but a lot of it really portrays the White side as very monolithic and reactionary and not complex like it was. In talking with you, [I] really see that your parents had quite complex racial views and experiences. It's quite interesting. I am actually going to get a drink of water. Just a second. [tape stops and restarts]

BE: Except that they're not pro-labor union.

EG: Right, yeah. Yeah I mean that's where I guess the Democrats still attract a lot of the working class and southern Whites, through those policies. You mentioned that your mom had admitted that she was wrong in terms of her views on race and these actions,

some of these actions at least. What about your dad? What does he have to say about what happened back then?

BE: He still doesn't. He doesn't care much for Black people overall. There will be individuals sometimes that he likes but like for instance, Black people as a whole, he resents them for the robbery that you know--. He'll still say things like his grandfather said that they were the next thing to an animal. He'll still kind of hold to those types of views and a lot of it [is] he's just stubborn. He knows better but he's just stubborn and won't say any different.

EG: Right. Now when he was assaulted very severely in 1980, was he targeted, do you know, because he was White?

BE: I don't think so. I don't believe it was because he was White. I believe it was because the kids probably thought he had money. He was delivering soft drinks to a liquor store on the West End and this was like in a rougher part of town, [where] the truck says on the outside, "The driver doesn't carry cash," you know, they just carry receipts, but they probably didn't read that—

EG: Or didn't believe it.

BE: And he had his back to them. It wasn't, as far as I know it wasn't that he provoked them in any sort of way. He said he was lifting the—you know how trucks have those sliding doors on the side that raise up in sections—and he was facing the truck, stacking out cases of soft drinks onto a dolly. They hit him in the back of the head with a lead pipe and it knocked his face into one of those shelves in the truck and it knocked all his teeth out and broke both jaws and gave him a concussion. He had to spend some time in Our Lady of Peace, which is a mental institution here, it's like for P.T.S.D., he had to

spend some time out there for that. To this day if he gets into a situation where he thinks there's going to be an altercation with somebody, he'll go into a panic attack and black out.

EG: Yeah that's really sad when those sorts of incidents happen and how they have that sort of impact.

BE: So he doesn't forgive. He still views them as taking away--. He was just short of having his twenty-year Teamster retirement and things like this, so they took away his retirement. He views that the Black people, there again, took this away from him.

EG: So the Teamsters didn't, because he didn't have the years?

BE: Right, because they disabled him from truck driving but they didn't disable him from working altogether.

EG: Oh, I see. But then he stopped working after that?

BE: Well he went on to work, but he just got low-paying factory jobs at that point, where he was making in 1980, he was bringing home five, six hundred dollars a week, which was pretty decent money. Then he went from that to working a job paying minimum wage, like 3.15 an hour, where he was maybe bringing home a hundred and fifty a week.

EG: So he blames all Black people for that? Which is, as you've realized with your research on psychology, that seems to be a not uncommon psychological reaction. And the Teamsters, I just want to make sure I understand this correctly, even though he had almost reached the age or the amount of work where he could have the retirement benefits, they didn't let him have them because he—

BE: Didn't complete the number of years.

EG: Years. So he didn't take the anger out, or was he also angry at the Teamsters for that?

BE: Well he should've been angry at them because like, for instance, the day he was down there he shouldn't have been. Someone who ran that route called in sick that particular day and his supervisor took his regular route, which was just basically going around to the Kroger loading docks and he'd pull in and they unload it and did everything, he typically didn't have to do anything. That particular day the supervisor decided to take his route and put him on that route down in the West End. The supervisor technically, under union contracts, was not supposed to be driving a truck anyway because he was not a union member. And so but then he should have been angry at them because they wouldn't even do anything as far as filing a grievance or whatever.

EG: But he wasn't, he was—

BE: He redirected it onto the—

EG: And had he been a labor union member, Teamster member, his whole working life?

BE: Pretty much as a truck driver. For instance, different, even to this day there are certain companies who are non-union, and he'll call them scabs, you know it's like he wouldn't take jobs with companies who weren't union.

EG: I was wondering too in terms of views [what] their views [were] on women and the feminist movement and so forth, what they have thought about the evolving changes in the roles of men and women, particularly women, over time?

BE: Well my mom seems to hold some of the pretty traditional views that women, you know, are supposed to take care of the family, supposed to cook supper and keep the house clean, even if she has a job, that that's her duty. And that the man shouldn't have to come home and do those things, and she kind of holds to that and that's another issue that sometimes I butt heads with her on because she kinds of accepts this role of holding us

back, and I get angry sometimes at women who hold to those views more than I do the men. So sometimes we butt heads on that. My dad, he always encouraged me, he said I could do anything I wanted to. And he didn't seem to be as much in that respect, now he has always said he wouldn't work for a woman boss. He didn't want a woman telling him what to do. But as far as for me, it's kind of a double standard, I guess you would say. He believes I should be able to do anything, that is, that I wanted to.

