

SOHP Series: Listening for a Change  
Davidson College Interviews - Ada Jenkins School

TRANSCRIPT - VENNIE MOORE

Interviewee: Vennie Moore

Interviewer: Brian Campbell and Laura Hajar

Date: 24 February 1999

Location: Davidson, N.C.

Tape No.: (cassette 1 of 1)  
(80 minutes?)

Notes: This interview is one of several investigating the history of the Ada Jenkins

School in Davidson, N.C. The school opened as the Davidson Colored High School in 1937-38 to serve the African American community of Davidson and northern Mecklenburg County. This neighborhood school was initially elementary through high school, and became elementary only in 1946-47 when a high school opened in Huntersville. In the mid-40s, the school was renamed Ada Jenkins, honoring the longtime teacher and leader. The school closed in 1965 when Mecklenburg County integrated schools. The facility has recently been renovated and re-opened as the Ada Jenkins Center with a variety of programs and services.

Vennie Torrence Moore was born in Mount Mourne, North Carolina and moved to Davidson as a small child. She attended the Davidson Colored Elementary School (later named Ada Jenkins) in the early 1940s before finishing school at Torrence-Lytle in Huntersville. Mrs. Moore has lived in Davidson for over 60 years, and she is now the mother of three and the grandmother of six. She is a member of Davidson Presbyterian Church, where she sings in the vocal choir.

She professes that she disliked school, with the exception of lunch and basketball. Mrs. Moore describes Mrs. Jenkins, Mr. Harris and several other favorite teachers from the school. She remembers May Day, the basketball team, and afternoons picking cotton. She

reveals her personal perspective most when describing the discrepancies between the white school and the black school, saying "we didn't miss what we didn't have," and stating that integration was important for equality, not mixing.

For the past four years, I have mentored Mrs. Moore's grandson, Ellis Moore, so I know her quite well, and we had discussed her schooling previously. The interview took place in her home. She was reluctant at first, and she apologized for not remembering details like specific dates. Early on, however, she relaxed and began to recount numerous stories about different people and events from the history of the school and the town. Throughout the interview she refers to a class photograph taken around 1939.

#### TRANSCRIPT

[Cassette 1 of 1, Side A]

Vennie Moore: . . .thanking her for giving him the information. He said he never would have graduated if it hadn't been for that. I read the letter, I read the letter. And she's got to have paper, you know? I'd don't remember years when things happened, and she could probably tell you more years than I could. And you'd like to have the years for things and the dates or something.

Brian Campbell: Well, we'll get that stuff eventually probably,

just talking to different people.

VM: Well now . . . Mrs. Johnson, she taught at Huntersville, but she lived in Davidson, and she worked with the Davidson community, so she knows everything. But, I can't get her on the telephone. You know her husband passed about a month or two ago, and she had a brother that came home from the home and she's probably staying with that brother and the brother is staying below her. But I couldn't catch her at home.

BC: We'll track her down.

VM: Do you want to go down to Dovie's and talk to her while you're down here.

BC: We can just get whatever you remember first and then we can see.

VM: I don't remember nothing, I told you everything.

Laura Hajar: We have some questions that we'll ask. Do you want to start with the personal history.

BC: Yeah, why don't you tell us just for the tape, where you were born . . .

VM: Where I was born?

BC: Yeah, and you can tell us a little bit about your family.

VM: Ok. Hhhgggm. Is that going to be on tape? Oh . . .

BC: So, you were born in Davidson, right?

VM: No, I was born in Mooresville, Iredell [County].

BC: But you grew up here.

VM: Yes, I moved from Mooresville when I was a baby.

BC: So were your parents from Mooresville or Davidson?

VM: Mount Mourne. My mother and father.

BC: What were their names?

VM: Ruby Torrence and John Torrence.

BC: And that was "Big John," right?

VM: Yeah, we called him Big John, because there were three Johns here - two black Johns and one white John. And all three of them were drunks, and my daddy was the largest, so they named him Big John.

BC: and then, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

VM: I had three sisters. No brothers.

BC: That was Marjean, Bernice, who was that?

VM: Marjean, Bernice, and Mildred. Mildred is the one that is passed.

BC: And how many kids do you have, and grandkids?

VM: Grandkids, I've got three, four, five, six.

BC: And then two children?

VM: Three. Buck, Stephanie, and Gail.

BC: So, what is your earliest memory of school?

VM: Oh, the second grade. I don't remember the first grade too much. I know my first grade teacher and everything, but I can't . . . I can remember some things happening in school, but I don't remember too much about first grade.

BC: Who was your first grade teacher?

VM: Mrs. Brown.

BC: Was she at the little school?

VM: Yes. She was at the school when it was first a house. The house is there now, but it's been remodeled and you wouldn't know it. This was just the one room where I started school down there.

BC: Did everyone around here go to that same place.

