

REBECCA CLAYTON
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ANGELA HORNSBY: My name is Angela Hornsby and I am interviewing Miss Becky Clayton a teacher at Eastway Elementary School. It's part of the Southern History Program's New Immigrants Project. Okay, Ms. Clayton if first you could tell me when you were born.

REBECCA CLAYTON: I was born in December, 1939 and I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia.

AH: Could you tell me a little bit about your family history? What your parents did. A little bit about your grandparents.

RC: All right. On my mother's side, my grandmother and my grandfather were both schoolteachers. Actually my grandfather was in North Carolina and my grandmother had come down to North Carolina to teach. They taught at Swan Quarter, right along the coast of North Carolina. I visited there and seen the little schoolhouse where they taught and all of that. Then they moved back to Virginia and settled in Madison County, Virginia which is about thirty miles from Charlottesville. My parents, my mother graduated from high school. My father did not. My father was an electrician and a plumber's helper. He had a lot of common sense. He brought the newspaper home every night. We listened to the news after dinner every night. My mother's two brothers were college educated but nobody else in the family was college educated. It was not until my mother and her siblings started having children that those of us were college educated, for the most part there. But education was always important to us. And it was always important to us to know. It was not, if we were riding along in the car--I learned as much riding along in the car from my mother telling us about things or things that we saw as I did probably from reading books. She always read the Sunday comics to us and I thought I hated it when we got old enough to read and she stopped reading to us on the Sunday comics. But we did that. We always got little books to read. At Christmas time, and remember as old as I am you only got gifts at Christmas time or birthdays, we got educational games. And it was a real challenge to win or to know the answers to all the questions in the book. And then I lived in Madison County, Virginia. Which one end of it is in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The other is in the foothills and right across the Rapid Dan River from where I lived was where James Madison lived. Montpelier, his home, was like five miles from my home. We would pass there on the way

to town because we would have to--like to go to Durham to maybe Ridgemont. No, Durham to probably Roxboro, that would be Orange where we would go to shop for groceries. So we would have to pass Montpelier or we'd have to pass the entrance to Montpelier. We would also go to Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, on our field trips because that was a real historical site. Every time I go there, I feel like he is there because there is so much of him in that place. So we just love that. Love going there.

AH: What impact did being so near these sort of sites of history--what type of impact did that have on you?

RC: I think it--of course too, the Civil War fought through there; the Revolutionary War fought through there; and all the stories of the people from that area who were involved in those things--I just think it made, made me proud of my country. Made me aware of how the country had developed from there. It was not like that things just happened over night. And that certainly made me want to know more about this place and to go places. Cause back, being born in '39, it was like World War II time where you didn't go a lot of places, where the gas was rationed. The rubber for the tires were rationed. I don't even think we really made any long trips until I was--gosh, I don't know--probably past ten before we would take trips to maybe to Lynchburg other than Charlottesville to the doctor those kind of things and to shop. But actually to go somewhere to visit somebody, like to go to Lynchburg or Richmond, things to visit relatives, we just didn't do that because we were poor. And I think a whole lot of other people were too at that time. So we had to do a lot of our going places by reading. But I knew they were there. And I knew I wanted to go to some of those places. I try to stress that with my kids now too. Even though you are where you are here in Northeast Central Durham, you can go anywhere you want to if you get your education and go.

AH: Was religion much of a factor growing up?

RC: My mother made sure that we attended Sunday School and went to church for preaching. We had, I went to the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ Church and we had Christian youth fellowship. We went to that. But I lived in a rural area. I lived in a rural area of three country stores and three churches: the Methodist Church, the Christian Church and the Lutheran Church. Part of my family background was with the Lutheran Church cause I think my grandparents and their family may have been at one time have been at the Lutheran Church. Now we were at the Christian but my mother and my cousins--my cousins went to the Methodist Church so my mother went to the Methodist Women's meetings

and sometimes we as children went to the Methodist youth group too. So for me religion was more open and not just tied to one denomination. And we still do that. And they share things at home: the Thanksgiving services, the Easter services, whatever. So we were tied in in that way. I went to church camp in the summer and things like that. But it was not something that just totally controlled your life. But it was just a part of everything that made you become what you were, what you are, I think. We just basically, we had services on Sunday, Sunday School and Sunday service and then probably Sunday evening would be the youth group, whenever they met as I recall with that.

AH: Did you have any siblings?

RC: Yes, I have two sisters. I have one sister that was about fourteen months younger than I. Then I have another sister that is about five years younger than I. I was the oldest one of the family, right there.

AH: And did they also go into teaching?

RC: Oh Lord no. They were really smart. I am the only one that works for the state government. They both went to work for the Federal government. So they have beach houses at Cape Cod. They have big houses. But they are very generous with me. They let me as a state employee come and share in all those things. No, they, as a matter of fact, one of them went to college and works for the Census Bureau as a statistician and makes really good money. Another sister went right out of college went to work at the Library of Congress typing up their news bulletin or whatever and stayed with the Federal government all the way through. When she got married, she moved to Boston. She works for the Housing and Urban Development. She retired last year and was given keys to the city and all these doodads that's in her curio cabinet that the people gave her for all of her work. Now I don't get that and I'm not going to get that. But I get little notes from kids that say, "You teach me everything I know" or "You teach me everything you know" and "You were working really hard and I didn't want to bother you". So those are the kind of rewards that I get back. It's just like a joke sometime because I say that I have really enjoyed my job more over the years than they have. Cause I can hear them complain at times. I've heard them say, "We don't have enough work to do in my office" at times. Things like that. I know I am making a difference daily almost with children. And the little notes and the little things you get back, the little things they bring you back from trips or whatever, I've got those. Or Christmas ornaments. I have a lot of Christmas ornaments

hanging on my tree that kids give me, have given me in the past and things like that. So those are my rewards. But they are doing great. I just say I chose the wrong government to work for. You need to work for the Federal government please.

