

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

1/3/00

Peggy Van Scoyoc (PV): This is Peggy Van Scoyoc. Today is Monday, January 3, 2000. I am here today in the home of Deborah Matthews Wright. Deborah is the sister of Gwen Matthews who I interviewed a few weeks ago. Gwen was one of the first six people to attend Cary High School as a segregated high school back in 1963. Deborah followed in her footsteps about eight years later to Cary High School, following behind her older sister. So we are here today to hear about Gwen's experiences from Deborah's perspective, and then Deborah's experiences following along the same lines. So Deborah, if you could tell me a little bit about your family background. We heard from Gwen that your family is from around here in this area. So if you could tell me a little bit more about your family.

DW: Sure. We grew up in Wake County, as Gwen has already told you. Wake County is our home, born and bred here in Wake County. I'm one of five children, as Gwen has probably told you also. We grew up in a rural area. At that time it was considered what was called the country, and so it was a rural area just outside the city limits of Raleigh, but between Raleigh and Cary. And so as a result of things that happened with the school system at that time, we did end up going to Cary schools rather than to what was considered Raleigh city schools. And Cary at that time was considered a county school, or rural school at the time also. So that was why we also went to Cary schools.

PV: That's interesting. So from the time you started school, you were in the Cary school system?

DW: From the time I started school, at the age, when I first started school I was in a segregated school, and yes, the actual Black school that I went to, elementary school, was also in Cary. And so I was one of several Black children who went to Cary even in a segregated society

or system. And in 1965, when there was a law passed, and supposedly there was a freedom of choice, there was a decision made. It was my decision, and I say my decision because my parents asked me about it. I'm not certain that I understood the ramifications of it, but at the age of ten I did choose to go to Swift Creek which is just outside of Cary, Swift Creek Elementary school. So at the age of ten and going into the fifth grade, I was one of three people to integrate Swift Creek school for the very first time. And that was quite an experience, as you can imagine. So my first experience with integration was at the age of ten, and not really when I was in high school, but it began much earlier.

PV: That's amazing. So you were one of the first three Black children in the entire school? How did it go? What happened your first day? Can you describe your first day?

DW: In the entire school. It was awful. It was absolutely, positively awful. As I indicated, even though my parents gave me an opportunity to choose, I don't think they even really understood what it really would mean in terms of the day to day interaction, the day to day going through the process of going to school. For them, I think, from their perspective, it was a matter of, I would be closer to home because the school was closer to my home, I wouldn't have to ride a bus as long. And also there was a distinction between the quality of education in the Black schools and the White schools, so from their perspective also, it would be advantageous, it would be beneficial for me to begin to go to what was considered a White school at such an early age, an even earlier age than even Gwen went, because it would have been supposedly a better quality of education. And so when I was given the choice, I said, "Oh well, yes, I'll go." Because again, I didn't really understand it and again didn't understand all of the ramifications of it, and how the whole scenario would play out on a day to day basis. But during the time that we rode the school bus, and being one of three, we had to stand all the time on the school bus.

We were never given an opportunity to sit down, even though there were plenty of seats on the bus. What the White children would do was they would, one person would sit in a seat to keep us from sitting down. And so we stood for the entire time from when we were picked and then riding to school. And the bus driver, that was just the way it was. And so, during that time, from getting on the bus to getting there we were, of course, teased and ridiculed the entire time. And then in school, it was just the same scenario. Being teased for being different, and not having been around Black children there were obvious physical differences, basically just the physical differences. We were just like any other children, had the same likes, dislikes as any other child. But the White children took it upon themselves to, of course, mimic us and just ridicule us and make fun of the differences between us and them. And so this was a daily occurrence. That was just life.

PV: Oh, how difficult. Were the three of you in the same class?

DW: No, I was in the fifth grade, and, there may have been four of us. I was in the fifth grade. There was a cousin of mine who was in the first grade, and then there was a friend of mine who was in the sixth grade. And then there was a young boy who was in the second or third grade, so there were four of us. I had forgotten about one young man.

PV: So you were all alone in your classroom once you got to school?

DW: Oh yes. I was all alone in my classroom probably until junior high school, for the next two or three years I was all alone as the only Black child in my class. And of course, being that kind of situation, it was a lonely situation, but the next year, I think the next year, maybe two years afterward, there were one or two people who began to somewhat befriend me, more or less. And that was somewhat comforting when that happened. But the first year was pretty traumatic. But even though there was one or two children who did begin to talk or share or even

just have a conversation with me, you know, eventually they would begin to be teased if they did that. So it was kind of an up and down kind of situation, seesaw relations in school. And there was really no real relationships in school, or friendships, but just acquaintances and people who, took the time to share with me or to talk with me.