VM: Yes... and fifth through eleventh in one class. And you had

one book, one reading book. And you read it over and over and over and over and over and over and over. I'd hurry and read mine, and you learned it awful hard.

BC: Do you remember the name of the book? Did you have it memorized?

VM: No, I remember it was a blue book, with yellow . . . a little girl . . . I don't remember the book. I had the book, I had lots of books, but I don't know where they are now. They probably got burnt.

BC: So you went . . . What was the name of that school? Did it have a name really?

VM: No, just Davidson Elementary School.

BC: And what grades did you go to that school?

VM: Till the eighth, and then I went to Huntersville.

BC: Wait, was this all at the one room school?

VM: No, see after you finished in the house, you went to this long building I showed you . . . it's on that picture. You went there to the second, third, and fourth grade - here. Until they built that school right here, and then you went from there to there.

BC: So you started here in what grade?

VM: I started here . . . I don't see the house. The house is not on here where I started, but I know I was here on the second grade.

BC: Now when did they build this big school? Do you remember what grade you were in?

VM: No, I was about in the fifth.

BC: When they built it?

VM: Yes, built for sixth grade, because Mrs. Jenkins taught sixth grade, and I never did get to Mrs. Jenkins' room, because the class was so big that they divided it and somehow or another I didn't get in her class. But she used to teach music, and I



remember one song she used to sing, and she used to play the piano. And I can't, I ain't heard that song since she died. I ain't heard nobody play it. But the name of it was "Any Bonds Today." And it went like this (singing) "Any bonds, today" She'd sing it real fast. "Bonds are freedom that's what I'm saying, in the USA, here comes the freedom man... freedom today."

BC: Mrs. Jenkins used to play that?

VM: She used to play it and we used to march, go outdoors, the piano would be outdoors. We'd be practicing maybe for May Day or something like that, piano would be outdoors where all the children could get, you know, on the ground, because we didn't have a place where everybody could get together.

BC: So tell us a little more about May Day. Was this a big celebration?

VM: Oh yes, it was big. Everybody came out to May Day. I can remember the last May Day I was in and I was playing [tape unclear] You ever played [tape unclear]? It's a line of girls and a line of boys, and you go out here and a boy and a girl skip and meet each other. They shake hands and the next time they come

and grab arms and go around. You know, just one to another. The next time you come you go from back to back . . . until you get all the way down the line. And then we had a May Day pole that we wrapped.

BC: Was this something that just the students came to or did the whole community come?

VM: The whole community came, to see, you know, the kids. I remember when I was in Huntersville, we were practicing for a play. When we'd go practice for a play - they'd give us time to practice - we would play. And when time came to recite that Friday, we got up on the stand and didn't know nothing. Oh, I was embarrassed. I didn't know my, well didn't none of us know our parts, because we had been playing.

BC: What was the name of the school in Huntersville?

VM: Torrence-Lytle. That's where Miss Johnson taught at for years and years and years.

BC: So what grade did you start there in?

VM: What I started there in, the ninth.

BC: So you went to this school, that's now called Ada Jenkins, you went there all the way up to eighth?

VM: Yes.

BC: What else do you remember about it? Where did the teachers come from and do you remember any of the other teachers?

VM: I remember lots of teachers from Davidson. They came to Davidson from Charlotte. We didn't have but one, two . . . We had one from Charlotte that married a guy in Davidson, and she taught me seventh grade. Her name was Mrs. Stevenson. Her daughter is in Charlotte now, but Mrs. Stevenson is dead. She was an English teacher, and she married a guy from Davidson, but they never did get along. He was a drunk and he would embarrass her when she would go out. She was ugly, but brains - oh, she had all the brains. I loved her to death.

BC: And she taught you seventh grade.

VM: Yeah, and then I had a man teacher, Kilbur. I had Baker in

Huntersville, Corston, Ike Graham, he was the Principal. (all name spellings unverified)

BC: In Huntersville?

VM: Yeah, he married one of the students - this girl right here - from Davidson, a Norton. Her sister teaches in Cornelius. Her name is Margaret, lives up there as you're going out toward Mooresville. He had been married about three times when he married her. And she was in his class. He's dead, she's still living.

BC: When you were going through this school in Davidson, did they have like one teacher for every grade, or how many teachers were there? How many students?

VM: They didn't have a teacher for every grade. Sometimes they had fifth and sixth grade together, sometimes they had sixth and seventh grade, sometimes they had a mix. It was just however it could be fitted in.

BC: So it was different every year probably?

VM: Yes, yes. It was different every year, because every year it would get more and more and more, and they had to do something about it.

LH: Were the kids that went to the school up here all kids from Davidson, or were there kids from other areas?

VM: It was after the years, it was a school, Lytle Groves out [Hwy] 73, they came to Davidson. Then, that's when they put the high school in Huntersville and the grammar children from out there came here.

BC: So those kids came all the way from up 73 everyday?