AH: In Madison, what schools did you attend?

RC: Madison County is a rural county and it had--let's see the town that I was in elementary school--it probably had five, four, probably I'd say about five elementary schools. I initially started to elementary school in the same school that my father and mother had gone too. It was a, actually a, four room building. But when I went there we only used one room and they had four classes in that same room. So when I read about some of the prairie schools and things like that, I know exactly what it looked like. It had the potbelly stove in the middle of the room. It had one row for first grade; one row for second grade; one row for third grade; and one row for fourth grade. It also had a room where you had to hang up your coat. You had to pack your lunch. You had to bring your metal cup to hang on the rack so you could go outside and pump water from the pump. You had to go to the outside bathroom. You had to ride the bus to school. All right that's where I started out. They closed that school when I was in the fourth grade and we moved. The students moved to Madison to I think they called them union schools down here. But anyway, it had first grade through twelfth grade. There was all there in one same building. And by that point, I was in fifth grade. And then too we only had one classroom. One classroom of fifth graders; one classroom of sixth. And they still had maybe two more elementary schools that were functioning in the county at that point. Now, they have I think it's two elementary schools in that county, maybe three, a middle school, one middle school and one high school. The--I guess when Joyce graduated which was five years after me, '59--about '65, they opened a brand new high school there.

AH: Joyce being?

RC: Joyce is my sister. That probably in '65 they built a new school for the high school there. And they built a separate school for the middle school. And then the old high school, which was built coming out of the depression years, because a lot of people did not have jobs. So I know that that was built with, out of Depression people because my grandfather helped build that. My father also worked on the CCC help building Skyline Drive cause I mean you just got a job wherever you could. So they worked there. Madison is not large. But it is growing. A lot of people have come out, even when I was in school,

and I graduated in from high school in 1959, 1958, 1958. A lot of people were coming out of the Washington area to retire. And it's even more so now. It's almost like you are in a continuous town from Washington down to about Charlottesville now. They've widened the highway. You used to have to go through town. Now all these little towns are bypassed. But it's, I like to go back there because it's peaceful. I can see the mountains but you're not in the mountains but I can see the mountains from where our house is--from where I grew up, where it's located there. And I just like that atmosphere.

AH: To what extent was Madison ethnically diverse? Was it not?

RC: In '58 and '59, there was no integration in the schools. It was not a large population of black families there. In Rochelle, which was the little community where I lived, there are the three churches and three general stores. There were two families that lived in like the town area. There were some other families that lived on the road down below us. And there was a black church down below us. It was not largely populated. I'm sure there must be more that have moved into that area now. And again it would have been Caucasian and black. There was no other ethnic groups there. Sometime after--no, sometime even before I graduated even before '58, though, we had a large influx of a religious group, the Mennonites moved in there. And they apparently had, before I left they had, of course they had their school. They had built a nursing home. And now they have built a store. A lot of people when they go back home, they go back there to shop because they have a lot of good items: the cheeses, and jellies and home breads and pies and all kind of things that you might find in specialty stores here in Durham. We can get them at the Yoder's market there in the Madison area. I'm sure it's been a real blessing having the nursing home that they have there. Not having lived there for a long time, just visiting back every once in a while, it seems like people get along fairly well. I don't hear a lot of distress. What seems to be the big distress in that area now is that people want to go in there and build houses on all the land. So a lot of people are fighting that so you don't have a lot of housing developments taking up a lot of the farm land or a lot of the green land, taking the trees away. Which I hope they can be successful in fighting a lot of that. That remains to be seen.

AH: What did you do after school?

RC: When I left school each day? What did I do after school is that what you mean? Or do you mean after I graduated?

AH: Yes, after you graduated from high school.

RC: After I graduated from high school I went to Longwood College. And Longwood is in Farmville, Virginia. And Farmville is located, or is the town seat for Prince Edward County, Virginia and that was part of the Brown versus the Board of Education suit. Of course when I was graduating in '58, that decision had already been made. The black students in Prince Edward County went on strike because their school was so bad. The conditions in their school were so bad. I think the facility itself was just, from what I had read, was just in real poor condition. So they went on strike. As I said, the Brown versus the Board of Education said that you had to have, that they could attend the white schools. But in Prince Edward County, and this happened probably when I was maybe in my sophomore or junior year, they closed the public schools entirely. It's the only place I've known where the public schools were entirely closed. And the students went to school in church basements, in factories, wherever they could find extra room. People from all across the nation sent books and supplies and things like that in there for them to use. When you went to Sunday School on Sunday morning and you had books lined up all along the side of the room. Or if you wanted to have your church dinners like you'd been having in the past, you couldn't because you had so much extra stuff piled in the room that was being used by the schools. By the time I left, I believe Prince Edward Academy opened which was a private academy. Now they tried to get some of the people in that area to pay taxes to go to the private academy even though they were not providing a public school. Now people who really knew what was going on balked at that and would not do that.