PV: How did the teachers act toward you?

DW: The first year, the teacher was Mrs. Cope. I remember her name. She was not outwardly, she did not treat me too differently outwardly, but she did not do a whole lot to try to keep the other children from teasing me or to keep them from saying things to me, even when she heard them. I think that probably the thing that I remember most about Mrs. Cope was her feelings toward my ability. I remember, probably after I guess six weeks, or whatever reporting period, and she sent a note home to my mother. And the note basically said to please talk to me because I was obviously copying from another child's paper. Her basis for her letter, or note, was that I couldn't be performing, I couldn't be doing satisfactory work because I was Black, was basically what she was implying so she sent the note home and asked my mother to talk to me. She had never seen me do it, she had never caught me cheating, she had never caught me copying or looking on anyone else's paper, but she sent the note home because it had to be happening. My mother was livid. She was livid. She was, my mother, like many mothers I'm sure, was like a mother hen and there were a lot of things that were outside of her control but there were things that when they were something that was an untruth and she knew our ability, she knew that that wasn't the case. And so we never received another note like that and I continued to excel and she gave me my grades. I mean, we wondered, I think my mother wondered for awhile whether or not she would be willing to be fair to me if she had this doubt or concern in her mind that I wasn't doing my work. But she did, she gave me the grades that I

deserved. So that was probably what I remember the most about Mrs. Cope. She wasn't necessarily unfriendly or ever mean to me, but she was just the teacher. And she didn't go out of her way to try to make life any better for me.

PV: Did your mother talk to her and that point in time? How did she handle it?

DW: She did. To be honest, I don't know. I just know that she was very upset and she did go to the school. I don't know whether she talked with her by herself or with the principal too, I don't remember. But she did do that. So the year other than teases or whatever, academically was a good year. And I went on to the sixth grade and had a very kind teacher in the sixth grade. Things went pretty good for the next two or three years.

PV: Were there more Black children coming into the school the second year that you were at Swift Creek?

DW: The school went to grade seven, and I started at five. By the next two to three years there were a few others, yes, there were a few others. But basically we were so spread out that there was still about one in every class, one Black child in every class.

PV: At most.

DW: Yes. And of course, some classes didn't have any Black children.

PV: New Gwen had told me that some of her experiences at Cary High School were that the teachers wouldn't call on her, wouldn't answer questions that she asked. Basically ignored her, were not open to having her come up to them after class to even ask questions. Did you experience those kinds of things with your teachers?

DW: No, I didn't experience that in elementary school, nor in junior high school. By the time I got to high school things were better, things were much better. So I didn't really experience that kind of treatment when I was younger. I didn't ask a lot of questions, I have to

admit. That's probably also, I didn't ask a lot of questions and I just kind of struggled through. I think a lot of it was feeling that I had to prove myself and feeling that any indication that I didn't know or that I had a question would be a reflection on my level of intelligence. So I think probably I was much more reserved than Gwen. Gwen was very gregarious and outgoing and talkative. So I think that I was probably much more reserved and tried to figure out a lot of things on my own and didn't ask a lot of questions, and did okay as a result of that. It took me a little bit longer probably but struggled through it without asking a lot of questions. But when I did raise my hand, I didn't feel ignored or mistreated.

PV: Oh good. Now from Swift Creek, where did you go after Swift Creek?

DW: I went to what was called at the time Cary Elementary and the school that sits right in the middle of town, the red brick school. I was there for the eighth grade. And then by that time there were many more Black children in the school, because I think at that time school integration was probably in full fledge. That was probably 1968. And then in '69 I went to West Cary which I think now is a middle school, but it's on Evans Road. And then from ten to twelve, I went to Cary High School.

PV: By the time you got to Cary High School, what were things like there?