EG: Sure. Have your views on women changed over time?

BE: They have somewhat. Like I got married when I was twenty and at that point I believed that the husband was supposed to be the head of the household and the provider and I kind of held to some of my mom's views, that I was supposed to take care of the house and be in submission to my husband. But as time went on, I realized there [was] a lot more that I wanted to do and that--. My husband wasn't the kind who would have held me back. He wasn't a male chauvinist or anything of that sort. I guess they started changing whenever he was sick [Emerick clarifies what she means by this sentence: I think I was referring to my own beliefs about the roles of men and women. When my husband became sick and I had to be the primary breadwinner, my ideas concerning women's roles began to change.] He was a bad diabetic and everything and had a lot of disabilities and stuff and it fell on me therefore a lot of times to be the head of the household and working and stuff. I always made more money than he did. And as I started realizing that, you know, somebody working side by side with me, if they were male, was making more money because they were the husband and they had children, a wife and family to support, I thought well I've got a family to support too. I don't have children but I still had to be the head of my household and so it's like I started realizing this isn't right.

EG: So it sounds like, particularly when you went on the workforce and you encountered unequal pay between men and women, and then you had more African-Americans as people you dealt with on a daily basis, that really made a big impact in terms of your views.

BE: Well that's when I actually started getting my socialization skills. When I entered the workforce is actually when I learned to interact with other people because otherwise I had lived from the time I was thirteen until I was twenty under my mother's wing. Part of it may be that she was mentally ill and part of it was a racist thing and part of it--.

EG: So it was when you got married that you moved out of that situation. You mentioned how—well obviously you'd lost a schooling experience and social development that most people experience at that time—what other things, or are there any other things that you look back on and you feel that you lost by not going to school at that time?

BE: Well when I recently started back to college, my first goal was to be a veterinarian. Whenever I went in to the math and the sciences and things and realizing I didn't have that foundation. That's the first time I think I resented my parents for what they did.

EG: This was in 2000?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Okay.

BE: At that point, even though before that I realized that it wasn't right that they did it, I never was angry at them for doing it because I felt like that even though they were wrong and the actions, they felt like they were protecting me and they were doing this because they loved me. So I could never be angry at them based upon that. But then

whenever I started struggling through school and realizing that I didn't have the foundation or the advantages that other people did, that's when I started resenting it somewhat.

EG: Is that when, did you talk to them more then at that time about your anger at them? You mentioned that you'll have conversations with them now—

BE: Well I'll challenge them on certain ideas and if they come up with something racist or, you know, and things about women's roles, I'll tell her that I don't believe that it's right.

EG: And you put too [on this life history form that] you were thinking maybe law school in the future. What's appealing to you about law school?

BE: I guess because I worked a lot with adolescents who have been taken out of the school and stuff at the hospital where I'm at, I think in terms of family mediation.

[Emerick clarifies: I am interested in family law and court mediation. U of L actually offers a combination degree in Social Work and Law. I have thought about this a lot more since I have been working at Ten Broeck. I have seen so many of the kids there get lost in the system and red tape, and I would like to be able to help them.] Of course my other thing, maybe a little bit of my parents coming out in me, but white collar crime fascinates me and the prosecution of that because of thinking of what corporate people get by with, as opposed to the working class people, the laws that are laid down like as far as murder and such. And then you learn that more people kill each other due to white collar crime, like for instance the Ford Pinto story, where that blew up, and those kinds of things. And they knew about it and they didn't fix it and that more money is embezzled each year than all of the robberies and burglaries and things like that. Those things kind of make you angry, whenever those people get off.

EG: Right. Just a personal story, my dad, he is retired now but he worked for years for the Internal Revenue Service as a tax collector, so he was able to witness first-hand about how so many people and corporations and so forth, and businesses have [not paid] taxes. And of course the I.R.S. isn't like a political cause, there aren't any organizations, I don't think, saying we need to strengthen the I.R.S.. No politician is going to have it as a platform but you really see they just don't have enough staff to deal with all that stuff, so so many people are getting away with millions of dollars.

BE: Yeah I actually looked at the I.R.S. at one of the justice administration fairs, and I actually had my major as history and my minor as justice administration, but then like anything to do with the federal government, the cutoff age is thirty-seven as far as hiring goes. And so I'm forty-three and so I had to, I just dropped the justice administration track because it really, it was mostly policing and such and it really wasn't helpful, any more helpful to getting into law school.

EG: Right. We've talked about different drawbacks [of] you having been taken out of school. Where there any benefits that you see now or you saw then at being out of school?