VM: Yeah, they had buses.

BC: But you said that was later.

VM: Yeah, that was later. They had closed the high school here and took it to Huntersville. And the children from 73 - we called it Lytle Grove - they came to Davidson School, Elementary School. It wasn't no more high school. These are high school people here. Now, they didn't, none of those went to Huntersville. None of

those and none of these didn't go to Huntersville. That's why I told you I was in about second or third grade here. I think it was third grade. Beause all these children that I can - all these went to Huntersville, all these here below. But, here they get older going up.

BC: So do you remember what year they changed that, about?

VM: No. Let me see. Stephanie, what year did you start school?

Stephanie Moore: Ma'am.

VM: That was the first year. Hey Stephanie.

VM: '85?

BC: She said she started in '72. But where did you go to high school?

VM: I didn't finish high school. I stopped in Huntersville. I didn't graduate.

BC: So, most of these kids, did they go to Huntersville for

middle school and then go back?

VM: No, they graduated at Davidson.

BC: And they went to junior high in Davidson as well?

VM: Yes, all the way through Davidson. Then they moved the high school to Huntersville. She finished in Huntersville, Francis finished in Huntersville, and none of these didn't go to Huntersville in the back here. Most of them that finished high school in Huntersville is up here.

BC: So this picture is from the early days. Were most of these kids from Davidson then?

VM: Yes.

BC: And they all just walked to school?

VM: Yes, we didn't have no buses just for Davidson schools. I used to stay in the country with a family that didn't have nobody - just a lady and her daughter. They lived way over there close to Mt. Mourne, and I used to stay with them after their mother

and father died. And I used to walk to school from over there and come here to school. They had horses and things to ride. I enjoyed that.

BC: You would walk from Mt. Mourne every day to Davidson to school? Were there a lot of kids that walked that far, you think?

VM: Yeah. Walking wasn't no problem. Walking wasn't nothing then. You'd carry your lunch...

BC: You didn't have a cafeteria.

VM: I had a cafeteria before I left here.

BC: So they added that on later.

VM: Yeah.

BC: Is that the same one they have over there now?

VM: No, they built that later, added it on.



BC: So you had to fix your lunch every day?

VM: Yeah, I had mine eat up before lunch time.

Stephanie Moore: Say what mama?

VM: I had my lunch eat up by lunch time. I didn't enjoy nothing but lunch time and basketball. That's the only thing I enjoyed. Sewing, I hated sewing. Teacher would turn her back, she'd want you to stitch things, and I'd hurry up and do it on the machine. I was bad all the time. When I quit school I just got disheartened. I had a lots of days to stay in, because I used to get on my knees and crawl out, during the study period.

SM: Ma, tell them they can have any one of them (snacks).

BC: Thanks Stephanie.

SM: I'm talking about my kids, Y'all want one.

BC: I'm just kidding. We just ate.

SM: Brian, you are a trip.

VM: Give them some cookies.

BC: So, what other subjects did you take?

SM: She took color, color, color. Brian, when Ellis [Stephanie's son] comes in here, you say, "Ellis, what's color, color, color?"

Our neighbor down the street says he come in everyday and she asks, "What did you do today?" "Color." Comes home the next day, "What did you do today?" "Color." Next day, "Mama, don't ask me that everyday, because I color, color, color all day."

VM: Color, color, color. She's about right, all I did was color, color, color. I would convince children to do bad. They didn't want to be at school and I didn't want them to be at school either. I was bad. I'll just tell the truth, I was bad.

LH: Did you guys have clubs or sports or anything after school or during?

VM: During school. . . Yeah, baseball, basketball. . . no fun. . . I played basketball with the boys all the time. I was rough, me and another girl from Long Creek. We used to play with the

boys all the time. We couldn't get along with the girls. But I did play on the basketball team and I was real good, forward.

BC: Did you play on the boys' team?

VM: The girls'.

BC: So you had a girls' and boys' team?

VM: Yeah.

BC: So do you remember much about playing on the basketball team?

VM: Yeah, I loved basketball, I love it to today. I told you I didn't like nothing but basketball and lunch.

BC: Did y'all travel around and play other schools?

VM: Yeah, schools right around in the area. We played Caldwell, Huntersville, Lytle Grove, Mooresville, Concord, Kannapolis. Not too far, Concord and Kannapolis was about the farthest we'd go.

BC: Were y'all pretty good?

VM: Yeah, I was real good in basketball.

BC: Did you have a mascot for the school?

VM: No.

BC: Or a team name?

VM: No, we didn't know what that was.

BC: Where did you play? Was there a basketball court out there?

VM: Yeah, outside, where the lunchroom is now.

BC: And when you played other schools, you'd do the same thing -  
play outside?

VM: Yeah, rain we didn't play.

BC: Was there big crowds? Did a lot of kids come to watch?