DW: I think by the time I got to Cary High School, White students were used to having us around, but we were still segregated so to speak, in terms of there wasn't a lot of interaction, there wasn't a lot of socializing together. So by the time I got to high school, there was still always the feeling of loneliness and be apart and being separated. Because with there being one Black child maybe in every class, you didn't have lunch with any other Black students. And usually, typically, I ate lunch alone and so you just didn't have any kind of interaction. So by the time I was in high school, there wasn't a lot of teasing or ridicule, and calling names and that

sort of thing, or racial slurs, as there were when I was younger, but there was the separation of the races. Black students typically socialized with each other and sat close to each other in class and White students did the same. I think there was much more tolerance, and there was some interaction. I don't want to give you the impression there was none, there was some. But there was a higher level of tolerance by that time. And so I started tenth grade in 1970, and so there was a little bit more tolerance then. We were used to each other, I would say, probably. The races were used to being around each other a lot more. But in the tenth grade, the tenth through the twelfth grade, there was one particular young woman who basically befriended me, we became friends. And I say she befriended me because I was eating lunch alone in the cafeteria, and she was White, and she came over and she asked me if she could sit with me. It kind of took me by surprise because I was like, you want to sit down here at the table with me? And from that point in time we became very good friends. We were friends all the way through high school and best of friends, as a matter of fact, to the point of spending time at each other's houses and just doing a lot of things together. I think that probably any other very lasting or strong friendships didn't occur in high school at that time.

PV: Oh that's great. You had one person.

DW: Yes, that I can look back on and it made the high school experience at least more tolerable and a little bit more pleasant. Academically the teachers were fine. There were Black teachers in the school by this time and the White teachers were open, were more open to the Black students. So from an academic perspective, things went well, the teachers were fine. The guidance counselors tended to primarily ignore the Black students. We were kind of steered, either we weren't guided at all or we were steered toward a trade or a technical kind of situation.

But we weren't encouraged to go to college. We didn't get, we weren't readily given information about college, we had to seek it out for ourselves.

PV: Was that true of both female and male Black students?

DW: Yes, and definitely more so, definitely more so for Black students. If, as a female, if I went to school, into the guidance counselor's office, and I don't remember a specific incident, but I do remember receiving the information but it was never given to me. Because I remember seeing other White children with it, and they had been given it, and so that was why I ended up going to get it. Because I had not received it. And I think a lot of the fact that my grades were pretty decent, and so I was provided with the information and given more information about college than I think some of the other Black students were given about college. But the teachers were overall were pretty good.

PV: Good. What about extra curricular activities. Gwen had indicated that she didn't even try. Had things gotten any better by the time you got to Cary High School, or was it still fairly closed to you?

DW: The extra curricular activities were fairly closed, other than there were token kinds of situations. There was a Black cheerleader, and then there were Black athletes, and you may have a Black person on the student counsel, something like that, along those lines. But the other clubs basically were fairly closed. I don't know if they were closed, I don't think it was a situation where we were actually closed out of them, but I think that many Black students just, like what Gwen said, didn't try to join any of the clubs because they didn't feel welcome. And so it was the same for me. I didn't either. I wasn't very active.

PV: Well then, what happened after high school?



DW: After high school, I wasn't quite sure where I wanted to go. I tossed around Wake Forest University and, at the time, I was a Carolina UNC fan, a Carolina fan and thought about Carolina. But I thought about Meredith, and after Gwen went it appealed to me. I stayed at home part of the time. Most of the time, the four years I was there. And so it appealed to me, the atmosphere, the small college atmosphere, all girls school. And so I applied. I applied to Meredith and to Peace College, and received a scholarship from Peace, but chose not to go there. I didn't receive, didn't actually apply for financial aid. I was given an academic scholarship from Peace which I didn't apply for, and didn't really apply for financial aid from Meredith until the second year, but ended up going to Meredith. And I'm glad that I went there. It was, I can't say a real positive experience, but looking back on it, it was a good experience. I think that that was where I should have gone and I think that it was a good opportunity for me. It lacked a lot of the other things that I think that people enjoy when they go to college, the interaction, the special friendships, the relationships, the extra curricular activity and involvement, those types of things. But from an academic perspective, I think that they, I know that they prepared me well. The campus was relatively receptive. I was one of twelve and there were about twelve Blacks and there were about twelve hundred, so is that one one-hundredth. I don't know what percentage that is.

PV: About one percent.

DW: One percent, only one percent. I was one of twelve, I do remember that. There were ten or twelve of us, so one percent Black students there at the time.

PV: Now Gwen went to Meredith, there was a gap between high school and when she went to Meredith. Were you going to Meredith at the same time or did you miss each other?

DW: We missed each other. Yes, I think Gwen had probably out three or four years before I even went to Meredith. There was a gap but she had gone to another college her freshmen year, then went to Meredith, worked a little while and then went to Meredith. But there was still that time when we didn't cross over, there was no overlap at all.

PV: What did you major in?