BE: Well, they probably kept me from the drug crowd [laughter]. They, you know, like I said, I'm a musician and they had raised me, I always thought that I was going to be a professional musician and I've had opportunities through the years in addition to my day work, I played at nights in clubs and things like that. I've had opportunities, we've opened, I don't know if you know much about country music but one band I've played in, we've opened for different stars like the biggest one we opened for was Tim McGraw, and Ricky Van Shelton and different people like that. So I've have opportunities in that way, that music was pretty much my education.

EG: Do you play an instrument or do you sing?

BE: I play bass guitar and I play mandolin and fiddle and regular guitar. It's just kind of been passed down. My grandmother played an upright bass and my dad always played music, and it's like a family thing on his side pretty much, that everybody played a musical instrument of some sort. There again, though, when I wanted to learn to read music, he wouldn't allow that.

EG: Because the idea of music was you just play by ear?

BE: And he thought that if I learned to read that that would be like a crutch and I would no longer be able to play by ear. The best musicians I've seen can do both.

EG: So do you play by ear and read music?

BE: I've tried to make myself learn to read music but I'm not disciplined enough to stay at it. I can look at the staff and identify the notes but to do it in real time and be able to play it as quickly as somebody else is playing, I can't do that.

EG: Yeah. I was wondering too, the people who knew what was going on with your family and how they were moving you from place to place, were they supportive of your parents or did they provide a support network for them or were they kind of indifferent?

BE: They were pretty much indifferent. I mean my dad's mother, I don't think she agreed with it. I had a great-aunt who was a schoolteacher in the Jefferson County school system. She actually retired that year when busing started. She said that was it, that she was getting out of it, and I don't know if it was so much for race as it was that the kids were just getting more disrespectful in general. I don't think she approved of it. I'm trying to think of anybody else. Like I said my one cousin who was going to be a teacher, she didn't approve it. But most people didn't challenge or really say anything; they were pretty much indifferent.

EG: Sure. And were these people in the community you were in really all anti-busing?

BE: Pretty much, I mean it seems like most of the people my parents associated with seemed to hold the same racial values.

EG: Well I mean that makes sense. I think most people tend to hang out around the same people with the same values as them. I had another question, I mean I have many more, I just had one and it slipped out of my mind. Let me consult my list here a second. What's your view on busing now?

BE: Looking back in retrospect and seeing the way that the races interact now, I think it was good because there were some interracial marriages and things like that came from it. And seeing that some of these people love each other the same, same as anybody else can and some of these marriages last longer. I think in the long run it was helpful and it had to be because nobody was going to volunteer to do it, and that it had to be mandated. Some of the practicalities whenever--. It was an era where they were also saying there was just gas shortages and the convenience of a lot of people to be able to send their children to the school closest to their home, where the kids spent two hours a day on the bus going to and from, whenever that could actually have been spent in an activity or education. Some of the, I guess it was necessary evils, but it seems like that they could have maybe let the people who wanted to come into the other schools, gave them the freedom to do that.

[Emerick clarifies: At the time, Busing did not seem practical at a time when there was supposed to be a gas shortage. When I was younger, I thought it did not make sense to spend all of this money on buses and fuel when the school systems could have invested in better books and teachers. It was inconvenient for many people who worked to have to get their children up hours earlier in order to send them across town. I believed that those who

wanted to attend schools out of their area should have been allowed to do so. I realize now that my thinking was flawed, because this would have caused an imbalance. All of the nice schools in the east end would have been full, and the schools in the west end would have been empty.]

EG: You mean figure out some way of avoiding these two-hour bus rides?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Yeah. Well too, I was just talking to a man yesterday and he was saying about how, and we found that with our research, the Black students really bore the brunt and they were the ones more who had to do these two-hour bus rides for longer periods of time, and the White students in the County and so forth didn't have to as much, and how some way of correcting that or making that more equitable--.

BE: And actually what they did with me, they didn't say I was going to be bused technically, they said I was going to be redistricted. And where I was going to Butler High School, when I look back on it this makes it even more ironic that my parents held me out, that it just seems stupid, but I was going to Butler High School, or Butler Junior High at that point, and they wanted to redistrict me to Southern Junior High, which is over by Churchill Downs. My grandmother lived across the fence from that school, two of my aunts and two of my cousins, there was like five different houses I could have gone to if there was trouble, and it was just more that my parents were opposed to somebody telling them what to do.

EG: So again it was this protest of the system and what was happening, so it didn't really matter where you would have gotten sent?

BE: Right.

EG: They would have been upset no matter what. I'm wondering too, you mentioned how they saw it as an invasion and your dad and your mom too maybe thinking that Blacks were closer to animals, did they also talk about a fear about miscegenation or interracial dating and intermarriage?

