

Interview

with

Leda Dimperio

June 17, 2005

by Willoughby Anderson

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

LEDA DIMPERIO
JUNE 17, 2005

WILLOUGHBY ANDERSON: Today is Friday June 17, 2005. I'm here with Leda Dimperio at her home in Birmingham and we are doing an interview for the Southern Oral History Program's Long Civil Rights Movement project on school desegregation in Birmingham. The interviewer's name is Willoughby Anderson. If you could please say your full name we'll see how you are picking up on the microphone.

LEDA DIMPERIO: Leda Dimperio.

WA: Alright then let's get started, if you could tell me a little bit about where you were born, what neighborhood you grew up in, if you were born in Birmingham, and a little bit about your childhood and your elementary school.

LD: I was born in Uruguay, South America and we moved around a lot. I went to school in Montevallo, which is near Birmingham and then we moved back to Uruguay and I went to school for three years there; I learned Spanish and then we moved back and settled in the Pinson area, which is where my mother is from. I went to school at the brand new Rudd Junior High School. During my eighth grade year, with six weeks left in the school year we moved to the Southside area, so I went to Glenn Iris for six weeks. That was my first introduction into the public school system; it had mostly been county schools prior to that.

WA: Tell me a little bit about your six weeks at Glenn Iris.

LD: It was a huge change just because Rudd had been a brand new school, nice carpet, brand new books, elevators and new lockers with combinations that worked. It was just a really nice school, it had a beautiful gym, we had the best equipment and it was fun. I enjoyed going to school there. When we moved to Glenn Iris, the school was an older building without air

conditioning or lockers, just a change. I adjusted fine; the students were really nice to me. I met new friends and some of them went on to Ramsey with me. It was just a change in location, but the people were still nice.

WA: You came back to the Pinson area in the mid-

LD: The late 1970s, 1978 or 1979. That was a change in itself, because in Uruguay the school systems are different. The economic situation is different; you have upper class and lower class, but no middle class. So I came from a school where we only went to school for a half day, there were two shifts. Everyone wore a uniform which is becoming common now here. There were no extracurricular activities after school was out, the main focus was education and there education system was very good. We missed a lot of school moving back and forth due to the season changes, we were either here for the summer or in Uruguay for the summer when we would move, so we missed a good year of school. When we came back, two years later in high school we were doing work that I had already learned in the Uruguayan system.

WA: What was your family doing to be moving back and forth?

LD: My dad is from Uruguay, he was in the military. When he was here he was a television repairman, he had a shop and he worked for different people. He wanted us to move to Uruguay, so we lived there a couple of years. Then he decided he needed to come back here and work, while we stayed there. Then my mom's dad got sick and she wanted to come home and stay to be with her family, so we moved back to Pinson. He just liked to travel, we actually drove to Uruguay.

WA: Wow.

LD: From Montevallo to Uruguay, through the Panama Canal and up and down the Andes. He was and still is an adventurer.

WA: You came to the Pinson area in the late 1970s, what do you remember from that time about desegregation of the Birmingham public schools? Do you remember hearing about the policies for desegregating the schools? Do you remember it being in the newspapers at all?

LD: No. I was pretty clueless. It didn't matter to me and I didn't even know anything about it. I think we had some history on it but, it wasn't part of my life.

WA: So, then you started at Ramsey High School in 1981 and you were a freshman, and how old were you?

LD: Yes, I was sixteen.

WA: Why did you enroll at Ramsey?

LD: That's where we were, the Southside area, which was basically one of my only choices. My friends were going there and my mom thought that was where I should go.

WA: When you enrolled did you know about Ramsey's history about desegregation and when it was desegregated?

LD: No.

WA: No?

LD: No, I was clueless, I really had no idea.

WA: So what was the racial makeup of the student body when you first got there?

LD: I would say it was fifty-fifty pretty much throughout my four years, I don't remember there being any one group more populous than another.

WA: Was that also the case for teachers and the administrative staff?

LD: The teachers, I would say they were more white. There were more white teachers than black teachers. There was a German teacher; there was a diverse group just like the students. We had a lot of, not a lot but we had students that came here to live that weren't from here while their

parents were studying at UAB [University of Alabama at Birmingham], so we already had a good little mix of different people from India, Pakistan, Lebanon and Asia. There were not a lot of Oriental people, but a few Oriental people in my class. It wasn't just white and black; you could already see other races.