VM: No, just people that could come that wasn't working or

something like that, but didn't a lot of people come. People come that, you know, wasn't working or something.

BC: What about for the boy's team, the same?

VM: Yeah.

BC: So what other groups did you have at the school? Did you have like a band and all the different clubs and everything?

VM: No, we had a little glee club. There was not no real band. We didn't have one. Stephanie played in the band when she went to school. She played clarinet. But we didn't have no instruments.

BC: Were you in the glee club?

VM: No, I wasn't in the glee club. I was just bad I tell you.

BC: Did you get in trouble? Did they have pretty stern discipline?

VM: Yeah. And you got it again when you got home, and sometimes when it would get so bad they would call your mamma or father

from school, I mean from work. I know . . . Do you know Berthine Ross?

BC: I think.

VM: She's got the bus in Cornelius, owns the bus company. And her son is Thurmond. Well, anyway, her daddy used to come to school and whup her brother. He used to work over at the mill. Oh he was so bad. He would do something every day, something wrong. His daddy would come over from the mill, off his job and whup him till he got so he wouldn't fight the teacher back. But he's dead now and they brung his body home. He had about seven wives. He was in California and at the funeral he had about seven wives. I think he still was bad. They was all at the funeral.

BC: So did most kids act up a lot or were they pretty well behaved?

VM: No, it was just like kids today, some good and some bad. There are some kids you never had no problem out of, you never had mother and father having to go to the school, because all the teachers had to do was let your parents know, and you was in trouble.

LH: Did your parents ever have to come to the school?

VM: No they didn't. I did little devilish things.

LH: What did you do?

VM: Oh, I just wanted to go outdoors and play. I just had my mind on it. I didn't think school meant nothing, just wasting my time. I had other things to do.

BC: So did most kids have to work a lot after school?

VM: Yes, we used to go pick cotton after school. You know where I used to live over there? That's my old home place where my sister stays now. We'd be on top of the hill after school - we called it on top of the hill right up there. And they'd come pick us up in the trucks, and we'd go I'd sit up in the cotton patch. I didn't never pick a hundred pounds of cotton. I'd lie, and made like a hundred pounds. And when time comes to pay the money I didn't have it, you know. And I ran a little bill at the store, and I done eat up everything I had at the store and didn't make no money picking cotton. I just went for fun. And I never will

forget. You know Arthur Jean [Davis]? My sister's boyfriend who drives the white car? Well, his grandmother used to go with us, and she was old and she was crippled. There was a lot of old people that went too. And she went to pick cotton with us and she said she never could get nothing done because all she could do was just sit there and look at me, because I would preach in the cotton field and I would shout and get happy. And I would have a blast doing just anything.

BC: So you liked picking cotton more than you liked school even?

VM: Yes, because I could cut up out there, and they'd give me attention just like I was a movie star. You know, they wouldn't pick no cotton - they'd stand and look at me and I'd entertain them. Then time it was about ready to come home I'd work hard trying to get something. We'd get out at one o'clock and pick cotton till it was dark. We picked cotton, and the people we were picking cotton for, their children would be going to school, and they'd go to school all day and we'd get out. But that was the rule - the black children picked cotton, the white children went to school.

BC: So everybody pretty much went out there?



VM: Yes, it was old people. I know men picked cotton to feed their families, would go and pick cotton all day. They could pick. Picked blackberries, strawberries, apples, anything. My mama came.

BC: So where was this cotton patch and who did you work for?

VM: Oh, all old people dead and gone now. Some of them or most of them. From here to Cornelius and farther, Caldwell Station, out 73, just the first one would come to pick you up, that's the one you went with. You could choose whoever you wanted to go with, you know.

BC: So they would just come to, what did you call it?

VM: Up on the hill. They'd be standing there waiting for school to get out when most of the time they'd be standing there waiting for school to get out. And we'd get out and go on, and our parents would know we were going.

BC: So these were white people who would come over in their pick-up trucks?

VM: Yeah, now the black people that raised cotton, they picked their own cotton. Then, like if they stayed on your farm they'd pick your cotton first, and then they'd pick their cotton last.

BC: Now, was there a time of year when you had to... Was you school scheduled like it is now with starting in September, break for Christmas, or did you have to go around the cotton season?

VM: Well, some years, according to the year. Beause some years we had school on Saturdays. When we had out, like snow days, from school. Some years, you may get out early this year and next year maybe you didn't get out as early, five or six days different. Something like that, but pretty much it was the same. Like, they do it right now, they have to make up snow days when they are out, go longer in June.

BC: So you had a big summer break.

VM: Yeah.

BC: And what did most kids do for the summer?

VM: Well, some of them went to stay with their other parents, when they had different parents. Some of them worked, and some of them didn't do nothing. I worked all around. When I first started working I was making two dollars and a half a week. And I'd give my mama the two dollars and keep the fifty cents. And I started a bank account.