BE: Well they, I'm trying to think, I mean my mom made the observation one time of a friend of hers in the country who married a Black man, but said that she had been married to one or two White men before and they both beat her, and then she married this Black man and he treated her like a queen. And so in that respect my mom was okay with it, that this friend of hers had found happiness. She lived somewhere like in California or somewhere else, but my mom made that observation. They never really said what they would have done if any of us had ever brought home a Black person as a date.

EG: Sure. That's been kind of one of the, looking again at civil rights movement history, a recurring thing is that so many of the Whites seemed particularly opposed to that, in some ways above everything else. That's interesting that your parents didn't seem to be as opposed to that may be, as some of these other things [like] that Blacks were communists.

BE: I mean maybe they just didn't ever say anything about it because they didn't think that any of us would do it.

EG: Yeah, well that could be too, it could be they were opposed as anybody else but didn't see that as a threat. Let me see here. Did you hear much about the civil rights movement back then? And you mentioned your uncle threw eggs at Martin Luther King, Jr., well you would have been really young--.

BE: I was like five to six years old whenever he was assassinated. So a lot of times I think what I do remember was more implanted memories, but my dad always spoke in

negative terms toward Martin Luther King. He would say Martin Luther Queen. He would always use some sort of derogatory name or something for him. He believed that he was planted by the communists to stir up trouble and that tended to be the view that he adopted, that they had, like somebody was paying him to stir all the people up.

EG: Looking back at my question list, because we've covered most of them, so I am seeing which ones we haven't hit. With your parents moving from place to place when your mom was suspicious, what was your, if we could talk more about that, theory exactly why they would have that sort of reaction. It seems from what you were saying, part of it might have had to deal with her kind of personality and mental illness, the paranoia, and part of it was again was this protest against the government. Where there any other factors do you think?

BE: I believe that she was afraid if they did ever catch us that they would immediately take me out of the home, and that she was very afraid of that. Like I said, why we just didn't move to Bullitt County, just go to school there, then daddy could have still worked here in town at the, kept his regular job, you know, a lot of people I knew moved to Indiana, which is just right, two miles across the river back into Louisville to work. I really don't know all of the answers why she behaved like she did. I know there was a time in there she was addicted to valium--. Like for instance even when I was in the sixth grade at Mill Creek Elementary, the whole sixth grade, like a hundred and twenty kids, went up to Middlesboro, Kentucky for a weeklong stay, and she wouldn't let me go on that. She was just always very overprotective.

EG: Mill Creek was predominately White, right?

BE: Right. There was like in that whole sixth grade class, there were two Black children in the whole class. They went up to Middlesboro and she wouldn't let me go,

because she would have these bouts of depression and, like I said, she was addicted to nerve pills, to valium, until I was like eighteen years old, I guess.

EG: And how did they, I guess when you went to these predominately Black schools, it was Shawnee Elementary, and the ones in the West End, how many White students were there at the time?

BE: Like in my third grade class and the one I can remember the best, second and third grade, there was maybe at most four or five White children in the whole class of, I think, about forty students in the class, because at that time the classes were kind of getting overcrowded a little bit too in the inner-city area.

EG: You had put in [the life history form] there that [the school system] had transferred you to Martin Luther King, was that also a predominately Black school? But then your mom petitioned to have you back?

BE: Yeah.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

BE: She said it was too far, but it looks like from where we were living—I would have to go back down there and retrace the steps—[the schools] would be about equal in distance. And I've often thought it was probably simply because the school's name was Martin Luther King that she just didn't want me going there. Because it was a brand-new school they, in doing that, they lessened the amount of children in each class, where you could get more one-on-one attention. So I really don't know, there were three of us that were going there at that time, my sister Lottie and my older brother Donnie he was in the sixth grade at that point but then the next year, he would've been in the seventh. And one of the arguments may have been is they were always walking in that direction toward the

high school, which was a few blocks on down, and it may be that she thought well we would be more protected, the smaller ones, walking with our older siblings until we got to the other school.

EG: The Shawnee High School?

BE: Uh huh.

EG: Okay.

BE: Where if we had to go Martin Luther King, we would've had to split up and just walk there all by ourselves.

EG: That makes sense.

BE: I mean I really don't know; I've never asked her.

EG: Sure. Let's see here. Like this music that you played at the anti-busing rallies, were there lyrics?

BE: There wasn't. I mean it was just regular old country music for the most part, traditional fiddle tunes. There was a fiddle player in the band and they'd do square dances and then, like just regular old George Jones or just regular old country music.

EG: Sure. Did it attract a kind of working class crowd?

BE: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, and then as you mentioned, some of these politicians who came--. Let's see here. If your parents could've afforded it, do you think they would've sent you to private schools?

