

Vivian Foushee  
Interviewed by Bob Gilgor  
3/23/01  
Tape 1 of 1

RG: This is March 23<sup>rd</sup> in the year 2001, and this is Bob Gilgor interviewing Vivian Foushee at her office at 1611 E. Franklin Street. Good afternoon, Vivian.

VF: Hi, Bob.

RG: I know it's been a long day for you and you've been very busy, so we'll just get started here. The first question I will ask you is what was it like growing up in Chapel Hill? And you just take it and run with it.

VF: I guess my best memory starts at around age six, and I would say it's a pretty confusing time for me. And by that I mean I went to school with a girlfriend of mine, Addie Mae Winstead is her name. She's now Addie Mae Charleston. Lives in Washington in D.C. But she took me to school with her. I was around five, actually, and I enjoyed that immensely, but I wasn't supposed to be enrolled in school, so I was just going and spending the day with her. I had a lot of friends, as I remember – I hope that's right. But my memory as a – my memory with my family is probably what I mean by confusing, because I spent almost all of my time with my grandmother. My mother worked, as did my dad, and I was here during – with my grandmother during the day. She was very poor, and had – I don't know whether I want this to be part of the interview, but she was just very poor and it didn't matter because it was totally a situation where I felt loved and, you know, just had people coming and going, and it felt good. But it was confusing to me because I didn't really understand having to go every day away from home, and I really had rather had been at home playing, but I couldn't be.

I guess around when I started first grade, I think, this is my memory, and if teachers were allowed they'd probably say it isn't true, but I always remember loving school and really thriving in that space. And as I look back on it, think of myself even then as a leader. We would, for instance, have class plays. This may have been around fifth grade and I had several leading parts. But it was just a good time, I just – I guess it's the thing that I miss most when I think about what my grandkids have now as opposed to what I had. Where things weren't perfect at Orange County Training School, let me tell you. And some of the teachers weren't always fair, and not all of them were excellent teachers.

But if you happened to, as I did, run across some who really, really cared about you, as I had the good fortune to do, I had some really good things happen. I particularly mention my, remember my third grade teacher, Miss Lampley, who was just a love, and – nurturing, and just an excellent teacher. Taught me what I needed to know about how to write, and I don't write that legibly, but back then I was doin' a little bit better. And then there was a fourth grade teacher, Norma Snipes, who, I just think of her with this look on her face of "you can do better than that." That was always her challenge, both to me and I guess everybody else. But she was really a super teacher. Played the piano beautifully,

and I remember thinkin' some day I'd like to play the piano like she did. I didn't ever get that good, but I did play the piano.

I had a sixth grade teacher, Melvin Scales. Good looking, very handsome, just a great guy. And all of the kids loved him, especially the girls. He was never inappropriate with any of the girls, as I, that I knew anything about, but it meant a lot to have Mr. Scales, as we all called him, be there and be involved with us – he would play with us. He would play ball, and he really was just one of the kids at lunchtime and recess. Just really a neat guy. And I remember one summer - the black churches all used to get together and go to Pullen Park in Raleigh, the only place we could go, actually, for a picnic. But all the churches would get together, it was great fun. You'd get to see kids from all over town. But we'd get in these buses and Trailway buses and drive over to Raleigh. This particular time, I don't know what the reason is, but I was drivin' with my mom and dad to the picnic, and Mr. Scales rode with me in the car, and I just thought I was hot stuff because he was in my car riding with me. And it's, we were having a conversation about something and I said "I have saw." And I'll never forget this, he said "You don't mean you have saw. You mean you have seen." And it's just, it jujst stands out as a time when I learned how to use saw and seen. But it was just a very special time.

Then I guess what stands out for me, I had great seventh grade teacher, Miss Wydell. And she was just super, just made us understand. If you make seventh grade, it's probably not anything you can't do, cause seventh grade is when we separate men from the boys kind of thing. I loved school, and she really challenged us a lot. I went to eighth grade and there was a music teacher, Mr. Pickard, Harry Pickard. I think he's probably still livin', and lives in Winston-Salem. And he had a chorus for the high school, nine, grades nine through twelve. And every moment I got I used to hang around his room, cause I wanted to be a part of that. Course I wasn't supposed to be cause I was only eighth grade, but he decided to let me try out with the alto singers. I didn't know I was an alto. But anyway, that's what he let me do. And I got into that choir in eighth grade, and I thought, you know, this is my future, I'm gonna be a, you know, a soloist. Of course I didn't make it there. But the point of it is, I felt acceptance all along the way. And somehow was able to use that acceptance to be a good person, whatever that meant at that time.

I played basketball for Mrs. Fulford. I think she's still living in Beaufort, North Carolina. I was on the girls' team, and as I said there, I made first string, and that was a big deal. We had, Mary Jones I think told you about how we – where we played. But that was really a good time. We did a lot of traveling, and -

- RG: Yeah, tell me about *your* experiences. Don't assume that Mary Jones told me everything.
- VF: Yeah well, I was goin' to say that, I guess the biggest deal was playing Hillside, from Durham. And we almost never could beat them. But it was the game of the century for us. You know, they'd come over here and kind of tease us about where we were playing. But we had, sometimes we played them a good game, other times not. But I had what they call a hook shot. And I was a forward, and so was Mary Jones, and I can't remember the

other forward we had. But anyway, I guess that changed with Elsie Gear and some others but anyway, I had a shot where the play would be set up so that I'd come down the middle of the floor and then go to my left and shoot back right. And it was my hook shot. It's great fun. Many times we'd have a write-up in the Durham Morning Herald. They'd say Mary Jones scored 16, Vivian Foushee six or whatever. But it was so good to see that in print, you know. It was just something.