DW: I majored in psychology with a minor in sociology. I had the feeling that I wanted to work with people, which is the standard kind of statement that when you're young you say things like that. But I did also want to go into counseling, I thought, so phase of counseling. So I majored in psychology. While I was there I was president of, I was part of a non-residence student's association and I was president of the non-resident student association, and involved in Psychi, which is an honor psychology club. So I was a little bit more involved there than I was in high school. At Meredith the interactions were pleasant. I think that Meredith, the climate at Meredith was a lot different from in high school. I think I just accepted the fact that the girls at Meredith probably hadn't been exposed a lot to people of other races. A lot of them came from middle class, White backgrounds and they themselves came from private schools, or private high schools or whatever, so they never really had a lot of interaction with people of color. And they were pleasant and weren't necessarily unfriendly, but I think it was just not having had any experiences with Black at all. But again, I was the one Black person in the class. And interestingly, I had a similar experience at Meredith as I did with Mrs. Cope. I had a social statistics class and for some reason I was fearful of the class. Or maybe it was just statistics, but it was statistics something and I think I had heard all sorts of things and I had this fear. So I went to the professor, and I just shared with him that I didn't know whether or not, I didn't know how I would do in the class. And I don't know what else I said. But he looked at me and he

said, "Oh there, there. You'll be okay. You'll make at least a C." And it just bothered, angered me really bad. The assumption was I would make no better than a C, and then I would make at least a C and at least pass, but I wondered if he said that to anybody else. It just his assumption that a C would be okay, and that's all that I should even strive for. And I took it very personally at that particular time. And I was determined that I would make better than a C, and I did. But it just was interesting that the assumption was that a C would be okay for me. And that I would at least do that well in the class. But that was sociology class. The psychology department was a very good department. The professors were extremely friendly and open and supportive of me. And so that was a positive experience. It really was. I think that Gwen helped pave the way for me. I guess, probably I don't think I got any preferential treatment, but I think that an awareness of Gwen having been there and now I was there was helpful, probably, in terms of relationships. The school was a tough school and I know that they did a good job of preparing overall.

PV: That's great. So what did you do with the degree once you got it?

DW: I finished my psychology degree and I went to work as a college counselor at St. Augustine College here in Raleigh. And at the same time I pursued a masters' in counseling. So I was working full time and the condition of my even getting that job was that I would pursue my masters, which I had intended to do, but it was just an extra incentive to do that. And so I worked there while I was in school. And then after working there for three or four years, I got a job at N.C. State. And I was getting my graduate degree from N.C. State University. And so I ended up getting the job at N.C. State, but it was not in counseling, it was in personnel. And so I finished my masters' and I started a career in human resources at N.C. State in 1983 and I've been at N.C. State all of that time. So I've been at State for sixteen years now in human

resources, and I've progressed over the years. And now I'm Assistant Director of Human Resources at N.C. State. So that's where I am now.

PV: That's fantastic. And you're working with people.

DW: And I'm working with people and interestingly, I use a lot of my counseling skills and recently I've become a certified mediator. That has come in very handy in dealing with employee relations. And so I'm using a lot of my counseling and people skills a lot more than I thought I was going to. A lot more than I did initially, and so it has definitely come in handy. I've also decided to utilizing my counseling background outside of my actual paid job. And I do counsel on the side and I have a ministry. I am a licensed minister and I have a ministry where I minister to women who are in various situations and have various issues going on in their lives. I have a ministry that is called Sister to Sister. And I use my counseling background and skills in that way also. And as you can imagine, being a minister, I get the opportunity to put those skills into practice. I'm also married to a minister and so in being by his side, that provides both of us the opportunity to work in that area and to work with people.

PV: Oh, that's fantastic. That's great. How do you view your sister and what she did in terms of making a contribution or paving a way, or pioneering, or whatever you want to call it?

DW: I think that you could truly consider her a trailblazer and I think she underestimates the contribution that she's made. And I think that because of her, for lack of a better word, gutsiness and courage is a better word. She provided an opportunity for people to be exposed to Black people in a positive way. Gwen's personality and the way Gwen is and who she is adds a lot to how she paved the way. I think that our experiences are very different because Gwen was somewhat of a forefront person where I was not as much, I was more of a background person. I

was more reserved than Gwen was, at Meredith in particular. Gwen was very active. Gwen was in plays and she did things. Oh, she didn't tell you that part.

PV: No, she didn't tell me that part.