AH: When did all this happen?

RC: This happened--I went to college, September of 1958. I graduated in June of 1962. So the schools, I believe the public schools were still closed when I left in June of 1962. And I'm not sure when the public school reopened because I did my student teaching in Roanoke, Virginia, which was one of the places students from Longwood went anyway to student teach. A number of people stayed. If you were an officer on campus, or if you were involved in some activities on campus, you stayed on campus to student teach. And you student taught in Prince Edward County so that you could take care of the all the activities that you were involved in. But because the schools were closed in Prince Edward County, those students had to drive to outlying counties every day to student teach. They also had to open up new facilities for the student teaching because in the past you went to Richmond and Roanoke. When they closed the public

schools in Prince Edward County, they had to go to Danville, Richmond and Roanoke to student teach. So I mean it was a real inconvenience I'm sure for the college and for some of the students too when that happened.

AH: What impression did all of that that was happening in Prince Edward, what impact did that have on you as a budding teacher to be?

RC: Well I hope it made me more tolerant. I hope it made me more aware of how people felt and how you would interact. And try and be more aware of people's feelings, I would think. I don't really know. Well I think it certainly gave me a rich background to talk about my experiences there. And discuss whether this was right or wrong in lots of cases with that.

AH: And what did you conclude in terms of--?

RC: Well, I mean some of this stuff is just a waste when you spend as much time and energy in something like that. When you could've been moving ahead all the time. Because as I said, I don't know when the public school reopened, but in all cases wherever these academies have been built for the most part they've all disappeared and they've all gone back to public schools. People are going and working together. The nation is diversified. Your workforce, wherever you go, is diversified. And people really need to learn how to get along with each other and be aware of the differences. That's an education in itself right there. For you to know how people from different countries react, what their feelings, customs are and look at how many of these things you people join together and use together anyway. It's just takes up a lot of time and energy that's not necessary with that. Longwood is now, when I went there it was just for females--now it's co-ed and it's diversified. They've got people from everywhere now. It could've easily been done earlier. I think most people just--I can't imagine to many of them being--it surprised me when I run across people who seem to be have real strong feelings about other people and negative feelings about other people. Because I think, "Well how in the world can that be?" You wish them a lot of energy on that.

AH: Your major in college, was it secondary education?

RC: Well, my degree was in secondary education. My major was in history. I called my minor social studies because I really wanted to emphasize history, all my courses being history. So I took economics, and government and whatever else we had, choices I had then for my social studies. I did my student teaching in Roanoke in government. When I started teaching in Manassas, I started with eighth

grade and taught US History. And then when I moved to the high school, I taught US History and government--I think I taught some government courses too. Then I was getting married and I moved to North Carolina. [laughs]

AH: When and what circumstances did you come to Durham?

RC: I married a guy from Roxboro. I got married in October of 1968. I moved to North Carolina and didn't particularly want to put all the time and energy into the work that would go into teaching. Getting married in October, which the school year would have already started, so I looked for a job somewhere else. I worked in the Biology/Forestry library at Duke. That was just not appealing to me at all.

AH: How long did you work there?

RC: About two years, a little less than two years. And then I just said, "No more."

AH: What was so unappealing about your job?

RC: Those things are just routines. You're dealing with books more so than you're dealing with people. It was just not what I wanted to do. I think I really must be a people person. I said I was definitely--I had also gone back to UNC and got my North Carolina teaching certificate. So I was prepared, not truly prepared for elementary, but I was prepared to get my certificate so I could continue teaching in high school. There were no positions available in Durham City or County for social studies at that point. I put my name, this was 1970, so I put my name on the substitute list. I substituted quite frequently. That was the first year of total integration in Durham. I think that people--I think all the classes had a little trouble getting started and going that year. In November, one of the older teachers who was also having, I think she had health problems and one of her relatives had health problems. And she just couldn't take it any more so she just quit on Friday afternoon. They called me and asked me if I would come into sub because the Director of Personnel knew I wanted the full-time job. So the principal, the young principal, who was a young man, at one of the schools called me and asked me if I would come in and take over the class until they could find a certified elementary teacher because he knew my degree and my certification was in high school. So I said, "I would." He used words like they are challenging. And I knew what that meant. But I still said, "I'll go in." And I did and I have been with elementary schools in Durham ever since. But I did have to go back. I think I taught for about four years before I found out that I

needed to take some more courses to get an elementary school certification. So I went back to UNC and took courses in how to teach health, and how to teach Phys. Ed., and how to teach math and reading, which by that time I was already doing, so I could get my certification so I've been here ever since.

AH: In elementary?

RC: In elementary. Yeah. I've been at the fourth or fifth grade level except for summer school. And then I've worked there with sixth and eighth grade levels in summer school.

AH: Could you talk just a little bit more about your experience substituting in--I forgot what the name of the school was?

RC: All right. Well I started--

AH: [inaudible] on the days that that schools were integrated.

RC: Well I actually got called frequently to sub from September through October and sometimes the conditions were pretty difficult. I had made up my mind I wasn't going to take anymore calls if I felt like it was going to be a difficult class. But it was one Friday afternoon, Mr. McDaniel who was principal of North Durham School called me. And I think, lucky for me, I had taken a course that summer at UNC on how to teach social studies to elementary students. The teacher had talked about the fact that you were not going to be able to use the work ethic for some of these kids even at fifth grade level, fourth or fifth grade level, cause that was not the environment they came from.