RG: Tell me about the basketball court, Vivian.

VF: The basketball what?

RG: The basketball court that Orange County Training School had.

VF: The basketball court was, see I'm not good at measurements, but we had a stage at one end of it, and the other portion of it – I don't know how to do it in terms of space. But it wasn't a very big floor. But even so it was divided in half, so that the forwards – in those days the forwards played on one end of the team and the guards on the other end. And then we had the post in the floor that you had to be sure you didn't run into when you were flyin' down the floor to shoot you ball, kind of thing. But it was, the floor was well kept, it was wood of course. Shiny as a penny. And the janitor took great pride in keeping that floor up.

RG: Did you have a high ceiling?

VF: It was a very low ceiling.

RG: So does that alter your shots?

VF: I guess it did, I mean I didn't know anything any different, so I would say no, it didn't alter my shot. That's all I ever knew. But when we would have, we would put on plays – I was tryin' to remember the name of the play when I first talked to you. – that we did. I remember I wore a blue polka-dot dress that had eyelets on the front of it. The main star was Rosalie Register, whom I haven't seen in fifty years. But that play was put on to a packed house. I mean, people were standing all around the – parents, all around the side of auditorium, that was also our gym. And afterwards it was just the feeling of being a celebrity. You know, you learn those parts and – another thing about being in these school plays is that we'd get to be out of class, cause we had to practice. I mean, we took that practice seriously, too. And so it was a lot of practice that went into the plays, and then we finally got to put it on. And it was just a grand moment. I mean, we'd have, the stage would have props or whatever, and I think, back then, I'm thinking it's amazing how much people knew then about what it took to make it. At 13 you don't know this, but we were around teachers who had such a vision for us that, I mean it's too late, but it makes me really know what value they had for us as teachers.

RG: Can you go into that again, when you say the vision of what it took to make it.

VF: Well, it's like at our auditorium – when we would have, what would they call them, assemblies. We'd have to go into assembly and go through whatever needed to be gone through, but I can see Mr. MacDougal, who was principal, and he'd be taking us through some things or talking about some things. Maybe - and R.D. Smith, who was shop teacher. But they would just be talkin' to us about whatever. And the point of it is, it wasn't that – I really don't know how to describe it, but it was just a sense of they wanted us to do what was right. And at that time in my life, it felt real constraining and like they were just wanting us to be straight and narrow.

But the truth of it is, and I know this, being black, that they were saying we want you to be safe. But I didn't know that then. I didn't know that there were ways that we had to behave and be and appear to be so that we would not be at risk. Even in Chapel Hill. And I didn't understand that for the longest time. In fact, I can remember once when my dad and I were coming from Church Street to Franklin Street, and I might have been 13 or 14 years old, and we were walking to a shoe store called E.A. Brown. This was really a long time ago. But there were these white guys on the corner of what was then, oh it was Hearn's Grocery or something along there. But as my dad and I walked by these guys made some comment under their breath, and looked like they were going to do something to me. And I remember my dad grabbin' me and saying to them, You leave her alone. And it felt so out of context, because we hadn't said anything to them, didn't pay them any attention. They just wanted to do something. So I think that's what the people at school are saying. You have to be mindful. You have to know that you're not in such a friendly place. Although it looks friendly, it's not so friendly. And that was a hard lesson to learn. Are we doin' ok?

RG: Doin' great.

VF: OK. OK. And your questions help me to say what I need to say because I'm appreciating people crying, because it does bring back a lot of feelings. It really does.

RG: You, I wanted to revisit your childhood, if we could take you away from school for a little bit, and some of the pain that you're showing with your tears here. Tell me about your mother and father, what they were like, what they did for a living, what kind of a house you lived in, whether family was around you where you lived.

VF: I lived my early years, one through six, on Graham Street in Chapel Hill. I think I may have even been born there. My house is still there, actually, and I pass by it, it's now student housing and I don't know who owns it. But my mother worked as a housekeeper and a maid. And they were the good jobs. She had a very hard job at University Laundry, where she was on her feet and worked till about 4:30 every day. I'm not going to be able to do this. (pause)

RG: So she wasn't home.

VF: No, she wasn't home, and I would come in from school, and it wouldn't be anybody there. So I was there for about two hours alone, and I guess that was always the case

unless I was going to my grandmother's. And I didn't usually do that during the school week. I mean, I just would come home. And that worked pretty good because I was just really involved in school stuff, so I was very often at school late afternoons, it wasn't such a big deal. But I can remember many days coming home and having to wait for my mom to get home. And my dad worked even later, because he, the job I know him about, know him from is working for University Cleaners, where he drove the delivery truck. And also did some pressing and cleaning. But one of the highlights of his job was at football season he would get, University Cleaners would clean the uniforms for Carolina football players. So I'd get to – huh?

RG: What was the name of the cleaners that did this?

VF: University, I think it was University Cleaners. I think that's right. But I would go, I would sometimes ride with him in the truck to do a pickup around town. But I especially enjoyed going with him to pick up the stuff from the campus. And I don't know what made that special, but I remember that being something that stands out for me, I don't know why. But I do know that during the year, when the games were on, we would go, I would go with him to some of the football games. And he would meet, some of the players who were then adults would come back for the games. And they always seemed so happy to see him. But it's also a point of shame for me, because...they were real condescending, you know. He got off on it so much because they were always pressin' his hand with money. I mean they were givin' him, they would give him money. And I, I didn't ever feel good about that, in fact I felt embarrassed. But, you know, I just felt embarrassed about it. That's all I can tell you.

RG: Why would they give him money?