BE: That would've been a possibility because she actually did look at Faith Baptist Temple, because she knew Brother Lowry and some of the people we had gone to church with at that time. She did look at that, but then it was like the tuition at all those places really got high during that time. Like you know for instance, I think the previous year or

two, Catholic schools, the tuition was sometimes maybe a quarter a day or maybe a few dollars a week, and then it jumped up quite a bit because all of a sudden they were overcrowded. Like my uncle, my dad's brother, who would've normally sent his children to public schools, the next year, because they were a member of a certain parish, they were able to get their kids into the Catholic school, and a lot of people, that's the direction they took.

EG: So you did witness like people in your community moving away or the White flight, and sending their kids to private schools and obviously you were part of that too but in an unusual way compared to other people.

BE: Yeah, I just had unusual parents [laughter].

EG: Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting to learn about their music careers and the steps they took to evade and protest the system and yeah, it certainly is unique. Let's see here. We've covered a lot of this already. Can you think of any topic area that we haven't talked about that we should delve into? Anything that I've missed in asking you the questions?

BE: I really can't. Like I said as a child, we weren't encouraged to go out and beat up Black kids or be violent towards them, but they thought it was humorous if we used the n-word. I can remember one time when my dad just thought this was so funny, he still tells this story to this day, I hate to even, to be portrayed as a racist somewhere or something but I was sitting on the porch and I looked out. It was raining like a thunderstorm and I was, like I said, out on the porch in the rain, and across the way this older Black lady was going up the steps and a lightning bolt came down by her, and she screamed out, "Oh Lord, have mercy!" You know, just screamed because the lightning bolt scared her. And I ran into the house and was laughing, and I told my dad that I had just seen the funniest, just saw the funniest thing I had ever seen in my life, and that I just saw a nigger get struck by

lightning. And he thought that was so funny, but we weren't ever punished for saying anything like that. It was nearly encouraged if we said things like that, they laughed and encouraged it and more rewarded it than--.

EG: Yeah.

BE: I think back on that now, that that's a shame.

EG: Is that an issue that you've talked with your parents about now?

BE: Yeah, I've said that I didn't think it was right, that those are people too, they're God's people the same as we are and if they have the abilities, they deserve any job or deserve any, if they have the job and can afford to live in a nice home, they deserve that right the same as we do.

EG: Have you specifically addressed like the story you just told me and said to them why did you encourage that?

BE: You know I haven't. I think there is still a thing in our family, we don't like to challenge my father or get him angry.

EG: Right.

BE: And a part of it is they're getting older and feeble, sometimes it seems senseless to throw things up in their face whenever they're not able to defend themselves so much, because his cognition and stuff, he's not thinking as sharply as he once did. I guess there is ways that wouldn't seem right to prey on him whenever he's getting weak.

EG: That makes sense. I saw in your life chronology [form] that you did put that they became more politically active when they did busing. Was busing the most major way that they were politically active?

BE: Yeah, I mean it's like right now they don't vote. They'll sit there and cuss the president or whoever because of policies and stuff but they don't vote, and they didn't vote

before that. But whenever busing started, the rumors that busing was coming, they got active in politics at that point and started trying to support the candidates who promised that we wouldn't be bused, and that was their motive behind it.

EG: And you had mentioned before that they had supported George Wallace fairly actively.

BE: Yeah.

EG: Had they engaged in any other sort of activism or politics before busing?

BE: Not other than the—. I honestly could not tell you because I was too young to remember if they voted for Wallace, if they actually physically went and voted, or if it was more verbally that they supported him, that kind of thing in their circle of friends.

EG: Sure, sure. And you talked about how your parents would laugh when you said what you mentioned [referring to the lightning story], and your mom would threaten to shoot like the truancy officer, but yet they abhorred violence. So they never actually engaged in violence?

BE: No, it's just more like that they would do it as a means for protection.

EG: Okay.

BE: They still believe in the thing if somebody comes into your home uninvited, that they have a right to shoot you. They still hold to those kind of ideas.

EG: This emphasis on privacy and being free from governmental or other interference, this kind of world view or political view it seems like they have. Let's see here. We're almost out of time too. I kind of asked you about what you see as the benefits and drawbacks of being out of school at that time. How would you say you were changed by that process?

BE: You mean going back to school?

EG: Yeah, I guess going back to school, being kept out of school.

BE: [Emerick clarifies: I will attempt to answer the question more clearly. I must not have understood it before. I am not sure if there were any real advantages to being held out of school. I am sure that I thought there were at the time. Since my parents were not very good with discipline, unless we disagreed with them, I had freedom to do what I wanted. I was free to play music and do things that other kids could not do. I did not have a curfew, or a set time to go to bed. I was also overweight at the time, and I did not have to endure other kids making fun of me. If there was any violence, I certainly missed that, and I guess I missed the drug scene. Many of my friends who went to school did not.