DW: Oh, she didn't tell you that part. Gwen was very active. She was very well known at Meredith. Everyone knew who Gwen was. Everyone realized not that Gwen Matthews was a Black student on campus, but Gwen was aware, Oh that's Gwen, oh yes, I know Gwen, kind of a situation. Not because she was Black but because of who Gwen was. And I think that she presented African Americans in a way that helped others see us in a real positive way. And she provided the opportunity for people to experience her personality, her friendliness, her laughter and her ability to interact with people well. I think that the way she became a trailblazer provided an opportunity to put people at ease with African Americans from the very beginning. And she has that way about her. So I think she did things a lot differently in the way that I did. I think that she jumped right in there and she grabbed the bull by the horns and she worked with what she had. And she did what she needed to do. The prime example of, she was assertive about when she had a question and went to the teacher and wanted to ask the question. Whereas I was more reserved and sat back and tried to figure it out. I think there's a lot to be said about that. Because that also helped to dispel some of the myths that people had about Blacks at the time. And the fact that we are interested in learning, we did want to know and we are curious and we do have interests, and we have the same likes, dislikes and values that White people have. And she was probably more forthright with that than I was and took the opportunity at the time to share more of herself. And I think that's important about a trailblazer. I think you have to be willing to share yourself with others so that they can begin to know you and experience you and know about you. And if you aren't willing to do that, if you can't do it or you don't do it for

whatever reason, then you may not be as affective as someone like Gwen who was very willing to share of herself, to be out there, to be in a play, to put on a funny costume, to laugh with people. You know, to do all of those things that help people see you as a real person and not just a Black person.

PV: How do you think she impacted your life directly with what she did?

DW: I think the impact comes primarily with knowing that it could be done, that it wasn't impossible. Integration was something that we had to deal with, but the success of integration, at that time, was yet to be seen. And I think that that's the key with Gwen. I think that we went through integration because at first supposedly we had the choice and then eventually because we were bussed. But nevertheless, it happened. To many people it just happened. But at that time, what was the fruit of that occurrence. How effective was integration? What was happening? And that was yet to be seen. And I think for me growing up, I think that seeing Gwen be successful, going through that process of the teasing and the ridicule and having the courage to, after leaving Cary, to go into another situation where she was a minority, that took a lot of courage. But out of the courage came a success story. And I think what it did for me was that it showed me that these efforts are good. That something good can come out of these efforts. A lot of pain, but also a lot of success and good things, positive things can come out of it.

PV: Your parents were very strong in their ideas and convictions for all of you. And Gwen told us that your father was very active in the NAACP. How do you view your parents as trailblazers and what they were trying to accomplish?

DW: The strength that my mother showed us, she was a trailblazer, I think, in that situation because for me she taught me to love and not to hate regardless of the situation. And

for me that was, looking back on it I can say, that was probably somewhat unusual because it was easy. It was easy to say well, they hit you, you hit them back, or they said something nasty to you, then you say something nasty to them. I think that would have been the easier thing to teach your child, but she didn't teach that and she didn't encourage that. She encouraged us not to be doormats but she encouraged us to understand that a lot of the things that the children were doing were things that their parents had taught them. And she tried to help us to separate the children's actions from the children in terms of, they were doing things they probably had been told that they should do, or they were behaving in ways that they were probably told they should behave. But that they were children just like me. What she tried to help me understand was what I wanted them to understand was that they were no different from me. Different skin color, some had different experiences, but we were still all children underneath all of that. We liked the same things. They played with dolls. They played with balls. They teased each other even at home in their families. They beat up their brothers and sisters. Basically we were all still children, so she, I think, her part of all of this was encouraging us to continue to love regardless. And to see the light at the end of the tunnel. And to understand the benefit in all this for us as individuals.

My father was, interestingly, a trailblazer in that he had relationships with people, with the White community that was probably rare. I mean, it was rare probably for a Black man to have positive and good relationships with White people at that particular time. And he had that way about him too, maybe that's where Gwen got it from, where he interacted well with White people. And that was hard at that particular time. And he did that well. How? Why? Whatever the case may be. But there was the ability, I think, on his part, to help us to understand that there was a need to work together and to develop some sense of relationship with the White race

regardless of what was happening. And he was active in the NAACP, so he did that in terms of helping to promote a better community and a better society. And that was important for us to see him do that also. It wasn't only about getting equal rights for Blacks. It was also about seeing what we could do as races coming together and understanding each other. And I think that was a big issue for them, trying to bring about some sense to what was happening and bring about a positive effort in terms of unity and cooperation between races. And when we were young, he worked in situations where he was primarily the only Black or African American. And when I was fourteen or fifteen, he went to work for a small, private company. He was hired in a job by a family which kind of took him under his wing and it was really a positive experience for us as a whole family. Because that was really the first close interaction we had had with any White people, so to speak. And so he went to work for this small company. He was the only Black there. He shared a lot of things with them, and we saw him help them understand Black people. Just in that particular setting, it was not a large company, but we saw also how they became friends of the family. We all began to consider them friends. They weren't just Al's children, but they came to our weddings. I mean, even, I have only been married for six years and when Gwen got married, and when my younger sister got married, even after he retired these people were part of the family. And so it was more about relationship building. And I think that is probably what they added to this whole issue of trailblazing is the importance of relationships, regardless of what color you are, and how those relationships can impact your life as a whole.