VF: Well, when I look back on it I'd say maybe they had a conscience. You know, and they had some thought about how he was struggling to make ends meet, or whatever. And they had gone ahead with their good education and made good and went back for the football game and saw Joe, and would give him a little – not really a little money. They'd give him lots of money. You know, happy to see him, and give him money.

RG: And they knew him because they were former football players?

VF: Yeah, yeah. That was his relationship with them.

RG: How did he know them, as someone who simply picked up the uniforms.

VF: He wasn't the kind of guy that would just simply know that. He would know, he would make it his business to know you. And that's, I mean, that's what he did. It's sort of, we have a saying, he would just probably...anyway.

RG: Go ahead.

VF: (pause) I don't know that I want to say that. But -

RG: Well let me shut this off.

Tape starts again

VF: The point I was making about my dad is what I often say today to people, which is "Don't do the darky routine." I think it's insulting and it's humiliating. And it's not a way to grow self-esteem. This is me speaking now. But when I saw my dad kind of playing up to these guys, to make them better than him, or to make them bigger than he was, and that kind of, just playing up to them. It really, it was a bad feeling. I really felt humiliated by it, but I didn't have words for it. And I couldn't say it to my dad, cause I didn't even know what I was feeling. I just knew I felt uncomfortable. But he behaved like that was the way to make it, because it was the way for him to make it as a black man.

RG: Then you used some terms that I –

VF: Really? That's putting people on. I want you to think I really think you're the greatest thing out there. But the truth be known, I hate your guts. You know, I don't like you, but I gotta play this game because that way you'll give me X, and I'll be able to do Y.

VF: Stepin Fetchit.

RG: Stepin Fetchit I've heard, but the others –

VF: Darky routine.

RG: Shuckin –

VF: Shuckin' and jivin'.

RG: I've never heard that.

RG: You'll give me money.

VF: That's right. And it was very yucky. Really was. But I loved my daddy. I really did. And he loved me and took good care of me. I'll go back to my mom for a minute, who worked at the laundry. She was a really good cook. I didn't learn to cook too much with her, but she was really good. She worked – you probably won't know this name, but she worked for Walter Spearman, journalism professor. And the Spearmans loved her. Everywhere she worked, I mean all the families that she ever worked for loved her, adored her. She was a good maid, ok? And they were good to her.

RG: How could she be a maid, and also work with the laundry?

VF: Well what I'm, that's what I was saying. The maid, the maid work came after the laundry work. She did that for as long as she could, and then her legs began to give her so much trouble she couldn't tolerate standing on the cement floor.

RG: So being in the laundry took a toll physically.

VF: Absolutely. Absolutely. But it was a fairly decent job.

RG: In what regard?

VF: Pay. I mean, not any other way, but it paid, at least I guess she believe it paid better than anything else she could do. But once she left the laundry, started working for a private family, she didn't do too badly. She worked for families who really, I would say even today, had a lot of integrity and weren't willing to take advantage of her. And so she didn't do badly. Charlie Jones, who was minister at Presbyterian Church – she worked for them. They were very good to her, and she to them. Paul Green, she worked there. I used to go play with his daughters, Betsy and the other kid I don't remember. I used to go to their house with mama and play, and well, we swore we'd be friends, but I immediately lost touch with them once I grew up and they grew up. I don't know whether they're around any more. But anyway, she didn't have – I can't remember how far she went in school, but I don't think either of them maybe even graduated high school. But as I was saying earlier, the word in the house for me was not *if* you go, it was always *when* you go.

RG: When you go to college?

VF: College, uh huh. You have to go. It's the only way to be somebody and to make it. And I wanted to go to West Virginia State. Don't know why, don't know where it came from. Don't have no clue. The only thing that turned me away from it was I needed to be able to swim to graduate, and so I decided I'm not doin' that. I was a coward even then. And ended up going to Central, North Carolina Central at Durham, is what we called it then. And it was not a bad choice.

RG: Let's go back to your mom for a minute. What kind of hours did she work?

VF: At the laundry?

RG: Both at the laundry and when she was doing work in people's homes.

VF: Um, 7:30 to 4:30 is what I remember at the laundry. And I don't remember the private family hours, but I don't remember them being long.

RG: Did she work weekends also?

VF: I don't think so. I mean, she wouldn't take a job that interfered with church. That was the other thing I wanted to get to about her. She was very involved in St. Paul A.M.E. Church, which is a church that comes out of her family, her great-grandfather founded the church, kind of thing, and she was very into the church. She played music, played for the

choir. So did I, at one point. But she wouldn't take anything that interfered with church. So I'm pretty sure she didn't work weekends. Pretty sure.

RG: Now, you talked also about your spending a lot of time with your grandmother. Did she live in the same neighborhood?

VF: You know where Domino Pizza is?

RG: Yes.

VF: That's where her shack sat, and it was a shack.

RG: Is that off of 15-501, the Dominoes there?

VF: No, right there in Carrboro.

RG: In Carrboro, the Dominoes. Yes.

VF: Uh huh. There was a pear tree in the front yard that had the best pears. Course it isn't there anymore. And she lived in a, if I remember it's two or three room house that, when it burned, caught fire some kind of way, I don't think was ever, I don't think was ever fixed.

RG: Was it painted?

VF: No.

RG: And this was, well when did it burn?

VF: I don't remember that.

RG: Approximately in the forties, or fifties, sixties?

VF: Probably forties. Probably in the forties.

RG: Now, the home that you and your parents lived in, can you describe that?