However, there were many drawbacks. I became more withdrawn and experienced depression after I was held out of school. I was more cynical of those in power and believed, at the time, that everything my parents had told me was the truth. I was fearful of African Americans and thought that they had “stolen” my education from me. I did not get a formal education. I did not learn socialization skills or how to interact with people my own age. I learned to improvise and to get by “by the skin of my teeth.”

I have really suffered since I returned to school. I originally had dreams of becoming a veterinarian, but I had no foundation in math or the sciences, and it would have taken me forever to achieve that goal. I did receive a “B” in College Algebra, which I am very proud of considering my background, but it took me going through five developmental math classes to achieve that. I had never had a chemistry class or biology class, because these were not offered until the ninth grade, my parents took me out at the end of the seventh. College professors do not care about this. They expect one to have some foundation in these disciplines. I have been on the Dean’s List for the past five

semesters and am in the Golden Key Honor Society. But I have had to struggle twice as hard as my classmates to achieve this.

I lost so much by not being able to complete high school and go to college when I was young. I was on the Honor Roll when my parents took me out. I would have probably been able to breeze right through college back then. Now that I am older, I do not retain things as easily, and I do not always feel as sharp as I was back then, but I guess I have built character.

I have benefited from returning to school. I have learned a great deal about diversity and having an open mind. I took courses in African American history and literature so that I could understand a different perspective than what my parents had taught me. I now know that neither busing nor African Americans robbed me of an education. It was the ignorance and defiance of my parents that robbed me.

Looking back, I now believe that busing was a necessary evil. It is now common to see interracial groups of friends in restaurants, in the workplace, and on campus. When I was young, this would not have been common or accepted. I think that busing helped bring black and white children together, and it educated them of their cultural differences and taught them that these differences were ok.]

Well there again, especially when I was--. [Emerick clarifies: I am not sure now where I was going with this. I believe I was referring to the fact that since I have been in the workplace, I have had the opportunity to work and interact with more black people. When I was young, my parents would not allow this, and we were not allowed to challenge their beliefs. It was not uncommon to get slapped away from the table if we disagreed with my dad.] I've had the opportunity to interact with more Black people and like in our family, a lot of times if we didn't agree with issues, we didn't always challenge it. Like if

we didn't agree with my dad, we didn't challenge it, but it's like in school, I've learned to challenge or question things and that was something I never learned before. I've learned to interact with other Black people, like I said before, I took all the African-American literature classes I could like African-American film. Now sometimes I get angry, like for instance there's a story about Rosewood, the movie, *Rosewood*, where they made a fictional Black hero and made the actual White hero in the true story out to be kind of a villain in the movie, and you know sometimes I can see where, that things are done to inflame rather than help. But I've learned to interact and I've learned to appreciate the different cultures. I've really enjoyed that part of the learning process--learning to appreciate people for who they are and not what you expect them to be, and the diversity.

EG: Sure, sure. Let's see here. We have this question here, "If you were talking to a historian," and you are talking to a historian because I guess I am a historian now, what lessons would you convey about your experience? What should people know, what kind of are the main things or lessons you would say from your life experience?

BE: Well I've learned that you have to be open, there again, to accept people for who they are because if everybody acted and behaved in the same way, there would be no diversity and just everybody going about like as a machine and not accepting that Black people can like their clothes and their music and still live next to you. That if you can learn to accept that, you can grow and have a lot of new friends and appreciate a lot of different things that the world has to offer. I'm trying to think—that people, sometimes things do have to be forced upon you in order to grow. It's just like the trees that you have to prune back and such. Sometimes you do have to have a--. Like the busing, it was a necessary evil because looking back nearly thirty years now, and the racial tensions at that time as I saw them versus what I see now—I mean I know they still exist, I still encountered them in

some of my work experiences where I've heard my managers say things about race and such--but people do seem to be getting along better. Where I live now I have Black neighbors and the lady has MS, and when I don't see her for a few days, and I've seen her out on a cane and stuff and seen her, I get concerned. I care about them as people.

EG: One topic I want to briefly return to was your experience going to the predominately Black school as a child, to Shawnee and so forth, where you did on the one hand, seem to have a positive experience, you met these strong Black teachers, but then also you did experience being mistreated as well. When I looked at your life history [form] in the first place, it kind of surprised me that your parents would even allow you to go to a predominately Black school. What you think they thought about it or how they reasoned it in their minds.

BE: Well they didn't have a choice at that time. It was like we lived in the West End and if they had wanted me to go to a different school, that would have entailed them having to drive to another area of town. They worked fairly close to home. They would have had to driven far away and then come back in. It was easier just for us all to walk to the school in the neighborhood where we lived.

EG: So a lot of it was practical and economic. I'm wondering if your parents too felt threatened economically by the civil rights movement and Blacks achieving gains.