AH: What was the racial make-up of the class?

RC: It was probably about half-and-half at that point. Because the kids were being drawn from what would now be, used to be Eastend school, Club Boulevard School and North Durham School. So we had a pretty--I don't even remember now what the percentage was but I do know it was probably like half-and-half. But it was really hard for the kids that had formerly been at Eastend, which would be the black students, being there and didn't particularly want to be. The white students who had come from probably come from Club Boulevard and had these other people in there and didn't know, didn't want them there. Or they didn't really--I really don't think they had spent a lot of time with the students in how to get along with each other, or what their differences were going to be, or how much they would be alike. But they did, they had spent a lot of time with the teachers working with them. So when I went in there in November, we even had workshops after that during the year. It was really good. And I think that's something that's

missing right now because we could sit and talk with each other. The black teachers could tell the white teachers, "This is why he's acting this way. This is what he means. This is the way you need to respond to that." Whereas the white teachers could do likewise, "It would be better if it would be handled this way." I don't think anyone is communicating with each other anymore. And they're not really being honest with saying with the way things are. Because it was, I guess, at first I think they were real thankful to have a teacher in that classroom. And frankly I knew nothing, I told them even that when I signed the contract, "I'll try to teach reading. I know I can teach math. I know I can teach social studies. I know I can teach health." Frankly, I didn't ever think I would ever get those things covered because the class was so out of control. But they were glad to have somebody there. And as I said, I treated those kids, I looked at those kids like, suppose they were mine. "Suppose my child was in this classroom. How would I want them treated? What would I want them to do?" And "What would I want them to learn?" Also when I went in, because I told the principal I would not come work unless I could have some materials. And so I went over on the Friday afternoon he called me to get the books and get some materials so I would be ready on Monday. And there just seemed to be a lack of hope in that room. That class was really out of control. It really, really was out of control. A lot of them had been suspended for calling the teacher names and for hitting people and hitting the teacher and fighting and all kinds of things. I had made up my mind that one of the things that I was going to do was to do things to get them to build some pride in themselves. And do things where the other people--I don't know how in the world I ever thought of all this because this was not the way I was supposed to be. I was supposed to be a high school teacher where you could go in and do your projects and your lectures and do everything else. But here I was with this, so but I wanted them to do some things so they would get some recognition. The other people in the school realized that this was what was needed too. If we did something good or something special, the other teachers would write us a thank you note so I could read it to the class and post it. Then I decided--Oh Lord, why did I ever decide this--I decided, because I took over like maybe the second week of November, somewhere, I can't even remember the exact date anymore. I decided we would decorate the cafeteria. We would make cornucopias and have, they would bring in real things: leaves, turnips, potatoes, nuts, whatever. That's what we did. I mean, we got the thank you notes. We got all that recognition back from the teachers that were there. But believe you me, it was like took my life away. The kids argued over, "he's got my turnip. He's got my this. He did

this. He did that." It was like oh gosh but we got the thing decorated. We got the recognition. And slowly but gradually the class came back under control. They began to fall into line. And probably I've got better memories of that class maybe than I have of some of the others because they came such a long ways.

AH: What was the--How would you characterize the interactions between black and white students initially and over time?

RC: I think they all came together eventually. But I think probably, in the beginning, from what I can gather because one of the schools, the nurse or guidance counselor or somebody, was already working with a group of the students when I got there. I think there was probably a lot of distrust. You're invading my school or you're invading my space. But probably just distrust along the line. But they all fell into line. And I do know for a fact out of that class some of them have become very successful because I actually got some of their children later on. At Holloway, I had some of the children from the kids that were in that 1971 class. I also had somebody who was in that class, or the second year class I had, and he came into help me as a volunteer over at Holloway. He was employed, probably still is employed at Duke Power and came over to volunteer at Holloway. You make an impression and you make a difference. You just don't always know it. It all comes back to you in a rather slow way. But it's been good. It's been good. I've enjoyed what I've done.

AH: So you feel like one of the important elements as far as the students coming in line was trying to foster the sense of self-pride in the kids?

RC: Definitely, definitely. Because I really felt like, I just had a hopeless feeling when I walked into that room. Just saw that they had practically torn up everything in there. They knew, and they really had total control of the room. Because I don't know, maybe it was the first week I was there, maybe it was after that, I remember one of the students, the teachers came down wanted chalk or staples or something. The students knew exactly where to look for it but I had no idea. They had really taken over in there.

AH: How would you assess race relations now in Durham?

RC: I don't think anybody's talking to each other. And I think that's the big difference, that's the big difference. I think also too that instead of just leaving it all to the schools, I think maybe the churches need to be doing more. There needs to be more visiting back and forth with each other. I know some churches do that but I don't think nearly enough of them do.

AH: Do you mean home visits?

RC: No, I mean church visits, church visits or whatever. Well I'm sure, now like if you teach, if you teach, or if you work, I'd think most of your co-workers you'd invite to your house. Now surely nobody thinks about now is this person black, or is this person Chinese or is this person whatever. I think people are accepting on that level. Certainly as your friend not necessarily looking at them as to what race they are. I hope not anyway. I just, that just needs to be more open talking than what has been. Durham, I've always said Durham has money; Durham has talent; Durham has education; Durham has materials; they have all those things. They're just not being directed the right way. Now don't ask me how all of that needs to be directed or to be handled. I just think they have far more resources than some places have that are doing a better job and getting all these things carried out. It seems like.