VF: I can't really. It's just a very small house. It's now painted gray. On Graham Street. And I would say had three, four rooms maybe. But I'm really guessin'. I haven't been in that house in fifty years, if not longer. But we left that house. My dad, for a spell I think, had his own business. Dry cleaning business. I don't know in what order this comes, whether it was before I was, I think it was before I was born. But he wasn't a good money manager. So when we left Graham Street, for whatever reason, moved from there, we moved to a house that Carrboro has a parking lot on right now. It's right across the street from Midway Barber Shop. A woman named Eugenia Jones owned the house, and she was related to my mother. And we moved there. We must have lost the house on Graham

Street. I mean I, I think that's what happened because as I remember we moved to Janie Jones', is what everybody called it, we moved to her house. We were upstairs in what I remember being one room. I don't know whether that's right, but I think that's right. It was not, it was really not a nice house, and it was scary because it was dark, and we had to come down a flight of stairs so we could get to the ground floor. No electricity, so we had lamps. As we did at my grandmother's. I don't think my grandmother ever had electricity. I mean, I always remember lamps at her house.

RG: Running water in your home?

VF: No, had a well that was in the back yard. That's at my grandmother's. At my home, I think we may have had running water. But my grandmother had a well that sat in the back of her house. But no electricity. Then when we moved to Janie Jones' house, she didn't have electricity. We used lamps there. And it was a very old, not well-kept house. But it was a decent place, and we were safe there, kind of thing. And then my mom and dad bought where I currently live, which is at 505 Church Street. And that was in 1939. I had an Easter Bunny that my mom gave me that year that we moved into the house. That's how I remember it was 1939, because on the foot of the bunny she wrote "To Vivian, Happy Easter, 1939." Don't know where that bunny is now. But anyway, that's how I know when it was.

And that house certainly was, it's an ok house. We did some work to it, my husband and I, after we married, and I moved back home. We went to D.C. for a little while, but I'm not a D.C. person. So we came back to Chapel Hill, my husband and I, and I lived with my mom and dad. And my dad, who, about that time, had a stroke, and was very disabled. So we stayed with them and helped out with him for a while. And then he became mentally dysfunctional, so he had to go over to, I think it's Salisbury, where they take veterans. At any rate, he moved, we took him to hospital, and that's where he died, actually. It may have been Statesville, but I think it was Salisbury. Salisbury's where the VA hospital is. But, I'm kind of jumping around here, but –

RG: Let's go back to (inaud) that your parents said to you *when* you go to college, not *if* you're going but *when* you're going.

VF: That's right.

RG: What kind of resources were provided for you to help you with school so you could accomplish this? Did your parents have a dictionary, books, encyclopedia, things like that?

VF: I had whatever I needed, and it was a great sacrifice, I know. But I did have encyclopedias. I had any material that I needed. I had the best room in the house for my room. I can remember I was in a home ec class, home economics class, with a woman named Ruth Pope, who had, who came from a very distinguished family over in Raleigh. And she used to really be after us to be ladies. But she'd help us, we'd get a project and she'd say pick something that you want to fix up at your house. And I remember puttin' a

little cloth around a table so that I could just stick things under there, but I'd have someplace to work. That was my point about loving school, because they would just pack us down with work, and I loved it because it just made me feel so good to get those reports done, and all that kind of stuff. But I mean, you have to keep asking because I get so caught up in what I'm talking about it just –

RG: You had said you wanted to stop at three.

VF: I do need to stop.

RG: I'm letting you go six minutes after –

VF: I was watching it. I got one right there too.

RG: Do you want to stop now?

VF: Well I do need to get home. Are we about done?

RG: No. (laughter) No, I got a lot more to ask.

VF: OK, well then we probably need to re-schedule. I do need to get home.

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RG: this is Bob Gilgor interviewing Vivian Foushee at her office at 1611 E. Franklin Street, and today is the 28<sup>th</sup> of March in the year 2001. Good afternoon, Vivian.

VF: Hi, Bob.

RG: I hope you had a good day today.

VF: I have had.

RG: Good. You look nice and smiling, bright eyed.

VF: Well thank you.

RG: I wanted to hear more about growing up in Chapel Hill, and then we'll get on with talking about the schools.

VF: OK. I realized after our last meeting that there was probably too much focus on how things were good, and my memory of that it's still real, but I wanted to give you some taste of what I experienced in the school system that was segregated. And that is, there were many teachers who themselves didn't have self-respect and who treated us badly. C.A. MacDougal, the principal, was a real, in my – for my money, a tyrant. And was particularly hard on some black boys, in a way that I think if you happened to have interviewed any of them and they talk about it, they'll speak about the detrimental effect

he had on them, their self-respect, their self-esteem. I mean he could really be a tyrant. I remember once, I was in eighth grade, in the library, and each door has a window, so you could walk by and look in. And the librarian, who was herself not even a competent teacher, but she was also very mean. She had left the library to do some errand. And eighth graders being eighth graders, we were up messing up, being loud, whatever. And I remember lookin' up, for some reason lookin' at the door, and Mr. MacDougal was standin' there with such a sneer on his face. It's like I can see it right now. And it was kind of a really dirty, threatening look. And then he kind of charged into the room and said something to us about misbehaving, whatever, whatever. But the point I'm making is, the way he disciplined and the way he interacted with us was always with a threat. It wasn't the, he could be kind, I'm just saying he wasn't. But the main thrust for him with us kids was harshness. And when I think of C.A. MacDougal, I think of harsh. I think of harshness. And he had people that he of course didn't behave that way with. But primarily, how I experienced him is like that. Just real harsh. Kind of scary.