BC: Was this working in the cotton fields?

VM: No, this wasn't working in the cotton fields. This was going uptown looking in the mail for old crippled ladies, and then going to houses and iron and wash and babysit. I done all that. I worked for one family here for fourteen years. He was a professor at Davidson College. I know y'all have seen his name over there - [Richard] Bernard, some people pronounce it Bernard. Bernard. His wife is out at The Pines now.

BC: Do you go visit her still sometimes?

VM: Oh yeah, I love her to death. She was from Mississippi. Her mother schooled two black kids and this girl, they wanted to be a teacher. No, they wanted her to be a nurse, and she told me she didn't want to be no nurse, because if she was a nurse, the

Bernards would want her to stay with the family all the time and work. So she chose to be a teacher. I don't know where she is now. But her mother is real, real rich. Mrs Bernard too. They did everything. She was more than nice to me. I used to stay with them, I used to go with them. They had a boys camp up in Brevard. They had a boys camp and we used to go up there and stay in the summer. And then I used to work at that red, two-story house right as you go to the college. Students stay there now.

BC: Across from the church?

VM: No, up there where the library is. You know where the library is? On the other side of the street. OK, it the other side you go into the guest house. You know where the guest house is?

BC: On campus?

VM: Yes, you know the road you go into the guest house? Well it's on Main Street. You know what I'm talking about now? It's on Griffith Street, the end of Griffith Street. Across the railroad from the drug store.

BC: It's a brick house?

VM: It's the house on the corner, on the left going out. Great big house. That's where I started working for them. And they'd go away for weeks at a time and leave me. They've got a daughter, an adopted daughter. She's in the mountains, in Asheville, teaching. She married an older guy and they had three, two adopted children. They had told us she had been to every hospital in the world and they told her she couldn't have no kids and she up and had one. He married a Yankee and he's in New York.

BC: Well, getting back to the school, do you remember when they were first building it or when it was first opening? You don't remember that? Do you think there are people around who do still? Because you were really young when it went up.

VM: Yeah, see I was real young. They built that school right along then. This school hadn't been built no time when we had this picture made. All I can remember is the school.

BC: But you don't remember even living right across the street, or did you hear stories or anything?

VM: No.

BC: You didn't hear stories about where people went to school at all the other schools before that one? What about your parents, did they go to this kind of little one room school?

VM: My mama went to school in Charlotte. My mama's mother died when she was nine years old, and she went to school in Charlotte until she came to Mount Mourne where some of the people raised her. Then she went to school in Marsch (sp?), Marsch School. She went to seventh grade, that was highest then. They didn't have high school. But she was smart. Her brother, she had one brother, and he didn't go to school. She'd bring her schoolwork home, what she'd done today, and that's how he got his learning. He died in the service, in Asheville, in Oteen (sp?) Hospital. He took tuberculosis overseas. But you would've thought my mamma had been to college. She was that smart. Now my daddy was dumb, on the dumb side. I took after him. Ha ha ha...

BC: Now, from what you remember of this school in Davidson, how involved, what was the connection like between the school and the rest of the community, the churches and other people in town, did people help out a lot in the school?

VM: Yes, yes they helped out a lot, as much as they was able. A lot of things we didn't have, but at that time we didn't miss it. We didn't miss what we didn't have. Because, that's just like anything else. If you don't have it, you don't miss it, if you don't know what it is. Like I heard a preacher say you don't know where you're going if you don't know where you come from. So, that's about like, we didn't know what y'all had all the time, until we worked and found out. A lot of things y'all, I mean the whites had, some of the whites, that we didn't have, but we didn't know about it, so it didn't worry us. We didn't think about it.

BC: Like what kind of things?

VM: Like maybe a raincoat or galoshes or skates or a bicycle. Now, most black children love bicycles and most of them had old piece of bicycles, but they didn't get a new bike every year. Music, or something like instruments. To get to go to ballet school or music school. We didn't know nothing about that. A lot of people think that clothes, a lot of black people think that clothes make you. A lot of black people buy unnecessary clothes, but I found out that white people don't. I found that out. Now, Mrs. Bernard, she was the rich, rich one I worked for, and I

worked for rich people in New York. I worked for Jews in New York that was rich. And they had clothes, but they had sufficient clothes. They didn't have clothes to put on just for show. And that's the difference I see in black and white about dressing. They go to extremes about dress.

BC: Why do you think that is?

VM: Because they never had it. I think that's it, >cause you never had it. I know right now, I used to be one of the finest dressed women in Davidson, because I didn't have it. That's when I was working in New York. But, right now I just have what I need, and since our clothes got messed up in the fire, I got three suits - a black one, a white one, and a blue one, and I got another skirt and blouse, and that's all I got now. I just change up from one thing to another. And I don't want too much more. I got a coat, a nice Sunday coat - I call it a Sunday coat - and a nice everyday coat. I don't want too much more where at my age, now, I just want to look decent when I go out.