BE: I can just remember, like, for instance, my mom had an altercation with a Black woman who had come in to work at a factory where she was working. They felt that the person was put in there as a plant to just stir things up again. It escalated to the point that my mom and that woman had words. My mother's best friend sided with the Black lady. I really don't know what it was about, but I think it was to the extent [that] my mom said she wasn't doing her share of the work and that it was putting more work onto my

mother—[that] was the story my mom told. Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but they actually got into a fight to the point that the woman threw, it was a little brush they call it, out of the starter, and it hit my mother in the eye and she had to go to the hospital at that point. But they didn't believe like in affirmative action. They pretty much believed that you shouldn't get a job because you were Black. They looked at that as taking jobs away from White men, I mean, and in that respect, there again with women, they didn't always think women should come in and take the jobs either.

EG: I assume they hold the same views now in terms of affirmative action.

BE: Yeah, pretty much.

EG: And they would still today be opposed to busing.

BE: Yeah. They're still opposed in that respect. You asked me earlier what did I learn. The other thing I learned is to challenge what I've been taught.

EG: Right.

BE: That I had always been raised to believe that anything my parents told me was true and that if they told me, I shouldn't question it and I should go on and obey them and hold to their beliefs. But I've learned to challenge and learned to research things for myself and see if it is fact or, like, for instance, my choice to take more African-American literature classes and African-American history classes is that I wanted to learn the truth about the quote, the other side.

EG: Right.

BE: That that was the only way I was going to know for sure what the truth was, is to see for myself and not just believe what my parents had told me.

EG: And did this start, questioning things, mostly when you entered college or just has it been a kind of continual process?

BE: It's been a growing process, and I would say some things like, for instance, watching the television shows such as *Roots* that raised a question. Well, you know, you always heard that the South had been wronged and that you learned that well a lot of people in the South just weren't quite upright and noble themselves, that they weren't right or biblically right in what they were doing. And so I think some things like that started to raise the question inside of me.

EG: Sure. I normally would say we have to wrap up now, but do you have time to stay for a few additional questions?

BE: We can if you have something that you—

EG: Okay, well, naturally I'm interested in people's portrayal of history, being in the history field, and if you were taught growing up anything about slavery or the past history of African-Americans or the Civil War, if your parents mentioned that and what they would say about that.

BE: Well my dad would say that the South was right, but him having any justification for it, it's like being in Kentucky, Kentucky was pretty much neutral. We don't have any family history that I'm aware of, of our families fighting in it. I'm sure that some did one way or the other, but there's not anything like that we hold to. But that they somehow believed--. I've even heard my brother make the comment that he didn't have anything against Black people, that everybody should own a few, those kinds of things. They somehow believe that they should be held in lower status as slaves, that they shouldn't have the same rights as everybody else.

EG: Right, right. I was wondering, I asked you about your father's union affiliation, was your mother a member of the union when you worked for the factory?

BE: I'm trying to think. I can only recall one place that she was ever in a union and she didn't take the job because it was a union job necessarily. That was something that surprised me years later. I worked in a factory for six weeks that was union and I realized I didn't have a union mentality. [laughter]. I think that upset my dad when I quit, because I said I didn't have use for the unions as far as--.

EG: Sure, jumping around a little bit with questions as I think of them. Do your parents know that you've been taking classes on African-American history—

BE: I've mentioned—

EG: and literature? Have they said anything about that?

BE: They don't ask a whole lot. The first [time] my dad has ever taken any pride in the fact that I've gone to school was when I mentioned that I wanted to go to law school. So he's actually told people I'm going to school to be a lawyer and it's like, well daddy, I have to be accepted into law school first, you know, and I've taken the LSAT once and I'll have to retake it if I get in.

EG: That's a hard test.

BE: It is because it doesn't have anything to do with what you've learned. And there again, that's another regret is I learned to get by through life on the skin of my teeth, and my reasoning and logic isn't always like anybody else's, because I had to learn in unconventional ways. And so whenever I look at those questions that have to do with analytical reasoning and logical reasoning, I have to try to think in terms of whoever wrote the test and not in the way I always learned.

EG: Right, so there's that challenge as well to meet. Sure. Are you a religious person at all?

BE: Yeah, I was married for eighteen years. My husband was a Southern Baptist, he was a deacon in the Southern Baptist Church. But I don't really hold to any label of any certain church now. I've learned that there's good and bad in all of the churches and I believe myself to be a Christian and I try to hold to the principles of Christianity, but I don't hold to any one denomination over another.

EG: Has that made any impact on your racial views, do you think?

BE: Well I think as you read the teachings in the Bible that the way the slaves, the way Black people have been treated like in the thirties, I'm trying to think of the name of the trial in Alabama where the nine boys were—

EG: Oh, the Scottsboro case?