The librarian at that time was a woman named Mrs. Smith, I don't remember her first name. But she mainly sat and twirled her hair. She really didn't care much about whether we got what we needed to get. And I would say that she was in the minority, but she was there. There was one other teacher that I think of as just so obviously incompetent that it was scary. His name was Grodin. He was an eighth grade teacher, and he just clearly didn't have it. But there he was. He wasn't mean, and he wasn't harsh. But he wasn't a good teacher. And seventh and eighth grade, if I remember this correctly, are for the most part pretty pivotal grades, in terms of whether you go on or not. And it's interested to me as I think back on it that when my class went into eighth grade we were so big, in terms of numbers, we had to have two sections. And when we graduated, I don't know the number, but we didn't have two section of that class, if I remember. I may have that fuzzy, but I remember we just continued to lose students. And they were people who were for whatever reason not being respected or put down or not valued in the system. And they just dropped out. It's much like what we have now where kids gets disenchanted, teachers aren't really interested or whatever, and they lose interest. So I'm saying it's parallel, but I can't really, that's the best I can do to describe it.

- RG: Do you think some of the students dropped out to earn a living, to help their families?
- VF: I don't think that – well, I'm sure that's what they did, they went to work. But I think what I want you to get from what I'm saying is the atmosphere in the school was not all conducive to everybody's learning.
- RG: So there was a segment of the student body that was not being seen the same as everyone else, and they were getting lost.
- VF: That's right. We had a significant number of kids who got lost. That's right.
- RG: Would you say that over half of your class that started high school graduated? OR less than, or about half? Can you give some percentage?

- VF: I'm really guessing, but I'd say maybe less than half of us. That's probably wrong, but that would be my guess. We lost a lot of kids.
- RG: Of those who graduated, do you have any idea of how many went on to college or further education?
- VF: In my class, I'll say in my group, I know that the girls that I ran with, all of us went to North Carolina Central in Durham. And several of the boys went away to school, but I don't have as clear a picture of that. So maybe ten to fifteen of us out of 35 – 40. I'm really guessing, because I – those figures could be absolutely wrong. But I know I had one classmate who went to Virginia Union, and let's see, one went to A&T, and these are just people I kind of ran with. That would be nine of us. I mean, that's the best I can do. But I know that, I'd say a fair number of us went off to college.
- RG: Can you – I don't want to focus on the down side –
- VF: But it helps to add the reality to what that experience was.
- RG: That's what I'm after is reality. Can you talk about the facilities of the school?
- VF: We had a science room with – I don't know what you call them, I guess where you were supposed to have gotten water. That's called a spigot or whatever. Nothing in that room worked. Nothing. And we had – that's where we went for Science. But we never did, that I remember, an exper – we probably did some experiments, but we didn't have the equipment, ever, to do what we needed to do. And I just remember, I can see this sink that I don't think ever, that I remember at least, was ever used. It was just there.
- RG: Did you have gas?
- VF: That's what it was, gas. No, we didn't have any gas.
- RG: No gas.
- VF: No, not that I remember.
- RG: Chemicals?
- VF: Not that I remember. Not that I remember.
- RG: What about the playground?
- VF: Full of rocks. You, when I think about Northside I think I remember that we used to go out for recess and play softball, whatever. And of these huge rocks that you had to be mindful of. Much like the auditorium that we played with the posts in the way. But you know, we were out there, but it was, could have been considered dangerous.

RG: Did the auditorium have a special name, the gym have a special name?

VF: Not that I know of.

RG: What about the desks, books?

VF: The desks that I remember always looked used, and I don't know that I, I guess I did get new books, along the way. So I guess at some point we had new books, but never enough new books to go around. You'd have, some kids would get new books. Other kids would get more used books. So there'd be good, fair – how'd they rate that – new books, good books, fair books. I think is how it was. But never enough new books. But never enough new books for everybody.

RG: Did everybody have books?

VF: As far as I know everybody had a book, but it was the quality of the book, the shape that the book was in. But I think everybody had a book, I mean, I don't remember that, I don't really know. But I think so.

RG: Did you have a locker room?

VF: No. But I think maybe the football team may have had a locker room in the shop area. But upstairs where we were and had classes, no, we didn't have lockers. You took your –

RG: Now you graduated from the Orange County Training School area –

VF: Northside.

RG: Northside. That was in what year?

VF: '51.

RG: About the last year it existed as such.

VF: The very last, that's right.

RG: Did you have showers over there?

VF: I guess downstairs where the boys showered for football. I don't know. Probably. I was trying to remember what my husband said about that, cause he played football. But I don't remember.

RG: What was the practice – was the practice field right there at the school?

VF: Uh huh. Yeah, practice field was right there where the playground was. It sat on one field.

- RG: But you didn't have rocks on the football field?
- VF: See, rocks go back, there used to be a flat surface, I think you'd go up the hill, where kids who weren't participating in sports could sit. And that's where the rocks were.
- RG: So they'd sit on the rocks and watch the games?
- VF: Yes. And so if you're hitting, if you're playing softball and you hit a ball out to the edge of the field, and you're going for the ball, you could run into the rocks. But not on the field. I don't mean to say – I don't know, there may have been. But I meant back where people were sitting, but even so, you're there where you could run into them and get hurt. It seems to me, though, not on the playing field, but right alongside the building were also a lot of rocks, where people again would sit. And that was a shaded area. And that's what I remember. (laughs) I may be making all of this up but that's what I remember.
- RG: Are there other things that you recall about people at the school, or clubs? You mentioned the librarian. How well stocked was the library?
- VF: I don't know what to compare it with. I mean, it seemed pretty full to me, you know. I mean, my memory is, when you needed something it was there. But I didn't have anything else to compare it with. It looked pretty good.
- RG: Did the parking area – you had buses coming in there.
- VF: I'm trying to remember where did the buses come, to the rear? Yeah, ok, the buses came in on, off of Church Street onto MacMasters. Came to the back of the building. I never rode a bus cause I lived right on Church Street.
- RG: So the entry was down by that branch where most of the kids came to the school, up that hill of red clay?
- VF: If you're walking from – you know where the Housing Authority is? It's, you know where, you know where Caldwell Street Extension is?
- RG: Uh huh.
- VF: OK. If you're going along there, those of us walking into the school from Caldwell Extension would have to go uphill, would have to cross over the branch. That's true. That's true. But now kids comin' in on the bus, I don't think they ever had to do any negotiating of that creek there, because they were in back of the school.
- RG: So the front of the school faced the creek.
- VF: Yeah. Well, the front of the school faced Caldwell Extension, and the creek is to the far right. And at some point they put a cafeteria there.