BC: What about at the school in terms of supplies and stuff?

VM: The school, let me see if I've got on that little dress now.



This little dress, I guess I wore it and we washed it. I'd come home - wear it to school, come home and you'd take it off, and come home and wash it for the weekend to wear to school the next week.

#### **SIDE B**

VM: Daddy had bought white kids his boss man - my daddy's boss man went off and messed up a lot of money and when he come home it was Christmas time and we didn't have nothing for Christmas and his children didn't have nothing for Christmas - and my daddy bought both families something for Christmas. That's the way... I was raised up with white kids all over where I used to live over there in the country and all.

BC: Do you remember a difference moving from Mount Mourne into Davidson, in terms of the racial mixing and stuff...

VM: No, because I wasn't big enough. I was a baby when they moved here. I was a baby when they moved here.

BC: But you spent a bunch of time there still.

VM: Yes.

BC: And was it different in the country versus in the town?

VM: I love the country. I just love the country. When I bought this lot, my mamma didn't want me to move this far out, and you know where she was living over there. I wasn't further than this out. I really did. I'm glad I bought this lot out here. I don't have no bothers. Everybody seems to take care of their own business, but I just always liked the country. And I like to do rough work.

BC: Going back to the school, you were saying the churches and stuff, a lot of people helped out with the school. Where did the school get its support mainly, you think? Was it from the city, from the school system, or was it mostly just from this community.

VM: No, it was from the state. Parents couldn't help you too much, because they didn't have nothing. At least mine didn't. There are some wealthy people here and some black children don't even know about work and things, but I was unfortunately not one of the lucky ones.

BC: So, this school up here, was it something that the whole community felt like was their's you think and were real proud of it or was it more like the state sort of came in...

VM: Oh yeah, we are real proud of it. Real proud of it. We was proud of the little one room and this other building here when we had it, but every year it got better and better you know. Like, I say you can't miss what you don't have, what you don't know about.

LH: Was the school in Huntersville real different?

VM: It was better, yeah. They didn't have as many children in a classroom as they did up here. And you got to change classes, you know. Like I say, up here in the lower grade that I was, third grade and all, we didn't have but one reading book and we learned it awful hard. We never did change the reading book. We read out of one book the whole year, and you could shut your eyes and read. Well, you'd read so much today, so much tomorrow and then when you get through with it you'd go back and start over again. But you wasn't learning too much, you know. You wasn't learning nothing reading the same book over and over and over and over.

The same way about Sunday School. I got disheartened in Sunday School. I used to have a teacher who every Sunday she'd ask we the same question - "Who made you, who made you, who made you?" "God." A few little things like that disheartened me. I wasn't learning nothing. I said, "Mamma, she asked me the same thing every Sunday. 'Who made you' I done told her God made me."

BC: Did the teachers in the school do a lot in town? Were they real active?

VM: No, no, no. Them from Charlotte, they'd go on back to Charlotte. They made that money and would go on back to Charlotte. They wasn't interested in you. They knew they was going to make it anyway. They wasn't . . . Now I had one teacher up here that was a man, up here in the eighth grade. I know you've heard of him, Mr. [J.R.] Harris. He was a good teacher. He loved math. He'd have math all day long, the whole day long. And he'd make you learn, he'd make you learn. Then he didn't like girls to wear pants to school. He said girls wearing pants to school makes you mannish. Then I walked in one morning with my pants on, and he sent me back home. But I love him to today because he straightened me out. I told you I was bad, but he straightened me out, yes. He straightened me out good. He never

did beat me or nothing, but he was very interested in me. He seen that I wasn't that interested in learning, that I was just there for the show. He really got with me. He was tight on girls. He was really interested in me. He got killed in Charlotte. He was running a store and somebody killed him.

BC: Do you remember other teachers that were really good, that everybody liked, that were real popular?

VM: Yeah, everybody loved Miss Brown. She was the easy going teacher. But nobody liked Miss Baucom (sp?). Miss Baucom was oh, she taught me fourth and fifth grades. She'd tear you up. She used to have a paddle she'd beat you with and it was like a two by four. And she would tear you up for anything. She loved to beat. I never did like her.

BC: Now, one of the questions we were thinking of. . . . When we went to school, or even still in Davidson, I think, there are these little groups of people hanging out and they have their little cliques and stuff. Was it, do you remember that kind of thing? What were the different groups?

VM: Right up there above my house where I lived, well I used to

live in a house behind that store, that store up there on top of the hill. That's where I first lived when I got married. That's where I lived, and my husband didn't allow Buck up there, what we call on top of the hill. Because that's just where everybody went and bad language and drink liquor and saying any and everything up there and you could hear it you know. He didn't allow Buck up there, and after he died, Buck said he was so glad after he died he got to go on top of the hill. You could hear anything, you know, like teen-age boys with no manners maybe. They might wee wee up there or anything, just anything went on up there.