AH: When you came to Durham, sort of just backtracking a little, where did you settle in the city?

RC: When we came to Durham, I lived on Gary Street, which runs between Main Street and Miami Boulevard. I was very close to Y.E. Smith School. As I said, I got married and we purchased a little, a small brick house on that street.

AH: What was the ethnic make-up of your, of the neighborhood?

RC: Uh.

AH: Do you still live--?

RC: No, I don't still live there now. All white in that area. And it was like families. Most of the people there had children or a couple of them I think their children were grown. But it was like families there. Young families or families that had kids that were like middle to high school in that area.

AH: And from there where did you move too?

RC: Then I was divorced, or I separated, and I moved to Ruffin Street. And my daughter and I got an apartment there and that is off of Duke Street. It is closer to Northgate Mall. That area there was all white when we moved. That was in 1977 although maybe even then, I'm not sure--Green Street, which Ruffin Street ran from Green Street to Crossclub Boulevard and ended up somewhere over there. But along Green Street there were some black families in that area in duplexes or whatever in that area. So I stayed there until--let me see, I don't know exactly when I--another single parent and I purchased a duplex together, which I don't know how you survive after divorce unless you just do something like that. And so

we purchased a duplex out near Willowdale Shopping Center and moved about thirteen years ago, whatever that would be, about '85 I guess was when we moved there. That neighborhood initially was all white when we were there too. And four years after that I moved to my current address on Stonewall Way and that's town houses right near North Duke Mall. Right across the street are apartments. That neighborhood is mixed. That neighborhood is mixed. It was with and a lot of them were older retired people. I know right across from me is a retired schoolteacher. Now there are, there is a young black girl right next door to me. I don't know if she works for the bank or whatever. But that's the type of population is there. And the apartments across the street, they are mixed. But again I think it's black-white. I don't think we're dealing with Orientals, Hispanics. I think it's a black-white population in both cases where I'm talking about.

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

AH: Okay, I wanted to see if I could get a little bit more information about your teaching experience here in Durham.

RC: All right, I taught five years at North Durham. The population there was both black and white. It was also during this time that the system was going through the Federal guidelines of balancing the races in the schools. In 1975, they closed to North Durham School and I transferred to Fayetteville Street School. Fayetteville Street School at that time, in compliance with these Federal guidelines, was paired with another school. So the kids from the Fayetteville Street area were bussed over to Club Boulevard, which is off of Roxboro Road and Club Boulevard and near Northgate Shopping Center. Fayetteville Street is down below North Carolina Central University. So and then the white children from the Club Boulevard area were bussed over to Fayetteville Street. Now you would have a balance in there. And you would have white students in there in '75 and '76 but that really didn't work well. Parents were not happy with that. And you had people moving out of Durham, out of Durham County. And consequently when I left Fayetteville Street in 1980, I had probably taught two years with virtually all black classes. And when I moved in 1980 to Holloway Street, we had black-white population. But by the time we moved over here in 1995, there'd been many times when I had had virtually all black classes. I may have had one or two white students or I may have had a Hispanic student but for the most part it was a large black population in that area.

AH: So back then--

RC: By back then you mean, '70, '75, 1980?

AH: Yeah, your experience had been primarily with black students?

RC: Oh, we integrated in Virginia in 19--let's see I left there in 1967--so we had integrated the schools in Virginia prior--and Prince William County which is Manassas we had integrated there before I left. So I had had experience with black students but again that was juniors, juniors in high school. I believe the year that we integrated, I had all juniors in high school. You had a serious population of students who really wanted to learn. You also had that same serious population of students in 1970, 1975. And because the black parents--I guess if you hear all these stereotypical things and you believe a lot of that stuff until you're in it and you see it's not true--because you had black parents that had the same goals

and aspirations for their children but the white children did. They wanted them to do well in school. They wanted them to bring home a good report card. They wanted them to achieve so they could go on to some other level to go to college, to go to high school, to go whatever. Now I'm not necessarily seeing all of that here. I don't think anybody seems to be pushing these kids anymore. Because if you would bring the parents in, they would really make sure those kids straightened up. Now I don't see as much of that.

AH: But as part of your Durham experience in the schools would you say that by and large you've taught more black students than white--

RC: Oh I'm pretty sure it's more--yeah I think the population has been more black students than white.

AH: Okay--

RC: Without a doubt.

AH: Sort of looking back at that prior experience, how would you say that the school community has changed in terms of the student population? Who makes up the student population?

RC: How has it changed? Well, there's more black population. Now we're getting Hispanics into the schools. I have two Hispanic students this year. Last year, now I had the same kid three years in a row. Because I was a fourth grade teacher and then I retained him and had him in fourth grade another year and then I had fifth grade and he was a fifth grade student. I've had three or four Hispanic students. I don't feel like I've been overloaded in any way as far as that goes with students like that.

AH: So three or four over the course of three years?

RC: Um hmm.

AH: How would you define--what makes, and I think you've touched upon this, what makes a strong school community in your opinion?