WA: Ramsey was drawing from the Southside area, did students tend to be of any particular social class or was it mixed economically?

LD: It was mixed economically. My mom worked two jobs, my parents had divorced. We did not have a lot of money and I was on the lunch programs, we got free lunches and some of my friends were very wealthy. Some of them lived in the beautiful big homes up here, not on the Mountain brook side but on the Birmingham side. It was a good mix, and not just with the white population, there were some black kids that were very wealthy too. A lot of our politician's children went to Ramsey, so there was a good mix.

WA: To the extent that you can recall, tell me about your first few days starting at Ramsey High School.

LD: I was nervous because I didn't know anyone, but I'm used to that because we traveled and I am used to going to schools and being the new kid. I fell in love with the school within two days. We went to take the tests; they showed me where to go. The school was old, but it was just a beautiful building. It was very hot. I remember the windows being open; it was very hot and humid. One of my best friends, who is still my best friend today sat in front of me. I tended to sit in the back. She turned around and introduced herself and she was very professional. I just thought she was the coolest because she turned around and stuck out her hand and said, "Hi, my name is Pam Jakeaway what is your name?" From that point we became friends and we are still friends today. I do remember a mix of kids, black, white-see and that's probably the first time I

saw a really good mix of black and white together. There were black students where I had always gone to school, but not as many as there were at Ramsey. So I did notice that. It didn't really bother me; I just thought it was a new adventure. I fell in love with the school instantly, and had a wonderful four years there.

WA: Great. So tell me a little bit about the classes that you were taking.

LD: At first I just took the basics, what we were supposed to take. I didn't get into the advanced placement classes as the normal classes were hard enough. I also took Spanish because I thought it would be easy, but knowing how to speak it and then learning the fundamentals from the beginning was hard. I enjoyed it; I really enjoyed my Spanish teacher. I took business classes. That was my focus mostly, the management classes and I wanted to work with DECA. In the beginning my main classes were just what you were supposed to take.

WA: What's DECA?

LD: It was a business club and we would compete with other schools in things like advertising or management. It was a club but we did also have classes that prepared you. We did Robert's Rules, which was my first experience learning Robert's Rules. Eventually I became President of that group.

WA: Was that your senior year?

LD: Yes, that was my senior year.

WA: Tell me more about that, did you have to run and campaign?

LD: No, no running. It was just the group getting together and they voted. That was it, it was easy.

WA: So how big was the group?

LD: About forty or fifty people were in the group. I remember I was shy too, even though I

was President I was shy and I would always let the Vice President, Charles Jeeter take over the meetings.

WA: Was that group pretty diverse?

LD: Yes it was. There were a lot of my friends in there too.

WA: Will you tell me about some of your friends in the group?

LD: Sure, I like everyone. I don't remember having any bad feelings towards any of the students. There was an upper classman I didn't like just because she had dated the guy I was dating at the time, I didn't even know her but you know. [laughs] In my class I pretty much kept the same friends that I met as a freshman throughout the years. They were diverse. My freshman year I had a boyfriend who was a junior, he was very popular. He kind of showed me around the school my freshman year, introduced me to different people and told me which teachers not to take or to take, general stuff like that. We only dated my freshman year. Then after that I never did date anyone else that I went to school with, so everything was just a friendship. All the guys were my friends and buddies, the same with the girls. I did meet more, or I got to know better my classmates as the four years passed, but mostly I still had the same core friends.

WA: Do you think that your experience was pretty typical in terms of being friends with lots of different people?

LD: Yes I think so.

WA: Talking about dating, was there much interracial dating?

LD: I did go out with a couple of my classmates that were black. We would go to the movies; we would do a few things. Not date, not hot and heavy but there were crushes. I don't think so, there wasn't too much of that going on. In that area it was still pretty much white/black. In my personal experience I had crushes on two or three fellow classmates.

WA: Let me ask you about your teachers, you said you had a Spanish teacher who was a favorite teacher. Will you tell me about him or her?

LD: One reason I liked her was because she was a native from South America, so we already had that connection of her being Hispanic. So, that's why I liked her and she was very friendly. She was hard, she was not easy. I spent a lot of time with her because I became active in the Spanish club and had her for homeroom a couple of times. I just knew her because of that Hispanic connection. I loved her accent, she sounded like my dad.

WA: Did you have any least favorite teachers?