BC: So that's just right there next to the school?

VM: Yes, yes. And then a lot of bad things used to happen around the school, you know. And so Buck wasn't allowed up there.

BC: So would they cause trouble at the school even?

VM: Well, no they didn't cause too much trouble at the school. I don't think I remember anything they really caused trouble at the school. This was after school, they would hang out. And little boys would get feeling matured, you know out. You wouldn't see no girls out there, mostly boys. They'd smoke the reefers or do

whatever they were doing.

LH: This was mostly the older kids?

VM: Yes, it was mostly the older ones. But they didn't even have a community center then. They had a community center right where that playground is, that's where they built one. It was a professor that had two sons to get killed in the service. Have you heard talk of Erwin Lodge out there? Ok, that's who built our community center, them sons that got killed, in the name of them. That's who built our first community center. And now from then, they moved it over on Griffith Street and then it just didn't have it no more. So that's why when they left the school up there they use it now as a community center. This community center, it had a kitchen and a playroom and then I can remember when we'd go in the afternoons to play and they had somebody to be there over you.

BC: When was this, about?

VM: This one was maybe when I was in the sixth and seventh grade. This was way after this. Let me see, it's a lady who lives at The Pines now . . . What was her name? I can't think of it right

now, but I might think of it. Well, she used to come teach us Bible School. I know quite a few used to come over, still living. They used to teach us Bible School when school was out.

BC: Do you remember when they changed the school, when they closed this school up here at integration and all?

VM: Yeah, that was Stephanie's first year in school. Yes, I can remember it . . . I can remember it... I can remember it just as good, taking Stephanie to school. You remember I told you that Stephanie went to school the first day - she went to school over there when they integrated - and she stayed in the bathroom all day. She never, I took her to her class and everything, but after I took her to the classroom, she went in the bathroom and stayed there all day. She and Mr. Roberts laughed about it. You know Mr. Roberts? He used to be the principal over there.

BC: Was it hard when . . . how did they decide to close this school for integration, do you remember?

VM: No, I don't remember. I know when they closed it they had to close it. They had to close it. That's when everything was integrating then. Luther Martin King was strong then and I had



that book about the lady that rode the bus, you know. I had that before my house got burned down and I gave my sister one of them because I had three I had bought. But, this was all during the time when they integrated. You know, I give Luther Martin King, what is it, Martin Luther King, credit for mostly for integrating the school. Beause when you hear him say his children on his speech - on his speech, his children will be not treated like the color of their skin, they be treated like their character. That's what I like about it. It was during that time. We were scared, we were scared. We were scared it was going to be a riot, you know. We were scared for the children and scared for us. But, everything went on calm and cool.

BC: Were people really excited about it or were they kind of upset that this school had to close?

VM: Well, some wanted it and some didn't. I didn't care about wanting it for the mix, but I wanted it for equal rights. I wanted my children to have equal rights. If they would give me equal rights over here, I wouldn't think about going over there. That's the way I felt about it, but everybody else don't feel about it like that.

BC: So some people were pretty upset.

VM: Yeah, they were upset and pretty scared for the kids to go to school, but it was . . . Mr. Roberts was a great teacher. He straightened them out, both sides. This kid . . . They had trouble, now, but they straightened them out, the white and the black. The white had what they was taught and the black had they was taught, but they didn't get to carry it to school. So, you can't help what you was taught, but if you live long enough you learn better.

BC: So, for a while there was a community center in this school, right?

VM: Yeah, it was a building just like a one-room house, with a little kitchen that we went to play games and have different things and whatever.

BC: But I mean, this same building that's here now, was a community center. It used to be...

VM: ...the school.

BC: But they had a community center at one time before now.

VM: Yeah, just like a one room house.

BC: Do you think people were real excited for it to open back up again, you know in the past few years?

VM: Yes, yes. Black people were really into doing anything they could do to make it better for the kids.

BC: Yeah, I bet that was kind of neat to have your grandchildren going up there for after school program in the same place where you started off.

VM: Yeah, but they wasn't learning nothing. I don't know whether it was the teachers or what, but they . . . Stephanie kept them at home. You know where they'll be when they come here in the evenings. And they started making better grades and two of them got on the honor roll. I don't know, when Frances got sick, it seemed like everything went down up there, to me. Mrs. Beale, now she's worked with kids all her life and she's tough too, but she's been sick and she ain't well yet. She never will be I don't believe, but she was tough. She was a math teacher, taught in

Georgia. So, I think that's some children, let me tell you, there's some children right now, don't have a place to go after school. It's good for them. Some children don't know where their mother is even know if she's working or not working. Some mothers don't care. And it's good for kids like that. There's some kids that don't even have anybody to help them with their homework.

Now I know a lady offered Ellis how much, fifteen or twenty dollars to help her son, when was it Saturday or Sunday evening?