RC: I think a strong school community is one that really supports the school and one that is really interested in education. I think in this particular area, in Northeast Central Durham, our parents are so overloaded with other problems that it's really hard for them to focus on their children.

AH: What types of problems specifically?

RC: Well, jobs, drugs, probably a lack of education on their part. Being able to get to jobs and things that they want or need. Not knowing how to get the services that they need. I'm glad that there are, well with the Hispanics I know that they've got, I don't know what they are called coordinators or

something like that, that can help them with that. I think sometimes the other parents just don't know exactly where to go. But I believe Edgemont Community has tried to help them like that so that they can get the service they need or the children can get the service they need. I see that as a real lack. But again I think it goes back to the fact of what I see is a lack of hope. When I moved like from Fayetteville Street School where you had upper class population, a middle class population, and then you move over to Holloway and you had people that were in the low socio-economic population and what they seem to lack is hope. "Am I going to get out of this? It's going to always be like this. No, it's not going to change." Instead of realizing that yes you can. Things can be different. Instead of just giving up. That's what I think is really difficult with that.

AH: How before sort of looking more at the routine or influence on these school s specifically. What are your general feelings just about the increase in the Latino population here as a whole?

RC: I don't really have any problem with that. The children that I've had seem to want to learn. Parents are supportive. They've been in. Except for this one case I had but the mother deserted that family. And then the father was working out of town so that made it really difficult for that child. I don't know how I would've felt if I had been in a foreign country; couldn't speak the language; and something like that had happened to me. So I'm sure all the problems we had with him were a lot of it was precipitated by that. Now with my others, if I called the parents in they'd come. They are supportive. I could always count on getting their papers back when I sent them home to be signed. They've been very supportive. And also this school too, we had a Hispanic coordinator here. She's just--

AH: Rosanna Perez?

RC: Yeah, Ms. Perez. But she just quit you know and went to work somewhere else with housing. So I don't know exactly the title of where she is working. But I mean that was very good. We did, we had a wonderful fiesta dance last December. And the teachers, the whites, the Spanish, the blacks, all came out and participated with that. A covered dish dinner, the piñatas, the dances, it was really great, really great. I think it was a good education for children who were not really familiar with what the Hispanics did and some of their customs were. It was a wonderful learning thing. And I think everybody really enjoyed it. I think that with Ms. Perez gone, somebody else is really going to have to take that up. Particularly teachers now are overwhelmed with all they have to do. I don't know exactly what is going to

be happening in that line. Because, I mean, I'm sure when you were talking with Ms. Wagstaff they were doing language studies where the Hispanics and the blacks came together so they could learn each other's language. I think it's great. That was something that was great.

AH: So what does it mean now that she's gone? What type of impact does that have on this place in terms of trying to bridge these cultural differences? Not just among the staff but parents as well--

RC: I don't know. I don't really know what is happening with that because that's just occurred here in the last couple of weeks. But I really think they need somebody to fill that spot. In my opinion that was very beneficial because number one she could speak the language. She could deal with the parents. And again how would you feel if you were in a foreign country and you could not speak the language and here was somebody that could help you with those issues who could speak the language, could tell you what was happening at the school. Because sometimes I have to get one of my little boys to translate for me when I call one of my parents to see why her child is not at school. And so he can translate for me and let her know why I'm calling because usually it's to see why they're not at school. So it's--and but I couldn't call on Perez. See heretofore you could say "Ms. Perez, I need you to call such and so parents and I need to find out why they're not at school today. It could be that he's sick. It could be that he missed the bus. It could be any number of reasons." So I don't know but to me it's going to be a real loss for us because I think we were making real progress there. We had bilingual PTA meetings, said in English and then Ms. Perez or Ms. Shaw translated it.

AH: Who's Ms. Shaw?

RC: Ms. Shaw is our English as a Second Language teacher. So I mean we were providing that service for our Hispanic families. And I just hope that we don't get lost to long off track on that.

AH: Is Ms. Shaw the only ESL?

RC: We have her and we just recently got one I think that's half time over here. I'm not sure of her name. But from what I understand, that person is fluent in French, not in Spanish which doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

AH: That doesn't help you [inaudible]--

RC: No but, that's sort of how the school system does things. That's why you wonder sometimes why we don't make the progress we make. But I don't know, I have not met the lady so I don't know. I

shouldn't, that's not exactly fair I guess. That's what I've heard so it's not really a good thing for this particular school, which needs all of the attention that it can get. Our children need all the attention that they can get. As I said I think they feel like there is no hope and that's what we have to stress the most. That you can be successful, you can be something. You can go places and you can be as smart as anybody else in the system. That's what I always tell them.

AH: I think again we've covered a little bit of this but I just wanted to see if I could get a sense from you in terms of just the overall impact that Latino students here have made on Eastway as a whole. As far as demographically in terms of how teaching approaches, interactions between the students. What's your sense of all of that in the three years that you've been here and the three years that the school's been here?