LD: No not really, they were all very nice. Probably Miss Lee, she was very tough but I enjoyed her class. At the time I was involved in this church that we had to take a week out of school that was not during a normal vacation time, and she had a hard time with me leaving. She was not very accommodating with my being gone for a week and giving me assignments, so my grades kind of slipped in that class. All the other teachers gave me assignments and let me catch up, but she wouldn't let me be gone for a week. She was kind of hard on that, so in that regard that was the only person I did not care for, but she was a great teacher. In my senior year I ended up being in the school play for the first time and she was over that and I just had a blast in that class, it was so much fun doing that. So, you get over it.

WA: Our next question is about how teachers felt about desegregation, if you could tell whether they had any attitudes about being at Ramsey or the student body.

LD: No, I couldn't tell. We really didn't discuss it, the main focus was education. Ramsey was a really good school; you had to take a test to get in there in the first place. A lot of kids wanted to go to Ramsey, so we were lucky enough just to be there. The teachers were really focused on school, I didn't see any problems that way or even any discussions, whether general

or specific about desegregation. It just didn't come up.

WA: Did you have the sense that desegregation was something that was in Ramsey's past that there was a period of transition but by the time you got there it was-

LD: Right, by the time I was there it was history. That was part of the past and it didn't have anything to do us at the time. I was very proud of our class; I thought we were a cool group of students. We kind of took over the school and did so many great things that I didn't see any of that. To me that was something that happened when my mom was a kid and it was just bizarre. We learned about it and we studied it like everybody else does, but I didn't look at my classmates like, "Wow, you're black: should I be going to school with you?" I didn't think anything of it.

Then again, moving back and forth from South America - South Americans were prejudiced against us because they didn't like Americans, some of the kids. So I kind of grew up being a little different anyway, no matter where I went. When I came to Pinson they introduced me as the Hispanic student and asked me to speak Spanish and I did. I tried to fit in; I still spoke English with a Southern accent so I wasn't that different. I kind of know what it feels like to be either an outcast or part of the group just because of your race, so to me that was the way I grew up. I didn't know about not being able to be in the same class with a black person or not having friends that were black or Indian or whatever. From my personal experience it was no big deal, I just did not sense that. Even the fights that broke out during school, I remember the first fight I ever witnessed was between two white girls over some guy. There were no black/white fights; there may have been problems but nothing like the past. To me that didn't matter, we had our own goals and missions and it didn't include being prejudiced. I didn't get it. I understood the past and I understood what happened, but it wasn't the focus, and I don't think the teachers focused on it. Some of my classmates may have different opinions but in my world of that period

it wasn't an issue.

WA: So tell me about some of the things that your class did. You sound very proud of the things that your class accomplished, will you tell me about some of those?

LD: We had a lot of organized dances at Highland club with diverse music. Some of the classes would dress up like Tina Turner and Cyndi Lauper and do performances. We didn't have a football team, so our school was different in that respect. Everybody else had homecoming and had all these great things planned and we really didn't have anything. There was a tradition of harvest week and they had different things planned to make up for the lack of some of these things. The teachers were really great about it, they actually organized it and it has been going for years. It's not like we invented harvest week, but it just seemed like we had skits and things that went on that the kids were great at doing and we just had so much fun planning it and the parties were great. We organized our skip day and got it approved, most of the class participated. We organized trips to the beach as a group, and it was black and white. It wasn't just the white people going to the beach and the black people going somewhere else, we went coordinated. I just think our class was really cool and I think it had to do with the fact that class was half black and half white, there was no major group and I think that had a lot to do with the balance. If you look through the yearbook, the class presidents, and the ! who's who is a really good mix and I think that really symbolized the way our class was. We did a lot of things. I think the play that we did was really good.

WA: What was it?

LD: *Bye Bye Birdie*. I didn't have a major part, mine was just a small behind the scenes part but it was a good experience. We had a beautiful auditorium that I hear is in dire need for repair, and I would hate to see that not get rebuilt where students can't get in there. I have heard that it

has been blocked off. Our senior class was discussing what to do with some money we had left over and Ryan Thomas, the president of our class reunion committee, said we should give the money to the high school for repairs. I thought that was a really good idea, and maybe for our twenty fifth we should try to get more money to help and suggest to other classes to do the same so we can repair Ramsey. It is an old school and I hate to hear that because the auditorium was gorgeous. It was hot again, it was the end of the year and the windows were up. We could just jump out the windows and go to Southside if we wanted. [laughs]

WA: Tell me a little bit about the Spanish club you said you were in.

LD: We met every now and then; it was not a major thing. We would meet when all the other clubs met and we would plan a little party, dress up and eat Mexican food. [laughs] We spoke in Spanish and it was-to me that wasn't one of the highlights that I remember from the club. I felt like I had to do it because I had started in it. [laughs] I had to be there. Some of the other clubs had more fun probably, but it was simple. We just got together; we didn't plan anything major or do any major trips or anything.

WA: What other extracurricular activities did you do if anything, because you have already talked about a lot?

LD: I was on the volleyball team, which I am very proud of because we went to the state championships. We didn't win that year, but they did the year after I graduated. Coach Fiorella was an awesome coach and I understand she is still there. She worked us very hard, we were great. We just beat everybody all over the state. I was proud of that because we would go to Huntsville and different towns and play teams that you could see had a lot of money. They were nice schools; their gyms were just incredible with the latest technology and equipment. They had the best balls, nicest floors and their nets didn't have any holes in them. Their uniforms were

impeccable and they had extra clothes to change into and they had matching shoes. This was in the mid 1980s, not like today with the matching teams, back then you didn't have all that. You had to get your own shoes and if they matched great, but it wasn't like a coordinated effort. That was the beginning, when they had the entire outfits matching. It didn't matter though, we were still better. We had some top notch players, very tall and very athletic. I was considered one of the shorter players, I was the setter and I am five foot six inches tall, we had girls that were six feet tall. We worked very hard, we worked all summer long. I remember the four hour practices in the morning, then the lunch break and then back to four more hours of practice in the afternoon in our hot gym with no air conditioning, just the fans. [laughs] We had a great team and we had a wonderful time. That was one of the highlights, I remember that.

I also cheered, I was a cheerleader. Cheerleaders actually cheered for the volleyball team, like I said there was no football team. That's what I mean, our school was kind of unusual in that we had an awesome volleyball team. So the school kind of followed the volleyball program rather than the basketball team at the time. I had to play ball over cheerleading that was the priority. I was very active, I got into whatever I could and I enjoyed it.

WA: Tell me about some of the school traditions at Ramsey.

LD: Well, like that harvest week. That was awesome, we had the dance and they had Mr. and Miss Harvest and I think it was my senior year that I was Miss Harvest Queen. We had a big ball and dance at the Highland Racquet Club which was great. I really don't remember any of the other school traditions.

WA: What about school colors or mascot, that kind of stuff?

LD: Oh yeah, blue and white and the ram. We had a song and we would sing. I remember at the end of the year they had a slideshow and the choir sang and then the student body sang the

class song, and most everybody knew it. That's about it. I don't remember some of the past traditions from when it was one of the top notch schools in the city during the 1940s and the 1950s. Even today I notice that they are still planning class reunions for the class of 1958 and the early 1950s. They are still active.

WA: Wow, are they active all the way through like the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s?

LD: No, probably during the 1960s there is a jump. There is a Ramsey reunion website that you can go to and find your classmates; I'm not sure who put it on there. Seems like in the 1960s they kind of laid low and then picked back up in the 1970s. Before that it seems like it was one of the prime school back in the day, in the 1930s and the 1940s.

WA: Have the traditions changed; do you think they were different?

LD: They were probably different, I would say they have probably changed but I am not really sure. I can't really say, but yeah everything changes.

WA: Who was the Principal when you were there?

LD: We had two, Dr. Contra who was a very cool principal. He was short in stature, kind of small, but he was loud and big. [laughs] I think he was very popular. When I graduated Dr. Sheets was principal, I did not know him very well. I did not get into trouble a lot, so I was fortunate that I did not get to see the counselors or the principal that often. [laughs] So I didn't know them on a regular basis. But I do remember Dr. Contra; I just thought he was the coolest principal. He didn't fit the mold of what you think of when you think of a principal. You think of a principal as being real strict, stern and dressing conservatively and he was not like that at all. He was very popular; he was part of the group. Even in the yearbook, I remember in one of the pictures-the yearbook theme was the director, like a movie and he is sitting in one of those chairs with a whip and a hat, playing a character. He could have fun too, so I remember him well. But I

didn't know him personally; I didn't talk to him all the time.

WA: What about discipline at Ramsey, what do you remember? I know you said you did not get into trouble, but what was your perception of other students?

LD: I guess like in any school there were a few kids that were always getting in trouble, I didn't know them very well and it didn't happen that often. I don't remember a lot of people getting suspended. Actually, my younger brother did get in trouble and he got sent to another school for a week. I can't even remember the name of the school, but it was one of those schools that you got sent to when you got into trouble or got suspended. Back then if there were any pregnant students they had to leave.

WA: Oh really?

LD: I understand today you can pretty much go through school pregnant, but back then once they knew something was going on you got sent to another school. So my brother did get in trouble, I remember he was in that little group that did seem to get into trouble. I think they were strict, but I don't think a lot of kids got into trouble. Like I said, it was a privilege to be there to begin with so a lot of the kids wanted to do well. I remember my best friend Ryan one of the first people I met, he already knew that he was going on to West Point. I had no clue whether I would even be in that school for another year and he already had his life planned, and West Point was his goal, and he went to West Point. He was very strict and disciplined and as a freshman he already knew what his path was. He was there to study and do well, and he did. A lot of the students were like that. They were there to learn and have fun, but there were not many troublemakers, there were a few as you would expect, you know the tough cool kids that were smoking pot and drinking at an early age. Even those few, they would do all that and not act up in school and even some that were still great students. [laughs]

WA: So tell me what else were you doing in your life at that time aside from all the extracurricular activities at school. You had mentioned church involvement-

LD: I worked at Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers starting at the end of my freshmen year. I loved it; I got to meet kids from other schools. It was in Crestwood, near Eastwood Mall. That area was happening, people were cruising the mall. So, I got to work with a lot of kids from different schools and it was fun. I had to work, if I wanted to pay for my prom dress. Like I said we didn't have a lot of money, so if we wanted extra-like back then it was Izod, if we wanted the fancy Izod shirt we had to work. Mom couldn't afford to get us those things, so I worked a lot. I worked on the weekends and it was a great job. They knew there were a lot of kids there, so if one group had a prom they would have others cover so you could be off on the weekend. So, I did that and I really enjoyed it. I worked there for several years. So, school and work that was it, and I did have a boyfriend. He also worked at Wendy's and we would do stuff when we got off work. We would either go to the mall or just hang out, so I was busy with him too.

WA: Tell me about the reunion that you just had, your twentieth anniversary reunion and you were involved in planning it right?

LD: Yes. Ryan, myself and a couple of other classmates planned it, we would get together to plan it. We tried to keep it simple and not make it a big deal or too expensive. We met at Embassy Suites for a mixer, then we rented part of Homewood Park and then we had dinner at John's City Diner in downtown Birmingham. It was nice seeing everybody; we pretty much look the same. Maybe a little bit heavier and a little grayer, but everybody looks the same. It was fun because we kind of regressed, back in high school I thought I knew things but I realize now that I didn't know anything. I was very naïve and ignorant. Then going back twenty years and looking back, we just laugh at ourselves for what we used to do, how we used to think and what we used

to wear. It was fun going back. Everybody brought their yearbooks and their memory books; we had memory books because we didn't get our yearbooks until after school. That was another thing we did, we decided to have more of our graduation and things included in our yearbook and have a party in the summer where you would pick up your yearbook. So, because of that we had memory books. We were reading who the favorite bands were and who had a crush on whom and those books called slam books. It was just fun seeing the silly things that we thought were so important back then. Prince and Michael Jackson were very important. [laughs] We played the music and we were just right back there acting silly like we were in high school, it was fun. We had a really good time.

WA: So you had a good turnout?

LD: It wasn't, it was pretty good. I think our class was around one hundred and we probably had thirty-five or forty people. So it was pretty good, even though I was disappointed because a lot of our classmates do live here in town. So we were hoping to get more of a turnout.

WA: Did you have a good cross section of people from all sorts of groups and different races?

LD: Yes. Well there were more black students that came than white. I was very disappointed in some of my friends that couldn't make it, but my good friends were there.

WA: What haven't I asked you about, about your years at Ramsey that you want to talk about?

LD: The first week that I went to Ramsey I did not want to go there, I wanted to go to Homewood. I had met some people in the Homewood area and they were going to Homewood and they talked about it. I didn't even know where Homewood was. I was already upset and I just begged my mom to let me go to Homewood. In fact I talked to my mom the other night and

asked her if I made a big deal out of it and she said that I had a fit over it and I didn't know what I could do, she said you have to live in Homewood. My mom said she felt so bad that there was nothing we could do about it and then the first week that I went to Ramsey I forgot all about it, like it was no big deal. I didn't want to go there at first but then I fell in love with it. I am so glad that I didn't go anywhere else. I enjoyed it and I thought we were a cool class, because of the mix. Going to play other schools in volleyball or going to cheer at other schools we would see the all black school or the all white school. Usually the black schools were like Ramsey, they didn't have a lot. It wasn't a brand new school and it wasn't very fancy. Then going to these all white private schools and seeing everything that they did have was something. Then to see our team, a really good balance with both blacks and whites beat them because it didn't really matter. That's why I think our class was cool because we did have such a good mix of people.

WA: When you were with the volleyball team and you would go to these other schools did you talk about it being an all black school or an all white school? Did you talk about the fact that you were an integrated team and diverse?

LD: Not really, no we didn't talk about it. We would tease ourselves as teammates and play around and you could tell the different types of cheers. You had the white, very conservative cheers and then you had the black funky throw down cool cheers, and we had a mix of both. We could do both and still be cool. We didn't really talk about it and say, "Oh we're better than you because we have black and white or we're better than you because we have some black kids on our team," we didn't do that. From my perspective and my perception of seeing us interact and seeing the other kids, I just thought we were just better. We just knew what was going on. I just felt lucky to have the mix and not just be one way or the other. That's why I said I liked our class, just seeing other schools and how they acted.

WA: The racial balance during your time at Ramsey, was it like that for all the classes, or was it skewing one way or the other in terms of racial balance?

LD: I did not see that in my four years and I don't know. You could ask my younger sister, when I graduated she started as a freshman. I know she didn't particularly enjoy high school much and I don't really know why, I never really discussed it with her. We are older now, so I have not even really thought about it. I do remember being in college and she was just not having a good time in high school. I don't know if that had anything to do with the school or just her or her attitude. From my point of view it was equal the whole time and there was no skewing one way or the other. It may have afterwards and I'm not even sure how it is now.

WA: I was going to ask you to tell me a little bit about Ramsey today.

LD: A couple years after I graduated they invited me back to judge the cheerleading squad and that was probably about three years after I graduated, and I noticed the majority of the cheerleaders were black. There were a lot more black cheerleaders than what we had, so I guess maybe the student body was increasing in the black population as compared to the white population. That's all I saw, and today if I see them I see the scholar athletes in the paper. I tried to see how they are doing, how the volleyball team is doing, the women's basketball team did really great. So I follow that but I have not really been back to the school.

WA: Will you tell me a little bit about what you did after high school, where you went to college and how you came to work for The Racing Commission?

LD: During my senior year I noticed a lot of my classmates had scholarships and were going off to college and I didn't know anything about going to college. My mom didn't go to college; she didn't even finish high school. I was one of the first in my family to actually finish high school, go to college and then graduate from college and I'm proud of that. At the time I

was confused because I didn't know and it didn't dawn on me to talk with a counselor. My grades were good, I just didn't check into going to school. I was kind of hurt and kind of lost at the same time; I didn't know what I was going to do. So, I went to Jeff State. I went there for a year, figured out the financial aide and how it worked and the transferred to UAB. I wound up getting a scholarship and financial aide. I had a great time at UAB also.

WA: So you stayed with your business interests at UAB?

LD: Yes, I studied International Studies and Spanish. Again, Spanish because I thought it would be easy, but it wasn't. It was even harder.

[END OF SIDE A]

LD: So I graduated and worked for a year. I was also involved in extracurricular activities at UAB; I danced for the basketball team. We didn't have a football team at the time, which I thought was weird that I went from one school without a football team to another school without a football team. I was a Golden Girl, we got to cheer. That was great because we got to travel all over the country with the team at their expense. Seeing other colleges and playing in the different arenas was fun. So I enjoyed college too.

Then I worked for a year with a publishing company. I didn't really care for it, I enjoyed the work but it didn't pay well and it was not what I wanted to do. I always wanted to go to Auburn; I have always been an Auburn fan. Some of my friends went to Auburn and I would go and visit while I was at UAB and I felt slighted because they got to go to a fun college that was into sorority and fraternity stuff. UAB at that time was not like that, it was more a school where people came that worked. Auburn accepted me for their MBA program, so I went there. It was very hard, hard adjusting, hard having to pay rent while going to school, the whole thing was

hard. I ended up coming to Birmingham for a summer job because there were no classes I could take at Auburn over the summer, so it would be best if I just didn't stay there. I had this great job here for the summer. Before I went back to Auburn, they [her summer job at the Racing Commission] had just gotten these new computers that nobody really knew how to work them, so I put in a proposal to my boss. Basically the proposal stated that if they hired me I would take over the computers, program and computerize all the daily tasks and I put in there how much money I wanted and then I left. I didn't think they would hire me but they did, and I have been with them ever since.

WA: That's great, are you still doing computers?

LD: Yes I still maintain the computer systems, but I also do other things just because computers are so easy to maintain now and we are such a small group. It's a small company; we regulate the Greyhound track so we take their money and give it to charities, so that's fun. I like that part of the job. We also sponsor horse races around the country. I get to plan those events and go to the races, which is a lot of fun too. Yes, I still maintain the computers.

WA: Okay. Let's sort of finish up with some general questions about school desegregation. The first question is, when you first entered high school what did consider the goals of school desegregation to be?

LD: I thought it was to have a class like ours, a good mix, good balance, fifty-fifty. That's pretty much what I thought.

WA: What about today?

LD: Today I don't think it's an issue. I think it worked and it may still be going on in some areas, as I am not really familiar with it. I don't think it's that big of an issue anymore.

WA: In Birmingham?

LD: In Birmingham.

WA: Why is that?

LD: It happened so long ago, we are so used to it. I just don't think it's that big of a deal. I don't think people really think about it that much. I don't think there are kids today that say they don't want to go to a school because there are black kids, or because there are white kids. I don't really see it that way.

WA: If you had it to do over again would you want to go! to a desegregated school?

LD: I wouldn't have changed going to Ramsey for anything. I wanted to go to Homewood, like I said, but I am so grateful that I went to Ramsey.

WA: How would you weigh the benefits and drawbacks to your having attended a desegregated school?

LD: I feel like I know more about things because I did go to a half white and half black school. Even today, I live downtown and a lot of people question why I moved downtown. They say that downtown is dead, and I say it's not. There are tons of people down here and it's a good mix. My neighbors are black, white, everything and it doesn't bother me; it never has bothered me, why would it now? It didn't bother me as a child, my mom never taught us to be prejudiced. My dad being Hispanic back then that was a big deal, so to me it wasn't ever a big deal. I feel like I am more open to new things and new people than some other people would be. So, I have carried it on. I do like to live and work downtown. A lot of my friends from high school are still my friends and they just happen to be white or black, it's a non-issue. I have other friends, more Hispanic friends now that they have moved into the community. So I see more people that speak my language. To me it's really just been part of my life, I don't know anything else and it has made me who I am, and I am proud to be who I am and how I grew up.

WA: What about the benefits and drawbacks of school desegregation for Birmingham as a whole?

LD: The benefits I think are that the younger generations are not prejudiced, they don't see things the same way that some of the older people do. I notice that even now there are still older black people that are still very prejudiced and sensitive. I am involved in my neighborhood association and there are some older people that have been here forever, and now there is a new younger generation that is getting involved in the neighborhood. The newer group is younger, more civic minded and more eclectic. There was some strife at the first couple of meetings, now it's okay. They did not like change either, they wanted to keep Birmingham the way it was how they knew it. Their attitude was that they didn't want to white people moving back. They felt like they had been doing fine without white people, so why change it. I don't think the younger generation sees it like that, it's not so black and white, it's more gray. It's more economic too I think. It depends on your education and your background. If you have money you are apt to be more educated and more tolerant, that's just my personal view. There are people who are still ignorant and they will always be that way, but I think the majority of the people are starting to realize that it is not that big of a deal anymore. I know Birmingham gets a bad rap, if there is any black and white issue it always seems to point back to Birmingham. I am happy the way things are changing in the city, because there are more diverse people moving in and younger people that don't care about that anymore. That's in the past, we've got stuff to do now and in the future that doesn't have anything to do with that. I think Birmingham has definitely benefited, I think everybody has. I am sure it was hard at the time, I couldn't imagine having to go through that but I do think that Birmingham benefited from it.

WA: Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you want to talk about?

LD: No, not really that's pretty much it.

WA: Well thank you so much.

LD: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed August 2005 by Chris O'Sullivan