I wasn't here. Sunday evening she offered to pay him to help her son on a project. I know one time she was working third shift. She was secretary down at the motel where we stayed, but now she's not working at all. I asked her when she was working third shift who helped him with his homework. And I know she'd be sleeping in the afternoon sometimes and sometimes one or two days we'd bring him to the motel and he stayed with his grandmother and he stayed on the other side of the street waiting for the bus to come and she didn't even say good morning to him or speak to him or nothing. She just went on in the house. So, you have some care and some don't care. But it's fine for children that really don't have anybody to help them. But, I don't go for it too much because I was glad when they was going up there to get rid of them, but they wasn't doing nothing so they have to be here where you can find out they're doing something. Now, O'Brien, he's here

and they sit all three of them, but O'Brien hasn't been turning his homework in. He forgot it, he forgot it. He had three or four notebooks . . . He went with a notebook one day that was seventeen dollars and he came home the next day and he didn't have no notebook. And that's one of the reasons something is going on, I don't know if somebody is blackmailing or what, but he's been in a lot of trouble I know. But, it makes us feel bad when he don't have his homework and two or three teachers say he talks too much. Now if you talk too much and disturb the other children who want to learn, you're not going to stay at that school. Now, we've been down there and had conferences and talked to them and told them, but if he can't listen, I don't what's going to happen to him. Because it is some down there that wants to learn.

BC: I was wondering if you had any more stories about Ada Jenkins. You were talking about her music earlier.

VM: Miss Jenkins' music. Well, she never did teach me no music. She taught some music, beause I believe she taught Frances, Mrs. Beale. I took some music from a preacher. You remember I told you about that preacher? He was an old man, he was preaching at the Methodist church over there. And me and Ervin, Mrs. McClain, I

know me and Ervin was taking it and let's see who else. I don't know who else, but he got fast with us and we had to stop. I know his wife had a baby and she was fifty-two years old. See, and the taxi was taking him to the hospital and the taxi said he had it on the floor and he was going as fast as he could and he said Rev. Wells, his name was Rev. Wells, reached up and said, "Mr. Car, can't you go a little bit faster please."

BC: Now Ada Jenkins, was she the favorite teacher?

VM: Yeah. You didn't see her daughter when she was here did you? She was up at the schoolhouse. I didn't get to see her either.

BC: No, I saw her. She was in a wheelchair.

VM: Yeah, real old.

BC: They gave her a copy of that picture. I remember her looking at it.

VM: Her name was Portia. She didn't have any children either. She adopted her baby. But, Mrs. Jenkins had two children. She had her, and a boy. The boy was named Plenny.

BC: Now what made her the favorite teacher?

VM: Let me see, I believe everybody you hear talking about Mrs. Jenkins, I think Mrs. Jenkins and Mr. Harris were the best teachers. It's four I can say: Mrs. Jenkins, Mr. Harris, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Baucom was the favorites, and then the fifth one would be Mrs. Ross from Charlotte. But Mrs. Jenkins did teach some music, give teachers some music lessons at her house. She lived in that house where Ruby lives now. My sister bought that house from Mrs. Jenkins. That's where my sister used to live, then when she moved, Ruby still lived there.

BC: So did she just teach music?

VM: No, she taught sixth grade, sixth and seventh.

BC: Do you know how they chose to name it after her.

VM: She done more for that school than any of the rest of the teachers I know. She done more money-wise, and then she done more helping kids. That's why. She had a lot of Indian in her, Mrs. Jenkins. She had a lot of Indian in her. Her hair was real long.

LH: When you say she did a lot for the school money-wise, did she, was that her money or did she help raise money?

VM: Her money. Yeah, she done a lot for the school. Now the list of things she done for the school I couldn't tell you. I was too young to know about.

BC: So she was here when it was being started, so she probably helped to make it.

VM: Yeah, she'd been teaching all her life. You can see she was old right there. She would have been teaching all her life and she didn't have but two children. Her husband, he died before I knew him, but it's a boy down the street, Frances's brother, named after her husband. Her husband was named Albert. And they named him after Mrs. Jenkins . . . Now we was in the same grade, but he was in Mrs. Jenkins' room but I wasn't. See how things worked, they separated it.

BC: Well, can you think of anything more to tell us? I'll be back if you think of anything, but are there any other stories or anything?



VM: No, but I'll get the people I'll call by Sunday, wrote down by Sunday so you can just read them off. You know if I had known, I thought when I gave you that picture I was through. I would've been calling around to some friends, you know and talking and got more, because when Mrs. Lowery told me about Mrs. Oswalt (sp) this morning I had forgot about her.

BC: Well, and we might try to interview some people together, because Marjean was saying that she'll remember a lot more if she'll be sitting there with Ken Norton or somebody else.

VM: Yeah, talking. That's good.

BC: Well thanks a lot.

End of tape