RG: So they didn't have a cafeteria?

VF: Well yeah, we ate in one of the classrooms. We ate in Miss Pope's Home Ec room.

RG: That was your –

VF: That was the cafeteria.

RG: So for a while you didn't have a cafeteria.

VF: That's right. Not designated cafeteria, that's right. We ate in the Home Ec room. And I don't know at what point we got this cafeteria. But I remember we got the new building, it was a cafeteria and we had an organization, it may have been called YT, something like that. And we would have a meeting in the cafeteria. And I don't even know what got this started, but I cursed one of the students. I don't know what was happening. I think I'd been, I may have been president, something, but anyway I did something very inappropriate, and I don't even know what I said, but I got in trouble for it. And I remember Mr. Smith, R.D., talking to me about cursing and using profanity. And so did my basketball coach, Ira O. Carnegie. And they were very disappointed with me, and I was just, you know, I was in a lot of trouble for a long time, for cursing. (laughter) And I don't know what that was about, but I remember just, I mean, it's been a long time, but I remember that. And I cursed a girl who was a good friend of mine, her name was Barbara Lee Jones. In fact, sister-in-law to Mary Norwood Jones. Barbara Lee and I were on the basketball team together. So that goes back to that cafeteria.

RG: Were there any favorite hangouts?

VF: Ah, there's a place called Ben Baldwin's

**End of tape 1, side 1**

**Side 2**

VF: I can't remember the name of the building that's there now but it used to be a joint. You could go in and get sodas and hot dogs, and everybody hung out there. Everybody. And I guess we had the Center, but I don't even remember that. Cause that wasn't the place, the place to be was at Ben's. Just a little tiny place with booths. And then a guy named Thurman Atkins, who owned a cab company in town, really just a super guy, had a restaurant, and had booths, and we'd go in there and hang out. But he came after Ben. Ben was when we were, when I was younger. And Thurman's place came along later.

RG: So that was a hangout after school? Was it before school as well?

VF: I think after, because see, it was out of reach of school. It was uptown, we called it, on Main Street, Carrboro. So it didn't really affect going and coming to school. It was

probably after school that that was mainly the place kids would go. And I think the same for Thurman's, I mean I'm pretty sure of that because they were both not around the campus. And we were all walking, we didn't have cars.

RG: So there's no hangout that you remember right near the school?

VF: Well, that's a good question. There was a little store, a little shack called – it was owned by Mr. Jasper Robinson. I mean it was a shack. I don't know why it didn't fall in on us. But kids – now, that was close to the school, and kids did go there and hang out before and after school. And you could dance. I don't know that he had food, but you could go there and dance and have a good time. And then up the street – this is on Brook Street – then up the street from Jasper Robinson's, Suzie and Dinah Weaver had a kind of grocery store. And I don't think we could dance there, but she had the best hamburgers. And so at lunch time, that's where everybody would go. They'd run down the hill, we called it, to Miss Suzie's, to get hamburgers and whatever else. And I think that must have gone on for years until she finally closed it down. But she did have good hamburgers.

RG: Anything else that stands out in your mind about the school?

VF: I'm trying to think.

RG: Now, were you on the newspaper staff?

VF: Yeah, remember my story about Hazel Scott? I was on the staff of the Orange Echo. And somehow or another got the assignment of interviewing Hazel Scott.

RG: Oh yes, uh huh.

VF: So I did that at a woman's house named Golden Sellars, who's of course now dead. But that was a highlight of my journalism career, kind of thing.

RG: Can you tell me more about the newspaper?

VF: More, like what?

RG: What did it mean, who read it, what kind of news was put in there?

VF: Well, honor roll, what was happening with the athletic team, some of what was going on, I'm trying to remember, I don't remember more than that, but I'm sure that, what I remember, it was glossy, had a front page, a back page of the front page, about four pages. And the way I remember it is everybody was into reading that paper. Then we – this wasn't a school paper but there was one time in the neighborhood a paper called The Shadow. And that paper put out, I don't know who was behind it, but it put out ugly stuff about people. OK? I mean they would talk about who was goin' with whose husband, that kind of stuff. That was not school-originated, I don't think. But I remember it havin' a very bad impact on students, whose parents would get called out in that paper. It was

embarrassing. I don't know why I thought of that with the school paper, cause they're not connected, but I did, cause it was hard. I was trying to remember – I guess that's enough said about that. I don't know where it started. But it used to come out every week. And it was really – people would be nervous about whose, who is The Shadow watching. I think we even had a column in the school paper called The Shadow. But in that it was more playful stuff about who's goin' with who, and that kind of stuff. So it wasn't hurtful stuff at all.

RG: How often did The Echo get produced, printed?

VF: Well that's a stretch. Once a month? I don't know.

RG: Uh huh. Did parents read it as well?

VF: I think so. I know my parents read it. Maybe not seriously, but I do know they would sometimes comment on, particularly on the honor roll, stuff like that. But I don't know that they were really into it beyond that.

RG: Now, you were valedictorian of your –

VF: No, no. I don't know who was valedictorian, to tell you the truth.