RC: Personally, I feel very fortunate because mine have all been working together very well. I find my regular students versus Hispanic students are really protective. Because I have one little girl that moved in from Mexico that does not speak any English but is picking up things pretty rapidly. But if I forget to give her something in terms of what we are working on in class, there is always one child that says, "You left Sophia out. You didn't give Sophia something Ms. Clayton." I also have found too that I can put the students together with my Hispanic students for them to read together or to work together and they're really protective and work with them. I've found that out. I've just been real appreciative of that. Yeah, they pretty much--and they'll try to explain the assignments to them so they'll understand it. But what I'm doing with the little girl that just came straight from Mexico here is to get my one who was born in Brownsville, Texas but also with a Hispanic family, get him to translate to Sophia and let her do some of her lessons in Spanish. Because like her writing a story, letting her write it in Spanish and then we translate it back. And I think some of the classes have more Hispanic students in them. Some teachers have no background at all in Spanish. I took two years in college of Spanish, I mean Spanish in college so I could get a BA degree instead of a BS degree. But I would not have been taking anymore Spanish. I mean growing up in Madison County, the only foreign language, extra language we had in school, was Latin. So I didn't have any foreign language until I got to college. That was two years of Spanish. So I have a little background there, not only of the language but of some of the customs and history and things like that, that I can draw on. Whereas some of the other teachers may have had all French or whatever. I think that's

more of a problem for them. But we have some good students around here. Hispanic students who can translate and we know who to call on. Or the other teachers know who to call on. I have Juan in my class so usually he can take care of it for me. And sometimes he gets called out. And last year Ugo would get called out to the other classes to work with students. So he could translate for them or explain the assignment to the child so they would know what they were doing if it was a math assignment or whatever. And that would also give them a real sense of being somebody. Because I call them my interpreter or my translator or whatever else. Thank goodness they are there with that.

AH: Are there other things--in essence would you say that your teaching style has changed somewhat because of--?

RC: No. I think the only thing that has changed our teaching style somewhat is dealing with the testing. No, not for me. For me, it makes it more interesting. Because I had a girl who was born in Los Angeles but her family was from El Salvador. So I mean to me what can I get from them that I can share with the class. So her grandmother would send in homemade bread and things like this that they did in their family. We would talk about those kinds of things or so several times while I had her, her grandmother sent in homemade bread to share with the class. I've been wanting to get someone to come in and show me how they cut that tissue paper in Mexico because it's so beautiful and so intricate. So but then again we hopped onto, we've got to pass these end of the grade tests. We've got to get test scores up. We haven't had as much time for that lately since we've been concentrating on test scores. But that's the kinds of things that I would like to do. I think when you ask the parents to do those kind of things, they will do it. You just can't say, "Oh no they're not doing anything." Because you haven't asked, if you ask you can usually get some response back. I find that.

AH: You mentioned Ms. Perez is now gone--

RC: Yes--

AH: Are there any other concrete things that Eastway has done to try to adapt to the changing school population?

RC: Well, I mentioned the PTA. And then again, I'm sure Ms. Wagstaff told you about where the parents came in to work together on learning language. They did that last year or year before last, maybe last year. I really don't know right off hand. And then we have a full-time--not every school, I believe, has

a full-time ESL teacher--we have a full-time ESL teacher here. There's one and a half. So we've done that. I really don't know of anything else right now.

AH: Would you, probably an obvious question, but you would say that these different strategies for coping or dealing with these changes has been successful?

RC: I think so. I think we are very fortunate that we have had the adults working together over here. I think we are very fortunate that we translate our PTA meetings because we have a good turnout of the families for our meetings. Any PTA meeting or general meeting that we have over here, we have a good turnout of the Hispanic families, mothers and fathers. I think that's very good for everybody. So I believe it's going to be very successful.

AH: So to your knowledge, there's been no, I guess, even remote instances of conflict or misunderstanding between black students, Latino students--?

RC: I think there is from time to time for that. I have not really had a bad situation with it in my room, that's all I can say. Some of the others it may be. But you know what? It's just like most other things. They'll call each other names or whatever but then if you're going to pick someone for the softball team or the soccer team or to play soccer with you or whatever, then you're going to pick that person whether you're black, white or Hispanic. So I just think that probably this is just the way things develop. I mean, when I had Ugo, I just loved to watch him kick that soccer ball around. I really wanted him to get out there and teach everybody but he balked at it more than they did because, I don't know. He could've really, he could've done that. It just varies from time to time because sometimes they're very accepting and other times they're not. But I always try to stress when it's like something new no matter whether it's black, white or Hispanic is it's something that you are going to learn from. This is the way they do it in their country so we want to see how that's done. Or this is the way that some people would say it and we would say it this way. Just go like that. This is the way that some people fix food and we would do it a different way. So that they could learn.

AH: What type of, we had talked about the importance of recognizing difference, are there also commonalities between Latino and black students that you've seen that are equally as important to emphasize?

RC: I think it's just true with anybody they want to learn. They want to be successful. They want to do well. They want friends. One of my black students was asking one of the Hispanic students today "are we still friends." So I went over and said something and I forgot what I said and the black student said "but we are friends. He's been my friend. I just want to be sure that he's still my friend." So I think that's true with any of them. I'm sure there are classrooms that probably have more problems with this than others. There are some classrooms that probably have students in there, that maybe all of their students don't speak English. They are coming right straight from Mexico or coming right straight from families where they have only heard the Spanish language. Instead of, I'm really lucky that I have Juan who can usually translate. He can translate from his mother too if I call there. He can translate for his mother. A number of them are doing that.

AH: Do you find yourself sometimes using Spanish in the classroom or do you try to--?

RC: If I do it's very simple little words or little phrases.

AH: But do you feel that it is important to for teachers to do that--?