PV: Very powerful.

DW: I hadn't thought about it until just then. That was a good question. I really hadn't thought about it til just then. I hadn't expected a question about my parents.



PV: Okay, well there were some surprises in there. Your father was active in the NAACP, and Gwen talked about how members of the NAACP actually coached her, at least that first year, on how to be tolerant of the taunts and not to provoke any kind of hostilities and those kinds of things. Did they have any direct contact with you, but the time you came along and were trailblazing behind her?

DW: None whatsoever. No, I didn't have any contact with them.

PV: So as a child you were not in contact with them directly like she was?

DW: Never was.

PV: But did you feel the influence of that organization on you?

DW: Through my father. But never had any direct interaction with them as members, but through him, his guidance, and just sitting me down and talking to me and sharing things. But no actual coaching from them as an organization. But I know it worked through him.

PV: Have you ever thought back on how your life would have been different if you had made the other decision when you were in the fifth grade, of staying in your segregated school?

DW: No, I never thought about it. I think that probably I would have continued on and I probably would have gone on to college from an academic and professional perspective, but I think that looking back on it, what it has allowed me to be able to do is develop those relationships with people who are different from me and to try to understand people from other perspectives, not just my own. Because I think that that was a lot of the problem then. It was that each person, each race was looking at the situation from their own individual perspective. And the White community was looking at it from their perspective, and we were looking at it from our perspective. I think that since we have become a society that is multi-cultural and is integrated, that we've had to come to learn to live with each other and to have relationships to

work together to raise our children in integrated communities. And I think that that transition for me has been much easier for me than it probably would have been otherwise. As I mentioned, I worked at St. Augustine's College, which is a predominantly Black school and that was one of the struggles that I think that the African American students also have, or would have in going out into the working world is not having had that experience of interacting with people who are different and interacting with the predominantly White society. Because there isn't any doubt that predominantly society, the majority is the White race. But not having had that interaction and that perspective and that experience, I think, can put people at a disadvantage. And I saw that when I was working at St. Augustine college. And I think that, for me, my transition into a multi-cultural society and being able to develop relationships in the working world and do things with people who were different from me have been much easier for me because of my experiences.

PV: Great. Let's stop here and turn the tape over. I think it's about to run out.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1

PV: And now for side two of our interview today with Deborah Matthews Wright. So, now you have three younger siblings, is that correct? Okay now how much younger is the next youngest in your family?

DW: There's five years between me and the next sibling and then six years between the next one and there's ten years between me and the youngest.

PV: Wow, your family's really spread out in time.

DW: Yes, I said when you think about it, Adonna who is the youngest, she's thirty-five and Gwen's fifty-two, so there is quite a spread.

PV: So how were things different for them by the time they started school as compared to your experience?

DW: Oh, a lot different. Integration was a full-blown. The acceptance of integration was much better. I think we were dealing, or society was dealing with a different generation of students and so they were more open to interacting with each other. My brothers, the two next to me are boys and there was inter-racial dating and so there was, it was completely different. My youngest sister was very active in a lot of activities, and my brothers were too. So I look back on

those times because, at the time I was still at home, I was in college maybe still at home, but I remember the door coming in with people of color just.... I mean, their friends were different, a lot of different friends, a variety of people, not just racially but socially, economically. It was just a multi-cultural kind of situation. So my house, when I think back on the friendships that my younger brothers and sisters had and interactions that they had were quite different from mine. Quite different from mine. I know very different from Gwen's, so in a positive way.

PV: And now you have children of your own.

DW: She's only five, well, she'll be five Saturday, as a matter of fact. She's a little one.

PV: So she hasn't started... Is she in kindergarten now?