RG: Were you president of your class? Weren't you in some leadership role at that time?

VF: I don't remember. I don't remember. But I was a very good student, I can tell you that. I wasn't valedictorian. I want to say Margaret Battle was valedictorian, but I'm not sure that's right. She was very smart. She probably was, and I don't know, I don't know. I think she was valedictorian.

RG: Let's go back to childhood and...I had mentioned to you before if you had any fears of the KKK, and you said something about you had not, you had no encounters, but there were some things that your parents had transmitted to you. Can you –

VF: Yeah. I'll tell you how the KKK interfered. And it was just by the sense of a lurking presence. And not feeling safe. I was thinkin' this morning, I was talkin' to one of my clients, and they were talking about something they had experimented with, and it reminded me that I didn't do much experimenting. Because it felt like to me that to experiment was not safe. And now, that's a weird connection to the KKK, but I think that's, that's exactly the association I would make. That there's this lurking, dangerous presence, and there's not really any way you can be safe unless you just don't get noticed, kind of thing. And you remember last week I was telling you about once my dad and I were going downtown to E.A. Brown's or some place, and this group of white guys kind of lunged at me. And, course they didn't do anything to me because he stopped them, but it's that kind of thing that I associate the KKK with. And it doesn't make any sense, but that's the experience I remember, and I don't even know why they would bother with us. But that's my point, it's just like you can't predict it. It's better if they don't see you.

When you were talking about not looking at black men in the eye, I was thinking yeah, I suspect early on that was how black men survived, by not looking *you* in the eye. Because that may have been taken as a challenge or whatever. So that's the presence of the KKK, but I didn't have any direct experience with them.

RG: Did your parents?

VF: My dad may have. But he didn't talk to me about it. But he may have, because my dad got around a lot. And I would imagine that he may have had some experience. But I don't know. It was not something I know about, but I could see that it would be possible. Because in his job, you know, driving around as a delivery man, or whatever. He ran into all kinds of people.

RG: What did your parents tell you about how to survive in a segregated world?

VF: Be the best you can be. Meaning you have to go to school. Education is your only way. Don't take chances, which is my point about not experimenting. Be safe. It's not a totally good message, but that is the message I got.

RG: What about when you were treated badly?

VF: By?

RG: By, let's say white people.

VF: Well I'll tell you. Here's a good example. When I, my oldest kid was maybe three or four years old, a girl friend of mine, she and I took our kids to the state fair. And I gave this guy, he was selling balloons or something and I gave this guy a twenty dollar bill for two balloons. Well, he gave me back change for a ten. And I said I gave you a twenty dollar bill and he said no ma'am, you didn't. And just to make a long story short, I went into his pocket on his apron and pulled out his money, cause I was looking for my twenty. It was there. And he said oh I, he made some excuse and gave me my money. And my girlfriend said you must have been crazy. And I said no, I 'm not crazy. I'm just showin' you I was just in his face about my money. And I got my ten dollars. Got my change for twenty dollars back. And I felt very proud of that. I was stickin' up for myself, ok? Then I went to, another time I went with another girlfriend to Sears, in Durham, I went to downtown Durham. My son needed to pee. So I asked the clerk, where's your bathroom? She said well we don't have a bathroom that you can use. And I looked at my son, and I said "Pee." He did, right on the floor. OK? So my girlfriend was very proud of me, and I felt very proud. I felt like I'm not gonna be pushed around. I mean, I've always had that attitude, you know.

RG: Is that what your parents taught?

VF: No.

RG: What did they teach?

VF: To be not so, just to be.

RG: To accept things?

VF: I wouldn't say accept – well, maybe. Probably. I'm an only child, I'm a girl, and the best way to protect yourself is to stay out of harm's way. Harm's way means you don't speak up. If you get into trouble you take it and deal with it some other way. I think, I have to be honest, I mean to be fair to them, I think as I grew older they didn't want, I mean they really weren't promoting my, I mean just allowing people to treat me any kind of way. But when it came to white people I think they both I could not survive if I had lip. You know what I mean? By talking back, it just wasn't smart. So I know I got that message very early on, that you just don't talk back to them because they'll hurt you. And I think there's some truth to that.

Even now, in meetings and things, like they can't hurt me by punching me or anything. They could, but they don't. But they have a way (?) this committee they immediately perceive me in a certain way and they don't let me out of that box. You know, I think you're here to make trouble, is their perception. So they don't value what I have to say, and they don't really listen to what I have to say. Now if I'm careful and I say things in ways that don't offend them, or upset them, but I'm always conscious of their feelings, then they'll listen. And I don't have time for that. I mean, I just, I really don't. So I say what I have to say and I take the consequences of that. Some people say she's too angry, we don't want her. Or maybe she has something to offer, if she just would say it *this* way – I meant to have brought you that paper about, I mean the e-mail correspondence about my suggestion about home visitation. Because in the end this woman – I may have told you this – this woman who I think really agrees with me said to this other group of people, "I think Vivian will agree." I told you that. "I think Vivian will agree to drop these first two items." I don't agree to that. She didn't ask me. But to keep trouble out of the picture, she just say I think – she spoke for me. And they're so happy to have that voice, that they don't come back and say well is this really how you feel? Cause they don't really want to know. So I have to go to this meeting and look like I'm raisin' hell, when all I'm saying is don't speak for me.

RG: Where did you get your assertiveness?

VF: Oh God. Hmm. I don't know how to answer that.

RG: Were you with assertive friends?