BE: Yeah, that's it. You know whenever you read things like that and really analyze it, then it doesn't hold to Christian principles at all if you read the Bible about loving one another and to know that a lot of these people even recently, the man who was a preacher in Mississippi that they just retried [for the Goodman, Cheney, and Schwerner murders in 1964 during Freedom Summer]—

EG: Yeah, Edgar Killen.

BE: That he was a Baptist preacher, I believe, and how could you claim to be a Christian and treat people like they were inferior?

EG: I'm wondering too with your taking classes on civil rights movement and African-American literature, are there any figures that you've learn about or things that you've read, that really spoke to you or that you really admire?

BE: Well there was one book in Doctor K'Meyer's class, the *Blood Done Sign My Name*, by [Timothy B.] Tyson, I really liked that one. Let's see I'm trying to think of, Baldwin, James Baldwin. I liked his writings a lot and he actually challenged a lot of the

traditional Christian beliefs and their justification of slavery in some of his writings, and I really liked his writing. I'm trying to think of in literature, I like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and then as far as political figures, we learned a lot about Martin Luther King and the Selma movement and all those--. Let's see I was trying to think, even though his ideals are held too much now, like there's a lot of quotes that I took personally from Booker T. Washington even the one that he said that success isn't measured by—I can't say it verbatim, but—shouldn't be measured by what you've achieved but the obstacles you had to overcome to get there. I can take that one personally for myself. That him and like DuBois, that they, if they could have gotten their heads together, they could have made a lot of headway back then. [Emerick clarifies: I believe that Washington wanted what was best for his people, but he thought that African Americans should take it slow. I took both an African American History course and an African American Literature course, and both of my professors sided with DuBois over Washington in the debate of vocational/technical training (Washington) versus classical learning (DuBois). Both professors tended to believe that Washington had sold out the Blacks in the South by advocating blacks learn a trade instead of gaining a formal education. The quote I was referring to that I liked of his was "I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed." This quote says something personal for me. I have had to overcome many obstacles to attend college and to achieve what I have achieved. I believe there was some wisdom in Washington's writing. It is a shame that he and DuBois did not unite and come to some compromise. They could possibly have led African Americans further sooner.]

EG: That's a good point. I haven't read *Blood Done Sign My Name* by Tim Tyson. I'm a little bit familiar with it because I know he talks about the racial incident and the White family who he knew and grew up with, was that something that you could relate to?

BE: It was a lot. It inspired me because I said I would like to write a memoir about my experiences and that inspired me to think, well I could actually do that, If I can do it objectively, which he as a historian, he went through and researched a lot of things, which I'm starting to do, hitting a lot of dead ends because a lot of stuff was just never really covered that well.

EG: Right. What are things you've seen when you've done your own research that haven't been covered?

BE: Well, like, for instance, the Fontaine Ferry thing, there was a riot, I think it was in the Greenwood neighborhood just prior to that, and there's not a lot of coverage in the newspapers at that time about it. I don't know if they didn't cover it so that it wouldn't escalate things, if they chose to cover it up, thinking that's what they wanted was to be heard. Of course I don't have a lot of time with working to go and beat down people's doors and ask the questions and stuff, but I believe I would have to get into a oral history project to try to find some people who were involved at that time, like some African-American people to get their perspective on it. I guess in writing a memoir, I only need to tell my side or what I viewed, but I'm afraid of then, you know, learning a lot about implanted memories, that what I've heard my parents and brothers and sisters say can kind of become memories that haven't actually even been there.

EG: Right.

BE: So I'd like to have the stuff to back up.

EG: Exactly. What appeals to you about writing a memoir?

BE: I believe it would be a further healing process first off, even if I never got it published, that there would be a healing in dealing with all of it and getting it out. Of course I guess one reason, one of the hesitations about it is [I'm] afraid of portraying family members in a negative light and that I don't want to hurt anybody.

EG: Right.

BE: But you know there was a lot of things, in addition to racism, there was other things that went on in the family too, that I experienced but they're not relative to this so I feel, don't go into all of that. I guess that the process would be to get it out there and it would be a healing experience. I don't think there would be a lot of, nobody beating down my door to write a movie about it [laughter].

EG: I shared your life history form with my colleagues, and my one was like, "That's a screenplay" [laughter] but I don't know. It interests us because we're historians. I don't know about the wider Hollywood public, a documentary maybe.

BE: I was afraid to bother Doctor K'Meyer too much when I first started telling her, I thought I'm probably annoying this woman to death telling her about—

EG: Oh I don't think so at all, I mean she's told me she just can't wait to hear this interview and mentioned you right away. Well I guess I would conclude by just asking you again if there's anything else you'd like to add.

BE: I can't think of anything else. If I do, I guess I could always write and tell you a little more about it. I've still got your email at home.

EG: Yeah, great. If I have follow-up questions, can I give you a call and—

BE: Sure.

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

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran. September, 2005.