DW: She's in pre-school and it is really interesting to hear her dealing with the whole issue of race. So we are working through what it means to be African American and what it means to be White, what it means to be Chinese, and Latino. And so, she has lots of questions about race and color. And so I try to talk with her about the differences in people and help her identify people and share with her that although they may look different, they like this too. And she likes ice cream too, just like you do. She has a young lady who, a little girl who is Latino in her class and we talk a lot about Cindy and when we see Spanish things or Mexican things, I say, this is the kind of background Cindy has. And so, I'm not quite certain if your next question may or may not be, where will I take her or how will I raise her, or how are my experiences, how will they impact my parenting of Brianna. I think that basically I just want her to be open and receptive. I want her to be open and receptive to people of color and people of different backgrounds. I would like for her to be as multi-cultural as possible. But by the same token, there's such a fine line because I do feel that my experiences had an impact on my self esteem in terms of my abilities, always feeling as if I had to prove myself. And so I never doubted that I

had the abilities, but what I doubted was whether or not the majority would accept the fact that I was capable and that I was able and that I was, that I am intelligent and that I am capable and that I can do things. And so the experiences that I had had an impact, it has to have impact on your self esteem, on your self concept. You just can't go through something like that and not have your self esteem affected. So there's a fine line. I want her to be open and I want her to experience different things, but I also want her to be comfortable with who she is. And I want her to be comfortable with being African American. And I want her to be comfortable with her own background in her own culture. And what I have tried to do is give her a solid background about being African American first. And then we're building on that. Because I think that that is real important. Being comfortable with who she is and then, I think that, good positive stuff, good positive self concept is important to accepting other people because I think that not accepting other people comes from your own sense of insecurity and your own sense of not knowing or not understanding who you are and who you are in relationship to other people. And so when you feel good about yourself and you feel good about who you are and you feel good about your own race and how you look, and your hair may be curly although theirs is straight, and you have brown eyes and somebody has blue eyes, if you feel good about who you are, I think you're going to be open to accepting other people for who they are also. Be open to it and by the same token, not be intimidated by it. Because you can be open to other people but still be intimidated by that difference also. So I don't want her to be intimidated by it. I want her to have good, positive self esteem and realize that she's okay. That she's okay and so is everyone else, regardless of who they are.

PV: Are you anticipating any real challenges for her from a racial standpoint, or a cultural standpoint?

DW: I don't anticipate the kinds of challenges I had. I think that her challenges will be more subtle. I think that integration has done a lot for society as a whole, but I don't think, I think we all would be fooling ourselves to say that prejudice and discrimination are gone and that there's none of that. It's just not as overt as it used to be. And I still experience it at work. It's very, it's more subtle. So I think her challenges will be to be more astute about racism and discrimination because it's going to be a lot more subtle. It's much easier now. It puts "easier" into quotations for me because it was out there. People let me know how they felt, I knew how they felt, they didn't like me, they didn't want me there. But I think that in the years to come that there's an undercurrent of prejudice and discrimination that I think the people of color will have to be more aware of than we have been aware of in the past. And I think that the challenges eventually may become more obvious as society becomes more multi-cultural, because as we know, people of color are going to begin, the number of people of color is going to expand or increase and so the majority will no longer be the majority, so to speak, in terms of numbers. And so that may be a little unsettling for the White majority and by the same token, it may affect the society in a strange way. But I think for the time being, I think, relationships are ones to cherish. I think that her challenge will be to be more aware of the subtleties of discrimination.

PV: Great. Okay, well, let's kind of shift gears a little bit. Maybe you can talk a few minutes about just your general impressions of life in this area and in and around Cary. Growing up here, living here, how things have changed over the years in terms of growth or just all the different changes. If you have any specific stories that you would like to share with us about growing up in this area?

DW: I don't really have any specific stories. I think that Cary as a whole is, we hear in the news and we hear about the statistics of North Carolina being one of the fastest growing

towns there is, I think that I just have seen a tremendous change in the attitudes of people. And I think that a lot of that also has to do, I think, with the fact that a lot of people who live in Cary aren't from Cary, which is interesting, and I think that brings a different perspective about the way of the world and a different perspective about people and differences with them. And I think that's a positive thing. I think Cary is still somewhat, probably, and I don't have any statistics or any proof of this, is still probably predominantly White oriented and I think that's the case. But I don't think that the African Americans are in Cary or go to Cary that we feel the way that we used to feel. We didn't feel, we no longer feel as if we aren't wanted or that we shouldn't be there. And I think over the years that that was the case. There was the feeling that we shouldn't be there because we were Black. And I think that the community and the town as a whole has changed in that regard which is very positive, it really is.