VF: I'm tryin' to think. I've always been, of the group that I was with, I've always been one of the more assertive ones. I'll say it like that. So the answer to the question is probably not, maybe it's just that it needed to be said and if not me, who?, kind of thing. I don't know where I got that from. I can tell you this, my kids used to really worry about going with me to grocery store, because I didn't let anything slide. My youngest son right now

says "I'm not going to the store with you, because you'll be in there, you'll be jumping on somebody." I said yes, if they don't treat me right, you're right. So he just won't shop with me, kind of thing.

RG: Tell him he should go out with my wife, too. She does the same thing.

VF: Is that right?

RG: Oh yeah, she doesn't let anybody take advantage of her.

VF: You can't.

RG: No. The mistakes that they make at the checkout counter are all in their favor.

VF: Every one of them.

RG: Yeah, and you go to the checkout counter a half dozen times and they make mistakes four out of the six time, you'd think it's a policy after a while.

VF: That's right. Exactly.

RG: Yeah. My wife doesn't let people get away with that.

VF: No, you can't do it. And I'll get home from the grocery store and have something missing out of my bag.

RG: Oh yeah.

VF: And I keep my receipt and I say you know, I called the manager right away and I said I got home and I'm missing X, and he'll say well, when you're in the store next time and I said no, I'm comin' back right now, because I want you to take care of it. And it's a hassle cause I'm across town. It's not convenient, but I'm – so I go back and they're a little exasperated, but it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

RG: Let me ask you another question. Do you think they're more exasperated because of your skin color?

VF: Oh, I'm sure that's the case. I'm sure. You know, the attitude – I'm, I gotta watch the time here, oh God – the attitude is, you should be so lucky. And that just gets me crazy. You should be so lucky that I'm even lettin' you in here to shop. I mean, and you'd be surprised but I run into that attitude a lot. You should be happy, you should be so grateful, you should be so thankful.

RG: Look how far you've come?

- VF: Look how far you've come. And I, I mean sometimes I don't say anything. But most times I have gone so far as to leave stuff on the checkout counter, just walk out. I mean I feel so good when I don't let people do that to me. And I can tell you what, it can be black people who are nastier than white folk. And I don't let them do it either. And it's scary to stick up to a black person.
- RG: Why?
- VF: Because I'm gonna see them in church. Or in my neighborhood.
- RG: They know you.
- VF: And they know me. That's right.
- RG: I want to ask you, I know you're in a rush here, but I want to ask you a couple more negative things about the community. There is no Shangri-La, there is not perfect community, and every community has some alcoholism, absentee fathers, divorce, abuse. Can you speak to what your memories are about some of those things where you grew up?
- VF: Well, I think alcoholism was very much a part of our neighborhood. I would say, I wouldn't say my dad was an alcoholic, but I think he drank much too much. And I wasn't abused, I mean I have to, I didn't get beaten, that kind of thing. But when you're livin' with a parent that you don't know when he's goin' to be sober or not, that for me is abuse. You know, cause it was just very unsettling. His drinkin' was very unsettling to me. But I think that went on a lot. And I know – excuse me – I can remember there was a woman once whose situation was very bad, but I remember she passing my house on Church Street, she had a very long switch, and anytime her children would whimper or do anything she'd just crack 'em with that switch. And so I asked her, I don't know what made me ask her, even, but I did. I asked her why she was hittin' them, and she was saying well they're not minding. Kind of thing. And this was when I was 18, 19 years old and just happened to be in the yard as she was coming by. Interestingly enough, some years later after I had gone away to school and was back working at the mental health center, she and her family came in for therapy, and they were assigned, I was assigned as their therapist. And it was very good because the first thing I had, she and her husband and these kids came in. Kids were much older, this was the second set of kids that she was bringin' to therapy, but she was doin' the same thing. So I had this guy, I had the family members kneel, and this guy was the only one standing, and he was pointing his finger and chastising each - his mom and his dad, not the kids, but his mom and his dad. And he has since, he lives in town now, and he has since told me that that scene really stopped (?) and it did him Lord good to settle that score, he calls it, with his mom and dad. And his mother came to me and said thank you. Because when I was in the position, on my knees, and this big person is towering over me with his finger pointing at me, even though I knew nothin' was going to happen, she said that just felt so bad, so bad I won't ever do it again. I'm probably off the subject, but it just reminds of the kind of

thing that was goin' on, you know? And I think it went on a lot. That's just one example of –

RG: So what you're saying, if I may interpret you, correct me if I'm wrong, that the physical kind of punishment –

VF: It was rampant.

RG: that was meted out was sometimes not done with love and kindness.

VF: Oh no. No, of course not. It was done with anger. People were frustrating, unhappy at not being paid much, had shit jobs. I mean, no it wasn't done with – not every instance, but abuse doesn't come out of love. It comes out of a lot of self-hate and hating who you're around and what you're about. So, it was a lot of that too.

RG: So getting punishment with a switch was not such a great thing sometimes.

VF: No, no. Now I got whipped with a switch when I – I went, I wasn't supposed to go – there used to be a little joint on the corner of Church and Cauldwell Street. It was my, it was a guy that my dad worked with, but his wife ran a joint, and you could go there and dance. I loved dancing. So I would slip up there, dancing, forgetting that this guy's my dad's friend and he's gonna know I've been there. I wasn't even thinking. So I'd go home, and if I didn't beat my mom home from the laundry, I came home late, which I did this one time. Probably many times. But I remember she sent me to the front yard to get a switch. And I got a switch, but it wasn't to her liking. So I got a whipping for not getting the right switch. She was really pissed off with me. Cause she didn't want me hanging around, but I loved that joint. (laughter)

RG: What time do you have to go?

VF: I really should get – let me just, I can't believe my line's busy.

RG: Well let me just stop here, then.

VF: OK.

**End of side 2**