RC: Oh yes, very definitely. Because I had them to write the other day what they knew about Christmas, Kwanzaa and Hanukkah. So of course for Sophia I had to say, or Juan was up there translating for her and I used Feliz Navidad so she'd know I was talking about Christmas. So very little simple phrases if I know. If not, we ask Juan or we ask Sophia to tell us what the Spanish word is for something. Sophia even though she doesn't speak English, she has read a book in Spanish to the class. My teacher assistant also had her one day to read. A lot of the library books are English on one page, Spanish on another. One day when I was out, the teacher assistant had them to read. She read the English page. Sophia read the Spanish page. The kids love that, just love that. "Sophia read to us yesterday, she read to us in Spanish." And that's also a good way to pick up on some of the words. I've always stressed even as a part of my language class where our words come from. We don't have American. We have words that have come from all over the world. So quite often we will just make lists of words we have gotten from Spanish or French or Native Americans or African or Arabic or whatever else. So they can see that you are part of a whole lot of different things.

AH: I think of Eastway as being sort of at the center of the community and that you guys do a lot of or host a lot of community groups and things like that. How do you feel that Eastway in terms of its

diversity, what type of lessons do you think the school can teach the larger Durham community, more specifically Northeast Central Durham about diversity?

RC: How to get along with each other and to accept each other. To look for the best in each group that you are dealing with and see what they have to offer. Use all the good qualities of the people that you are working with. Don't spend so much time putting down or complaining, or complaining about what you don't have. Use what you've got and make that strong is what I think they need to really emphasize right there.

AH: Do you think there's one concrete thing or specific thing that Latino parents and black parents could do within the context, or outside of I guess--let me rephrase that--Is there one specific thing that you could cite which would improve race relations that Latinos and blacks could do?

RC: Well, I don't know exactly how, it would have to be some kind of activity like where they could work together and really realize that they are all working for the same thing, for the betterment of their children. But it's very hard to be accepting of that especially when I think that some of the black families are now feeling threatened because they feel like some of the jobs are going to the Hispanics. So therefore, they will be taken away from them. So I think it's hard. Maybe eventually if you've got the Hispanic Center here and you've got the Edgemont Center here and some of these other centers maybe they eventually can draw together and draw people together.

AH: What is the Edgemont Center?

RC: Edgemont, I think is uh, uh, I don't, I think I should say, um at Holloway, and I believe they still have it set up there at that--it's a center over in the housing project in Few Gardens. I do know that a lot of the children go there in the afternoon to work to get their homework, to have somebody to watch over them and go over their homework and things like that. Now what they do with the adults, I really don't know.

AH: And Few Gardens is not that far?

RC: Few Gardens is across the street. No. It's right across the street. When you come into the entrance of Eastway on Taylor Street, on the other side are the housing projects there. And I know a lot of people have worked with the people of that neighborhood. Also there's usually been a coordinator over there that has worked with the school. But no one has called me recently because we're all functioning

pretty well over here in this room this year. But usually if there's a child that's having problems and is having problems over there in that area then the coordinator would call and find out what they could do and how they could work with them or whatever. But I haven't had anyone like that this year.

AH: I understand that you're going to be retiring soon?

RC: Yeah, I should retire in July of '99.

AH: How do you feel about that?

RC: Retiring?

AH: Yeah.

RC: Well I thought, I always thought I probably would not want to. That I would always want to keep working. But now, I don't know whether it's just because I've gotten to that age where I can retire or whether it really is getting more difficult in the schools where I don't seem like I enjoy it as much. But then again that may be going back to that testing issue with end of grade tests. You're so stressed out about trying to get kids grades pulled up and things like that that you have lost a little bit of the pleasure of trying to teach kids a whole lot of knowledge but not necessarily if it's not on the test. That's why we have to do that first before we do anything else. I don't exactly feel sad. I know I'll have to do something where I've still got some contact with people. Now whether it'll be, I don't think I'll substitute because I don't want that name attached to me because when you come in the classroom now, that's not a good thing. Not a good thing.

AH: Students don't respect that.

RC: Not usually. And so but I really thought maybe I could tutor a child a couple days a week. Or if Eastway would stay on the year around schedule, then I could come in and teach during intersession because I have said all along they should have retired teachers teaching intersession so that the regular teachers could have a full three weeks off. I think that would be the best thing to do. I wouldn't mind doing that just like to have some contact back with teaching. Because I really have enjoyed my teaching career and my time and just enjoyed so many of the students that I've had and the things that I've done with them.

AH: We've come to the conclusion of the interview--

RC: Oh.

AH: One final thing though, is there anything that we haven't talked about regarding education or anything else you'd like to add?

RC: I don't really think so. I just hope I've been helpful for you and that you can use some of this. Because as I've said I've enjoyed my experiences and I really think that I've had real varied life as far as education is concerned and the experiences that I've had. I don't feel like I've always been stuck in a rut where everything has been the same or the populations that I've dealt with have been the same. And I really think I've learned a lot from the population that I've dealt with. I think in some ways it's unfortunate a lot of the people, no matter what background they are, have not had the chance to meet and see and observe in lots of ways people are alike in so many ways. And our differences are much smaller than our likenesses are. So I have really enjoyed it. And I'm glad that you asked me to be part of your interview because I've really enjoyed this.

AH: Well thank you on behalf of the Southern Oral History program, I'd like to thank you very much for your time and your participation. Thank you very much.

RC: Thank you.