PV: It sure is. Gwen shared with us some of her memories of times when everything was segregated and in going shopping in Raleigh, those kinds of things. Do you have memories of separate drinking fountains and those kinds of things?

DW: The earliest memory that I have of the fact that there was a difference was when I was, I assume I was four or five, but I was pre-school aged. And had of course grown up in an all Black community, gone to an all Black church and had only been around Black people. My mother and I were shopping in Hudson Belk which used to be downtown. I don't know how long you've been here but the Hudson Belk was the department store that was in Raleigh. So we had gone to Hudson Belk to shop. And I remember telling her that I had to use the bathroom. And I remember her saying, "Okay, we'll go to the bathroom." I remember saying, "but I have to go now." And she kept walking. And I said that I have to go now and I remember her saying, "I know, I know but I have to find the colored bathroom." And I remember that, and I remember

thinking, what is a colored bathroom? And I didn't know until, she had to explain it to me later. I didn't understand. We went to the bathroom. But that was my first experience of realizing that things were different and things were separate. And when she actually made that statement that she had to find the colored bathroom. And I really hadn't even, didn't know that there was a colored bathroom.

PV: Wow. Do you have any other memories like that?

DW: No, I really don't, because by the time, we were so segregated in our personal lives that I really don't have a lot of stories of the water fountain, at least in the rural areas, I don't have a whole lot of stories of the Black, the colored water fountain and the White water fountain and that sort of thing. And then my first experience was really being with school being integrated. So our personal lives were very segregated and so I really didn't have the opportunity to experience those distinctions in my personal life until I was really in school. And then in school there really weren't separate things there.

PV: Do you have any other stories you want to share about just life in general in this area?

DW: No, I can't think of anything else that comes to mind at this point in time.

PV: Do you remember the names of the other students that you started at Swift Creek with and have you stayed in touch with any of them?

DW: No. I do remember the names. One was Sherry Pope. She was one of the people who kind of befriended me at Swift Creek. And another name is Janice. I don't remember her... Janice, I do see, she works here in the area. We don't stay in contact but I see her every now and again. Another was Mary Jo Jones. And the young woman that I became, the student that I became friends with in high school where we became very good friends, her name was Becky



Rambeau. And we tried to stay in contact a little when we went to college. She went to East Carolina and I ended up going to Meredith and then we just kind of got separated and I haven't talked to her or seen her in years. I was thinking back on this experience and would love to know where she is and what she's doing, but I have no idea.

PV: It would be fun if we could find her.

DW: It really would be, it really would be. Her mother, she lived in the what was considered the Morrisville area at the time and her mother may still be there. I don't know if her mother ever remarried or not because her father was deceased. But her name is Rebecca, I think, Rambeau. But I don't know if Cary High would have a record of where she might be as a result of graduating from Cary High, or East Carolina. I hadn't thought of that either. East Carolina probably might have an address as an alumni or East Carolina. But I would love to see her, I would love to talk with her. Because I think that in her own right she was a trailblazer. I think I remember just a puzzled look that even her friends gave her and she always included me. It was almost as if she didn't see any color, it was kind of like I was one of all of her friends. And whenever she did anything I was included. But I could feel the distance of her White friends. But to her it was just we were all one big happy family. She never seemed to feel any difference toward me or feel any slight toward me at all, which was a good feeling at the time. It really was.

PV: Well, I'd love to find any of these people. Either the people who you started school with or what have you. That would be great if we could locate some of them. We'll see if we can. Is there anyone else you can think of that we might want to interview?

DW: Stephanie Ballantine. She was a neighbor. She was one of the ones who went to school when I did. Her father lives, if you're familiar with Tryon Road, do you know where

Gorman Street and Tryon Road intersect? And then there's a church that's being remodeled and her father lives in the first house right after the church. The church is on the right, he lives in the house on the right and his name is Stanley Ballantine. And we lived, my father still lives four houses down from there on Tryon Road. But Stephanie went on to Duke and was one of the few people who graduated from Duke's dental school at the time. And so she may be someone. I think she now lives in Charlotte. I don't know. But her father would be able to tell you how to contact her, I'm sure. I think she would be a good person to talk to.

PV: Wonderful. That would be just great. Well, is there anything else that you can think of that we haven't touched on?

DW: I hope I answered all your questions.

PV: Well, you were just absolutely wonderful. This has been a fantastic interview and extremely valuable to not only my own organization, the Page-Walker, but to anyone else who may hear it. So we just are very grateful to you for your time and all of your knowledge. We appreciate it.

DW: Thank you. I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW