

**Start of Tape 1 Side A**

**Melissa Froemming  
February 26, 2001**

Melissa Froemming: This is Melissa Froemming on February 26, 2001, visiting with Ms. Barbara Lorie. We are at Ms. Lorie's house in Pittsboro. We will be speaking as part of the Southern Oral History Program's Desegregation and the Inner Life of Schools Project.

Before we go into what you are doing now, I'd be really interested to hear what led up to you initially teaching. Just basically some of your life history, where you were born, and anything you would like to mention from that point leading up to when you initially began teaching in Chapel Hill. For the record – so that we know where you are coming from.

Barbara Lorie: Right. I was born in Iowa City. My father was the head of surgery at the hospital there. I lived there until I went to prep school, then I went to the University of Iowa. Shortly, I was the original "dropout." I hated it. I was in and out of college for numbers of years and just left finally and worked. I finally got married. My husband and I lived in Palm Beach and that's where I had my children. Eventually, our marriage dissolved and I moved to Chapel Hill to go back to school – to actually finish my undergraduate degree.

MF: At Carolina?

BL: Yeah, at UNC, Carolina. And that was traumatic, because that was let's see, 1958. And Chapel Hill, Carolina, didn't accept women as freshmen, and they barely accepted women in the upper grades. And there was a lot of hostility, and I just didn't understand it. I mean I was sort of, very naive. I was so

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naive when I look back on it, that it's amazing that I survived. But that first year I entered, there was something like two or three hundred women on campus. I think I had one woman professor, Anne Scott, in History, who was absolutely brilliant. And at that time, my former husband committed suicide, so I was absolutely wacko emotionally, and trying to keep myself together, go to school, take care of my children. Somehow survive. Which I did. You know, everybody does, you finally do. And finally in the '60s, it was early '61 I believe it was, that the Greensboro sit-ins started in the dime stores. My family had always had black servants, so I was raised with blacks, I knew blacks, I was comfortable with them. But of course, it was in a very plantation kind of mind. What happened was that simultaneous to my husband committing suicide to coming to a university which was totally segregated, which was so racist, so, and was patriarchal to the endth degree, what happened was that the inside of me changed so radically that I was able to understand these black students in Greensboro. I began to, the whole picture began to open up to me, and when I was – I think it was – I really don't remember the year, let's say '61 or so, somewhere around there, that the students in Chapel Hill began to march. I was standing on Franklin Street right next to the Varsity Theater, where there was a newspaper shop there that had been there forever and ever and ever. I was standing outside that, and these students were coming up the street. I turned to this man, and I said, "What is that all about? What's happening here?" And he said, "Oh, those niggers, you know, the niggers they want something more than they've got." First of all, that word was ( ) in my family, that word was a word that

was so beholden of just, you know, I never heard it, I just never heard it. I was so shocked, that it just paralyzed me. I began to see. Of course, we had television, so I was aware of things happening all over certain places in the South. But I got it. I got it inside of myself. And I identified with those young people marching in such a radical way, that it was just one of those epiphanies that happen to you. You know, like you coming from Tampa to Western North Carolina, it was an epiphany you just, you know, something changes radically inside of you. I didn't get the whole picture, but I knew that I would never be the same. So, I was in the University, and I wrote to my brother who was a professor at Stanford, I believe it was at the time, and I said, "I really don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I know I have to earn a living; I have no money except Social Security coming in." Actually it was welfare. I was on welfare at that time. "I don't know what to do." And he said, "well, you know, you're not very bright, and you probably won't – obviously couldn't be a nurse because you couldn't pass chemistry. And I am sure that secretarial work doesn't seem to be your bent. I know you've tried that for a while and didn't find it agreeable. So, probably a teacher – you could be a teacher. So why don't you be a teacher. I think that, you know, that elementary school or something." I thought, oh, okay, fine. So I went back to school, and that's what my goal was. But nobody exactly – nobody was comforting at UNC as far as guidance is concerned. So I really didn't know what I was doing. When I finally graduated, nobody had told me I had to go to the School of Education and get a, you know, certificate. Certification. So I graduated, and I went to apply for teaching. "Well, did you

certify?" No. So, I had to go back. Anyway, I worked for a year at the University hospital, and then I finally found out what I had to do. Then I went back to get an M.A. – an M.A.T. at that point. No, I didn't either, I got my certification and that was it. I started my – did my student teaching at the old high school on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill. Which was this historically beautiful building. You know, high ceilings; it was a very lovely building. It had the oak trees out in front. Chapel Hill in those days was a very beautiful place. Not like it is now. Not trashed like it is now. But it was a very lovely place. There of course, weren't any black students there. I can remember the first day I went in to do my student teaching, I went in to the principal and, "How do you do Ms. Marshbanks, I am Barbara Lorie." And, "Oh, Ms. Lorie, Ms. Lewis is expecting you." And all of a sudden the door opens and here comes, "Oh, Ms. Lewis, here is your student teacher." Ms. Lewis takes one look at me and she said, "I feel very sick and I am going home. Bye." So she left, you know, and Ms. Marshbanks said, "Oh, uh, well, did you leave plans?" "I left Return of the Native on the desk and that's what I'm teaching." And she walked out of there. And I go, weeee! Inside my head I go, oh well. Ms. Marshbanks said "Well, I'm sure that you will do fine. You are much older than most student teachers." You know, blah blah. And I'm going, oh my god, oh dear god, what am I going to do? So that's how I started teaching. I went up there and I had five classes of senior English. And it was, she taught the bright kids, the super, you know, that track. So, fortunately one of the students in the first period was the daughter of one of my best friends, Carlyle Poteat. I'll never forget it. And I saw Carly in there, and I said, "Carlyle, I would

like to see you for just a minute, could you come here please, in the hallway?" So I go out if there, I brought her out into the hallway and I said, "Carly, what's this book about? I've never read it!" So Carlyle gives me the quick rundown, da da da, you know. So every day Carlyle gave me a little preview of what we were supposed to be doing that day. Ha! So that's when I did my student teaching. Finally Ms. Lewis came back, I guess like the third week into my student teaching. I think that was it. And of course then things were better naturally! But, it was at that time that, it was sort of at the end of my student teaching, that John Kennedy was killed. It was so devastating for me that I just brought a television – I didn't care what anybody said, I just brought a television. The school should have stopped. But I just brought a television in because they didn't close the school. I said we're gonna watch this because this is history in the making. Anyway, that was my first radical act in the schools, the public schools of America. So after that, what happened? Something happened. Oh yeah, I got a job. Oh, I know what happened, I was going to go back to Florida. Definitely I wasn't going to stay in North Carolina, you know, I had lived in Florida, and I definitely wanted to go back there. I had made all these appointments with these superintendents – all of them down the coast. And I was out playing tennis with my best friend and I fell and broke my leg in three places! Can you believe it? You know, the good Lord was saying, you know, "You're not going out to Florida, you are staying right here!" So, that was in March, and I was in a cast for four months, with a terrible break. Finally, I had to get a job; I was just on the edge. So this friend of mine called me and she says,



"Oh, listen, Durham Academy has positions." I said, "I'm on crutches!" She said, "Oh, that's all right. I am sure they won't mind." So I call them, yes... Well, long story short, to make a long story short, I got a job at Durham Academy, and I'm on crutches, teaching Latin and French. You know, nothing to do with English, but that was fine. So I stayed there for two years, until finally, Ms. Lewis, the one I had student taught under, called me up. "Barbara, there is a job that is, there is a position opening up here in sophomore English, and I think you'd do real well. So why don't you apply for that?" And I said, "Okay, Ms. Lewis, I will." I go over there and [to] Ms. Marshbanks: "Hi, Ms. Marshbanks, you probably don't remember me." "Well, yes I do remember you, Ms. Lorie. This is the year we're going to integrate, and they've built the brand new school." God forbid we should see anybody down in the middle of town. You know, let's get 'em out of town, as far away as possible so that nobody has to see that we've got blacks and whites going to school together, my god! You know. So they built this hideous school with windows – you know, in the Middle Ages they had these little tiny windows that you could put arrows through, you know? And kill anybody that was coming. Well that's the kind of windows that were out there in this new building. You know, god forbid you should have a window that you could see through! And here was this beautiful, they were out there in the middle of the forest, and the fields, it was absolutely gorgeous out there. And inside classrooms without any windows. It was the ugliest building you ever saw in your life. It was just – ah, man, it was so bad. Anyway, Ms. Marshbanks said – just getting back to the interview – said to me: "Ah well, Ms. Lorie, I guess you know that we are

integrating." And I said, "Yes, I do know that." "And I know it's going to be, you know, there will be some problems." And I said, "Well, I assume there will be, yes." "But I think you'll do fine. You're big and I'll think you'll do fine." I go, good, thank you very much, and I left! I went home and told my children, I said, "I got the job because I'm big! You know, it has nothing to do with my brain, or what I know or anything." God, it was so, it was so, it was bizarre, to say the least. Well, we integrated. We *desegregated*, we didn't integrate. We desegregated by bringing these black children, by closing their school, closing their way of life, absolutely destroying any semblance of what they were used to. And bringing them out to this white school with still the white school name, with still the white school song for basketball, football, school song, white song. You know, there wasn't any semblance of integration whatsoever! Nothing, nothing, nothing. What happened, the incredible tragedy of that first year, and the second year, and the third year was the sickness. You know, the inherent sickness of this situation. The pain that nobody was talking about or addressing or you know, discussing, or you know, making recommendations to. I couldn't stand it. From day one, I thought this is the most insane thing I've ever, this is just, this has got to be, we're so stupid here. We should be talking about what's happening. I'd get these essays back from my children, you know, to get to know them you always give them an essay the first crack out of the box.

MF: And are these white or black, or both?

BL: This is both. And all of them were scared. "I'm very scared." This black kid, he's only six feet five or something like that, you know, built like a

Wahtoossee, scared to death. "I'm scared to come into this school." "I get sick every morning when I wake up." I mean, the tragedy is profound! And we're not talking about it! So I finally said, to hell with this, and I went to Ms. Lewis. I said, "Ms. Lewis, I think that we need to bring in some literature about the black experience. Like American Negro poems and American Negro short stories." "Oh! Now Barbara, I don't want, I don't think we need, we don't need to do that. That's not state-adopted text, and we don't have any money for that, and I just don't think we need to do that. We just follow the curriculum, and I want you to do Julius Caesar, and I want you to do poems, and I want you to do Audin," and you know, blah blah. I said, "Ms. Lewis, if I get the money, and I buy the books, is that okay?" "Well I don't want to know anything about it, I just don't want to know anything about it." So I went, hmm. So I left, and I thought, what does she mean, she doesn't want to know anything about it? That means I can do it, but just don't tell. So I rally around these people that I knew and got some money together. I ordered these books, from Dell Publishing I think it was. I ordered the Autobiography of Malcolm X, I ordered the Invisible Man, which was just one of the most profound novels of the twentieth century. I ordered American Negro Short Stories, American Negro Poetry – anyway I ordered these books and I had them sent to my house so nobody would know, you know? And I brought them in a bookbag, in one by one, and handed them out to everybody. I said, "Let's talk about this. Let's talk about why we're here, what's happened, what does this mean?" It was profound. It was, it was, lots of crying and lots of people, children daring to say things about what their experience, you know, they were scared to



touch anybody by mistake in a hallway. Or, scared to be caught sitting next to anybody in the lunchroom, and stuff began to come out. Finally, I did all kinds of exercises that I had created, stuff that I had been reading about. Because there was a lot of stuff that began to come out in literature, not in literature, but in the modern discourse about how do we deal with this? One of them was this incredible exercise in Iowa I read about this teacher who had said to everybody who had blue eyes. Maybe you've heard about this one? You know, the blue eyed, brown-eyed thing. Well I did that, you know, and that just really blew everybody's mind totally. Then there was another one, there was this guy Leonard who was a, I think his name was Leonard. I read about this huge thing about how we have to somehow teach our children that we are one. That we are the spirit, the spirit of life, the spirit that comes through all of us. So I thought, how can I do that? How can I show them that, you know, that we're all the same? So I had this idea, I know what I'll do. I've got this great idea. So I brought in Junior Walker, this is this great guy, Junior Walker, who was a jazz guy. I had this record player in the room. In those days it was a record player. I used to play Junior Walker all the time. I'd play something jazzy for when the kids were coming in to class. To make them feel a little free, and body movement and stuff like that. They all loved it man, they just bugged, you know, everyone is jazzing up, you know? And I said, "Okay, now I got to do a little Julius Caesar. Let's do it, let's get on with Caesar." We'd dance a little bit, you know, with Julius Caesar. Of course I was very young. Physically I was able to move around you know, and jazz it up with them myself. I said, "Okay, we're

going to do something; we are going to do something that's really great." They went, mmmm. I said, "What I want you to do tomorrow is bring a blanket. Just bring a blanket, don't ask any questions, just come." So they all came. I said, "Okay, and I want you to put your blanket down in a circle." We moved all the chairs back. "Okay, I want you to lie down with your feet pointing towards the center, and lie down on your blanket. Now, hold hands with the person next to you. I don't want you to say anything. I'm going to turn off the lights. I'm going to put on a record, and we're just going to lie here, and we're gonna just think about what it's like that this energy is going all around this circle. And that we're all the same." So I did that. And we lay there for forty minutes. Finally I turned on the light. They got up. We put the room back. The buzzer rang and they left. One of those kids told me it was the most profound experience he'd had in his entire high school career. Because it was so, he got it. He got it. He understood it. So, of course, the next day, the loudspeaker: "Ms. Lorie, the superintendent would like to see you if it's possible. If you could run down there after school he would really appreciate that." I said, "Well, I'd be glad to." So that was the beginning of my dialogue, which was never a dialogue with the superintendent, Dr. Cody. But he was a white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant male, and he was doing the best he could, and he didn't understand anything. Because he was a victim of public schools in America. He was a victim of being a white, Anglo Saxon Protestant male, and he wasn't enlightened. He wasn't anything. He was just doing his job. So here he had this nutsy teacher who was doing all these creative, wacko things first of all, and she was big! You know, I was a lot bigger

than Cody! So I walked in there, "Ms. Lorie, I'm really, good to see you, good, have a seat, have a seat." "Dr. Cody it's really nice to be here. Now what's on your mind?" "Well, you know, I don't presume to question what you're teaching. I just wanted to know what, you know; I'm just hearing things from parents that concern me. So I wanted to know if you could tell me what's going on in your classroom?" So I tried to explain to him the spiritual life, and how important it is. Well, come on, "I certainly appreciate you coming down, but I wonder if you could get back to Julius Caesar?" I said, "Yes, don't you worry, Dr. Cody, we're going to do Julius Caesar! I promise you." You know that was it, that was the routine. I would do these way out wacko things, and then I was constantly being called on either by Ms. Marshbanks in the principal's office, or Dr. Cody's office. It was sort of like, it was a drop in the bucket. Because the prejudice in Chapel Hill was just as bad as it was anywhere in the South. Racism was rampant. Then, and just as it is now. You know, it's worse now because it's out in the open. In those days, we were all really polite. Nobody said anything, at least overtly; I remember there was this guy. I wish I could remember his name, but I can't remember his name. But he was a huge activist at the university. I mean, he closed down Duke, I loved it, man! He just closed it down! Because UNC is racist as it can come, but you know, next-door Duke is probably a little worse! Anyway, this guy was really great. He was huge; he was like 6'7" or something, massive! You know, big powerful black man with an Afro out to here. I called him and I said, "You know, my kids they don't really understand all this stuff. I wonder, would you mind coming out and talking to my class?" "Barbara, I would

love to come to your class! It would be great." So, by that time, it was the second or third year – they hadn't fired me, yet. But they were close, you know. So I had this room with one of the slit walls, one of those windows on the front. I could see the visitor parking lot. So the guy gets out of the car, and I go, "Oh man, this is it! This is, they're gonna, he's gonna walk in here and I can see.... the place is going to go up in flames!" I was scared. Part of me was scared to death, because I was doing something that was so radical. But I was trying so hard for them to see what the problem was, and to get over their own racism that they'd inherited from their family. You know, all these kids had come in there with their bias. They couldn't help it! They were born and raised that way. If you were born and raised in the south, you were a racist! There wasn't any getting around it! You didn't know Jews. Jews, who Jews? But you did know about blacks. That they were the servants, and so forth and so on. So you get one kid coming in, this white kid who comes here, sits here. Next to her is the guy whose mother is her cook, her family's cook. So, this is what we're dealing with. These economic differences as well as the racial differences. So in comes this guy. He comes in. I was so glad, I said, "I am so glad to see you." He said, "It's hard for me to be here today." He just turned around to the class and he said, "This is hard for me to be here because my brothers were killed trying to integrate a bowling alley in South Carolina last night." We hadn't heard about it. You know, it hadn't been on the news yet. I just wept. I just broke down and wept. I just thought, my god! What is the matter? What the hell is the matter with us? That we can't even...a bowling alley, what the hell is that all about? God, it was just,

every day there was some huge horrible thing that was happening. And we were trying, those of us who were teaching were trying to make some kind of sense out of what...and there wasn't any sense. There wasn't any sense. It was just one ignored day after the other. Pain, pain, pain, pain, pain, pain. And no solution. We didn't have any leadership from Washington. Forget that bullshit! We didn't have any leadership from our superintendent. We didn't have any leadership from our principal who was just trying to hold the school together. And of course, these black kids were getting--

[Interruption]

What was happening was that inside of me, I was just cracking up. The pain of it all was so horrendous. I would go home and I would just weep. I would just weep because I could see that the smoldering, the fire was smoldering. That if we didn't address the issues, if we didn't change the name of the school, and change the name of.... if we didn't have black cheerleaders, and if we didn't have school songs that represented the black kids, and if we didn't have all those things that are related to permanent parts of somebody's identity as a high school student. Which is such an impressionable age, which is so precious and so painful. As a teenager, this is just the worse time to go through, I think. If we didn't do something about that we were losing it. And of course, we did lose it. We just, I finally couldn't stand it. I knew that I was going to be fired. Because the third year, I got a letter from the superintendent saying that my principal wanted to meet with me before school started. I thought, oh god, this is it. This has got to be it. So, I went out there and he said, "Ms. Lorie, you're so good with



them, that we're going to make you into, we've made you into a reading teacher." I said, "Well, Ms Marshbanks, I've never had a course in reading. I don't know a damn thing about reading, teaching reading." She said, " Oh I'm sure you'll do fine. You'll do just fine. And we got a new space for you, and let me show you." So she marches me away from the English wing, straight down the main hall to where the band room is, and on the side of the band room there's a great big broom closet. Which has been cleaned out, and there are three desks there with an overhead light. That's where I'm going to be teaching reading to two students an hour, and every six weeks I'll get two students for five classes. Then every six weeks it will be changed. I'll get new students. So I knew I had lost. Because, there wasn't any point...my gift and my skills were negated by this diminution of me as a teacher, as a professional. So it wasn't, it just didn't, I knew that I couldn't work under those circumstances. So I went home and wrote a letter of resignation. Before that happened, it was in the spring of the preceding year before that happened, the end of the second school year, or the third school year. It was the end of the third school year, and I was down in the office for some damn thing, I don't even know what the hell it was. I don't even remember. I've done this, I've done that. I said, "You know something, Dr. Cody, I want to tell you something. That this place is going to blow wide open if we don't change our ways! Things are really bad out there. And if we don't, I don't know what's going to happen. I just want to tell you that." And of course, he wasn't listening, he didn't care. He cared, but he didn't care enough to do anything. That last year, there was a terrible incident. Some white boys had brought a gun to the

school. So the black kids came and told me, they said, "Ms. Lorie," and I said, "Okay." "And they're coming down by your room." I said, "Okay." So what happened was these white boys were coming down. The black kids were coming up this way. So I went out of my room, and I stood there. I waited until they got to me. I said, "All right, let me tell you something. I'm not looking at what you're holding. I don't know where you think you're going, or what you think you're going to do, but I do know that if you do anything, you're going to get twenty years in prison. Just for being on school property with whatever you're holding, which I'm not even looking at, okay? You're going to get twenty years if they pick you up. So my advice to you guys is to turn around, and go back the way you came as fast as you can, and get off of school property." So they stood there and they looked at me. They finally turned around, and walked very quickly down the hallway and left. I turned around and said to the black boys, I said, "now let this be a lesson to you. We don't need violence in this school. That's not the answer to this problem. Now you guys go back to where you belong, go back to your classes, and forget that you ever saw anything today." I turned around and they left. Anyway, the next year, it was after...there were a lot of things in my personal life that happened. I had dead animals thrown in my driveway. I had my windows shot out. I had terrible obscene phone calls. Because I would bring black kids home, I taught, weekends I taught Upward Bound. In the summertime I taught Upward Bound, brought those black kids back into my home. So my neighbor was a Klan person. So I don't know where

it came from, if it came from them, I don't, I'm not judging them. Anyway, that was my experience.

MF: What year was it when this run-in between the white kids and the black kids and the gun that you were just telling me about? What year, approximately?

BL: You know, I don't really remember. The '60s, we're talking about the late '60s. I think I started teaching in '64, I think, that was at Durham Academy, '64, '65, '66. I think that Chapel Hill integrated in '66, but you know, you'll have to check on that, I don't really remember. I think that '66-'67, '67-'68, '68-'69 – yeah, that's it, those years I was there. So it would have been '69 that that gun thing happened. And '69-'70 I was working for the National Assessment Educational Project all over the United States, so I wasn't here. Then in '70-'71 I went and taught at Pinecrest which had built this brand new school which was a very beautiful school, but stupidly laid out in the interior. I mean, they wanted to save money, so they had schools within the...what did they call that? Open classrooms, I think it was called.

MF: Pinecrest is where?

BL: Pinecrest is in Southern Pines. I was down there for a year, and it was just the dumbest thing in the whole world. They had these giant rooms, okay, it was this open classroom concept, which I won't even bore you with the philosophy because it was so dumb! Oh god! So they had classes in these big rooms, all together. Oh, it was the same thing down there. The hostility was great, only it was much worse because there was so much racism. It was just

racism across the board. There wasn't any worse, better, best, or whatever. I shouldn't put degrees on anything, because it was just there. What was it? What was I? This is really funny if I can remember. I brought in a lot of black literature and put it on reserve in the library. And the librarian said, "Barbara, I don't really...if you think those, them...if you think any of them are going to read any of this, you are just wrong. They're just going to tear it up. You know how them Negroes are."

MF: This is at Pinecrest?

BL: Mmm hmm. Okay, we had three principals. We had a big daddy principal, then we had two daddy principals. And one of those daddies was black. So at least they were trying. And the head of the English department was black, which was a big leap. But it was just the same 'ol same 'ol. So, I was perceived as a very radical teacher, which I was, I admit it. Of course, by that time, the feminist movement was out of the bag and in full swing. So there was a lot of ways I was identifying with blacks all over the place. There was one store that got the New York Times... you know, it was like voices from the outside world, you know, wow! On Sunday I would drive over to the store practically incognito and get the paper and run back to my little dwelling and read it. Oh my god, so that's what's happening all over the world! Oh my god. To be enlightened! There was this essay by a guy named Knoplinger or something like that, Nottinger or Nothinger about the new South, and how it is making great strides with integration. And all these new laws. We don't have white fountains and black fountains anymore, and we're doing this and that. I'm going, oh

please! Give me a break! So I wrote this letter to the Times about how this guy is off base or something like that. And just, he doesn't know what's really happening. It was quite a strong letter, let's put it that way, okay? And you know, [I] forgot about it. I came home from school one day, phone rings – no, I think that happened at school, I think that was it. The principal called me and said, "Ms. Lorie, the New York, now I don't understand this, but the New York Times is trying to get a hold of you." And I go, "Oh! I don't understand either, I can't imagine, they must have a mistake." Oh my god, dear god! I'll be fired just for this! So when I got home the phone rings, and of course it's the New York Times, and they want to publish my letter and they want permission to publish it and so forth. Which they did. I thought, dear god, if anybody down here sees this, I'll be fired. There's no question about it! So there again, there's this part of me that's way out there on this limb, praying to God that nobody cuts it off! By that time I was doing my writtens and I got my M.A. and I was out of there. I got a job and went up North. So I left. The end. I have nothing more to say!

MF: I seriously doubt that! Do you have a copy of this letter, of the editorial that they printed? That would be fascinating for me to make a copy of it and include it in your record and put it in the archive. I can look it up too, to see if I could find it.

BL: I'm sure I have a copy, but you're asking somebody who has voluminous records about, you know, I think, sure I have a copy, of course! But where? Five years later I might find it!

[Discussion about obtaining copy of newspaper article.]



MF: You mentioned, when you were talking about raising money for the books that you bought in Chapel Hill, you said you got a bunch of your people together. Who were these people?

BL: These were professors you see, and some of them were the radical, they were the radical bunch in Chapel Hill at that time. You know like Lou Lipsitz, who was a professor in Political Science, and Maggie and Donald Matthews, who were in Political Science, and let's see who else? Bill Poteat and Marion Poteat, he was, I think he was head of Religion at Duke, but they were really good friends of mine. When I asked them for some money, they gave me some money. So I can't even remember who else. But I had enough money, it was like five hundred dollars I needed, and I got it. I got it. So, it was great.

MF: So you had a little bit of a network there of activists within the movement?

BL: Yes. And definitely they were all in the University.

MF: That's interesting. So there wasn't necessarily any kind of a community support that you had as far as non-university related – just parents of students that lived in the community?

BL: No, no, no.

MF: Well, parents of black students, did you have any kind of interaction with them?

BL: No, no, I had no connection with those parents. Because they just didn't come to the school. They really didn't. It was, god, it was just incredible. It was too scary, I don't blame them. You know, there just wasn't anything out

there for them. It wasn't until... One of the big units that I taught was on violence. It was really easy to teach about violence and talk about Julius Caesar. There was an article in the New Yorker – there was a movie called Bonnie and Clyde that came out at that time. The reviewer had panned it. I saw that movie and I thought it was one of the most brilliant movies that had ever been made in America because it personified, it glorified violence. Okay. And the thing with our country is that we glorify violence on every occasion, you know. This is so much a part of our culture. Look at this guy Earnhardt that just cracked up against a wall on a, you know, and everybody is mourning him. What was he doing? He was driving cars, at a hundred and eighty miles an hour around a damn circle, you know? What the hell is that all about, for god's sake? The violence that permeates the American culture, it's everywhere. It is glorified. I was trying to show how the violence of integration, the violence of desegregation, had simply fed in to the violence that is a part of our country. I can't even, you know, it's a course. I'm not going to give you the course today. But I felt that it was so significant that our children see that movie, and be able to physically perceive what was happening to their bodies as they were witnessing this violence. So I took, I prevailed upon this poor principal, this poor woman... I mean, I really hope she forgives me wherever she is, you know, to let me take every sophomore kid, I had 90 kids. So I got these parents and these 90 kids into buses and we went over to the movie theater and we saw this movie. Of course the parents were just "Ahhh! What has she done?" So when P.T.A. Back to School Night came, I had parents who lambasted me like you wouldn't believe.

[Switched tape to side B]

**End of Tape 1 Side A**

**Start of Tape 1 Side B**

They were just, they leveled me with what was I trying to do? I said, well, all you have to do is look at the television at six 'o clock at night, listen to Jesse Helms, look at the sheriff in Birmingham, Alabama, look at the black children that were killed at the church. You know I preceded to – look at the men who were killed, look at the boys who were killed at the bowling alley, look at... You think I can stand here and not teach about violence? Now we have it glorified in the cinema. So I went on and tried to – why did I bring that up? I don't know. I don't know why I brought it up.

MF: Violence in the schools?

BL: Violence in the schools, oh right, right. I said, we're going to have violence in our schools because we're not addressing the problem of racism. We're not addressing it within ourselves, and we're sure not addressing it in the halls of Chapel Hill High School. So that year, the year after I left, that would have been the fourth year of integration, Chapel Hill just came apart. It just came apart. Those black kids had had it, and they went in there, and they just tore apart the records, they destroyed the records office. They beat up some teachers, one of my sons got beat up who was there.

MF: This is at Chapel Hill High School?

BL: Yeah, right.

MF: Is this when they locked the doors, and, that was it?

BL: Right, that was it.

MF: That's interesting to hear. All I knew was that the black students had locked the doors--

BL: It was just so scary. We had to close the school down for four days -- for four or five days, until things could calm down. The eruption of the violence was a natural outcome of our not understanding and being more cognizant of what it was for these children to be put into this school. And what it was for our white children. Both white and black children were suffering. I don't know, we could have done it, but I don't know, there was anybody around teaching us. There wasn't anybody teaching the superintendent, what did he know? Well, we had laws coming down from the Supreme Court. Our churches aren't integrated. So how the hell are we supposed to know each other? Oh god. And then, in Pinecrest, I could see the same thing was going to happen down there. I told my principal, I said, you know, look, this place is going to burn up if you don't start addressing these issues of black and white and racism and the feelings of the people, and the feelings of the staff. It's going to just be wiped out one of these days. And of course, the year after I left, it was, it blew up. The same thing. They started on the busses. They beat each other up, and they closed the schools down for three or four days. Anyway, so that was it. The tragedy, okay, I don't know if you want to know my feelings about what should have been done? Okay, here you have generations, you have four hundred years of black kids who have been going to bad schools, who have not have any kind of individualized...you know, they had teachers that weren't really trained really well. Because of the culture they came from, and the colleges they went to. You had



kids, black kids who weren't up to snuff, who weren't up to the standards of white kids. What should have happened would have been to teach them as if they were foreigners coming into our schools. Listen to me talk, into *our* schools, you see? I have, I mean my own body is so full of racism, even as old as I am, and as hard as I've worked, my language still is of a white racist. Because that's what I was born and raised on. But these children should have had individualized, massive intrusion of individualized instruction on reading and writing and math. There wasn't any way that they could ever catch up, so they never caught up, and the frustrations are to this day, so great. Because of the economic deprivations and the scholastic deprivations are huge. Today, we don't have, we never addressed, we whites have never said, we're sorry. We never. We did it to the Nisei Japanese. We paid them – we nationally told them we were sorry. But as a nation, we have never said to black people, look, we are sorry. This is a terrible thing that we've done to you. We apologize, and somehow, we want to make it up to you. We haven't. So I don't know when it's going to happen, or what it's going to take. I just don't know. Because the degrees of separation are so huge – even now. I'm sure you read the papers; you know what I'm talking about. So, that was my experience, and I don't think much has changed. I don't think the attitudes of – I don't think attitudes in this country generally have changed much. You have places and small communities, which are trying very hard to be, to address the whole idea of racism. To get rid of it. But as a nation, it sucks, briefly.

MF: I'm interested to know – you've already kind of touched on this – the differences, or the similarities, or the sameness even, of the attitudes of the students that you are tutoring every so often which we talked about very briefly in the beginning, as opposed to the students you were teaching at Chapel Hill during desegregation, or integration, depending on which angle you are looking at it from.

BL: Well, there are definitely changes in attitudes now. Definitely! I mean, these kids all have black friends, and there's no feeling about blackness, whiteness, or anything. They just go out together and have a great time. So, there are definitely changes that have come about. We have a teen center here in Pittsboro, which has been a huge, wonderful success. There doesn't seem to be any feeling anymore about black and white kids going out together. I'm not a part of the secondary school scene, so I don't really know. I just hear this third-hand from parents who work there, and who feel that it's very comfortable. For the most part, it's very comfortable.

MF: What do you think about the same question, but on an institutional level? From the educator's standpoint, or the school, or the curriculum?

BL: I think that our school board is totally racist. I think my superintendent here is totally racist. I think he's a real, oh man, I have no respect for this man. I finally joined a group called the Chatham County Political Reform Group, which is a multiracial group of people working to share stories, to share our lives. Just so that we could get past the initial racism we were all born with. I don't belong to it anymore, but I did belong to it for about ten years. I don't anymore because I've

physically had to – I'm old, what the hell! I'm old. I've had to limit what I'm doing. So I've tried to cut back on some of the stuff I've been doing, and that was unfortunately one of the groups that I really had to, that I love, and had to withdraw from. Anyway, one of the things I did do was to join a black church. I mean, I'm real sick of... I'm sick of it, I'm sick of not knowing black people intimately, on an equal level. So this black church I belong to has been a very great revelation for me, just a wonderful opportunity for me to be with people on a daily basis, a weekly basis.

MF: What's the name of the church?

BL: <sup>Akron</sup>~~Austin~~ Chapel Church. And if you're interested, I'll take you there some Sunday. It would be a good experience for you. Have you ever been to a black church?

MF: I haven't. I've been invited on several occasions. I worked with a couple of African American ladies this summer. It was just a matter of time. I'm very active with my church, and so, they always went at the same time, and we could never figure out how we could work around it. But I would really be interested in doing that. It could only help with this project as well.

BL: Right, well then we'll do that. It's a charismatic church. It's not a traditional Protestant church. So lots of shouting and screaming and falling down and talking in tongues and stuff like that. I don't adhere to all the things that... I just feel Christianity has floundered as far as teaching what Christ, the messages of Christ. I just think we messed up totally. And even my church, I think we've messed up. Of course I don't say that to my church. I don't say it to the

members of my church. But I don't find any church following the concepts that Jesus laid out. I just don't see it anywhere. So sometimes it's very hard for me to go to the church, because I don't feel that that church is meeting my Christian needs either. But it has allowed me to meet, and be with, and form deep friendships with some of the people in this church. And I'm deeply grateful for that. I am very very grateful that they have accepted me as a part of their community.

MF: Are you the only white person in the church?

BL: Yes, yes. Yes, I am. I am very – I have a reputation in this state. I am a left-wing radical feminist. That's sort of not what this church is looking for, they are very middle class, traditional, conservative, etc. So I come out with a few things, statements that they go, "There she goes again." But you know, it's good for them. They're good for me and I'm good for them. I'm an environmentalist, I mean, that's really my heart, that's where my heart is. And I'm probably a pantheist, if you really wanted to define me, what's my spiritual path – I'm a pantheist. That's all I think about, is what we are doing to the earth. In more ways than one. Okay, what else? That's it, that's enough, right?

MF: I mean, if you're ready to stop we can stop.

BL: Well, do you have anything else you want to know?

MF: You've answered a lot of my questions as we went along, which is wonderful. There are two things that you said, one of them which was: you referred to – I think this was very astute – both blacks and whites as being

victims. Which seems to be very much the case. Could you talk about that a little bit? I guess more on the white side, whites as victims as well.

BL: We are so limited in our worldview, white people. We are missing out on the great cultural beauties that three-fourths of the world have to offer. We are in our own culture, we have missed out. You know, we think Bach, Brahms, Beethoven, and whoever, have got to be it. But all of our music in this country comes from black people. And anybody who denies that is full of it, you know? Blues, and jazz, and gospel, are the foundation of modern music worldwide. It's not just in the United States. You go to Africa, you go to Morocco, you go to England, you go to Egypt, you go anywhere and you hear the roots that have come from the diaspora of blacks in the world. And that's true of Latinos, of Asians. We are so limited because we have been dealt this superiority complex historically. The rigidity of our white superiority has denied us the glories of other cultures to be integrated within our lives. I feel that so deeply. I can't tell you how strongly I feel that we have been denied the knowledge, the prescience, the joy of other cultures by the limitations of our own western education. So it wasn't until integration that you finally had blacks saying, "Hello, we're here." The center, what is it, the Sonja B. Haynes Center that is being built is such a marvelous thing right there in the middle of the... "Sorry, honeys. We're right here in the middle of this white campus. Here we are." I love it, I love it. I just think it is about time, you know? We're only a hundred years late, a couple of hundred years. So I feel very sorry for white people who are so rigid in their beliefs and their traditions that it limits them in what they read, what they listen to

on the radio, what they watch on television. Of course, we shouldn't watch television anyway, because that's the biggest addiction of the world right now. That they don't step outside and see what the glories are of other cultures. That's mainly what I feel as a white person. I feel very strongly about television. I feel it is such a terrible drug. It's so far worse than any drug, so far worse than heroine, and crack cocaine, and dope, it is the drug of the world. And we have done it. The white culture, and white men, mostly, have done it. White Anglo Saxon men, thank you very much, are people who have laid this culture out as the culture. When you go to Egypt and you see "Dallas" on the television, for god's sake, what the hell is that all about? Give me strength! It's insane, it's total insanity. "Ah, I love you." And nails hanging off their fingernails like fangs. Okay, in answer to that, that's enough.

MF: It's interesting that you mentioned the Black Cultural Center, because, the new Black Cultural Center, because that's something that's very much an issue on campus still. There's been a lot of opposition. A lot of people are saying that there needs to be a multicultural center, not a black cultural center, because the concern is raised that this will just cause more of a separation. More of a division. Because there is very much a division on campus still. So how would you respond to that kind of argument?

BL: I would say that any culture, let's have a Japanese center, or an Asian center. Let's spread the goodies around. Because there isn't such thing as multiculturalism. That's bullshit, total bullshit. You have a significant contribution to this country by a group of people that despite the fact that they



were slaves, gave us the buildings – the congressional building was built by blacks, okay. Do we have any pictures of blacks in the rotunda? No! You go to Washington D.C. and you don't see any pictures of blacks in the rotunda. And that building was built by slaves. You know, we have so much culture that comes from black people, that they need a building, they need a museum, they need their story to be in our face! So that we can finally understand that's what it's all about. And we can't get it any other way. It's like the Jews finally gave us that museum in Washington D.C. You know, yeah, six million of us were killed. Guess what, gassed over in Germany. Well, how many blacks have been hung from trees? How many of us even know where the trees were? How many of us know what the cultures were and where they came from, and what happened to these black families. We know a little bit, that's it. But we don't know what's happened since. We don't have that four hundred years of culture in our country. We don't have any place where it's all coming together: this is the story, and these are what we have done, and this is where we've come from. So that's my feeling about.

MF: I'm a Women's Studies major, an American History and Women's' Studies double major, so I was really intrigued – this is something that I've read tons about, but I would like to hear it from you. You were speaking about how the women's movement led to you identifying with blacks, and with the Civil Rights Movement, these kinds of things. Can you talk a little bit about that?

BL: It's so hard for me to talk about the Women's Movement, because my life – I refuse to look at myself as a victim. But I was victimized by the legal

system – my whole life has been saturated with patriarchy. I see it today. All you need to do is go to Raleigh and sit in on the legislature. Okay, that's all you need to do. Go sit in there and listen to those windbags talk about making the laws for the people of this state. And you know, fifty percent of the people of this state aren't represented by those windbags. All you need to do is listen to some of the windbags on the UNC campus. All you need to do is go into some of those old-timey professors and listen to them talk, and you want to puke! You want to just puke because they haven't got it. They haven't got the message, they don't understand about women. They don't understand why we feel like we were enslaved also, and of course we were slaves! We were slaves of a different kind than the black slaves were working in the cotton fields. I try very hard not to go there, not to go to this place of anger that I have towards men. Because my anger is so huge. My own family – my father was, you know, we bowed down to him. My brothers were, we bowed down to them. And my sisters and I, we barely – we were supposed to go to college to get married and that was it. None of us were supposed to show any signs of brains or whatever. I will never forget my brother who was the professor, my other brother was a medical doctor, surgeon of course... and my brother, Charles, who is a famous professor – was, he's retired now – written all kinds of books, he was a Classical blah blah wanchō, Greek and Latin scholar stuff. He was down here giving an address at the university. One of the significant issues in my own personal life was that my family never helped me when I needed it. I came from a family of some means. Because I got divorced, and because there was a stigma there. I just had a very

very rough time. A very very very very rough time. I was always one minute away from the street, and I will never forget that my family didn't help me. Finally I was a teacher, and my brother, Charles, came down to lecture here, and I hadn't seen him. When my husband committed suicide, my family didn't show up here. I didn't have any telephone calls or, "Gee, what's going on," or "Sorry." But my brother was here, and of course, I was still enamored of him as being my brother the big professor. So he came out to cook dinner for me and my children. We lived in a very tiny house, about a thousand square feet; it was just really a hovel. When he was cooking dinner and pontificating, finally we were having this argument about some theological question. I can't even remember what it was, maybe existential something. And all of a sudden he stopped, and he turned around and said, "Really, you know you're quite bright." Then he went back to stirring and you know. I remember that vividly. But anyway, I can hardly talk about the women's movement – it's been so powerful in my life, and I'm so grateful that even though it was at the end of my life, I was able to witness that women are coming into their own. They aren't anywhere near there yet, not at all. But I'm so grateful that I live in this community. And all of the men in this community I love, and have tremendous respect for, They are gentle, loving, caring men who understand women's issues, and who are devoted to women in a way... I never met a man like that, you know, I never had a man in my life like that. That's for sure. So, things are changing, and they're raising their children, these men are raising their children in a totally different way than from how you were raised, even you probably, were not raised the way these children are being

raised. So there are changes, there's great hope. There is such hope. I am so proud of the women I see out there doing what they're doing. My heart just opens up, and I am passionately loving of these women going out and standing up for their rights.

MF: Unless, there's something else that we haven't covered, or anything else that you'd like to...

BL: We've covered everything. We don't need to talk anymore.

MF: Okay, sounds like a good place to stop then.

**End of Interview**