

Interview
with
E. V. DACONS

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By Goldie F. Wells

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. E.V. DACONS

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Goldie: Just testing to see if the equipment is working correctly.

Mr. Dacons: I'm Ebson Dacons and I am known in the professional circle as E.V. Dacons and formal principal of Union School in Wilkes County with eight years of experience there as a principal and fourteen years as principal of a Career Center that was established following the closing of the Union School. Our grades there ranged from 1-12 and we had 521 students. We had twenty-two staff members. It was a challenging opportunity that I experienced and I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it. Matter of fact, when I left Iredell County and got into administration in Wilkes County I remained there for twenty-five years in a capacity as an administrator--I wore two hats as principal of the Career Center on the closing of Lincoln Heights I not only was the chief honcho at the center but my job had to do with supervising sixty teachers that were in the area of occupational career or vocational education. And of course that covered the middle grades exploratory programs and the Percy High School Vocational Programs. We had a center there that had eleven quotas for our principal. This had to do with really a pre-vocational kind of skill program. These persons coming out of there would be health occupation people or LPN's because we worked with and had the cooperation of Wilkes County Hospital.

Goldie: Just for the record you had better say that you know that this is being recorded.

Mr. Dacons: I am aware that this is being recorded.

Goldie: Tell me how you became a high school principal.

Mr. Dacons: I suppose I just more or less drifted into it. I can't tell you what was the major factor that motivated me in that direction. I was content as a science/math teacher and thoroughly enjoyed the classroom--the give and take--the students. I missed that when I got into administration. I really did. The farther I got from them, the colder it got and it took me sometime to adjust to that. I suppose it was finance. That was one factor. I certainly didn't care that much about the authoritative aspect even though that is part of the territory. But it was year around employment, I needed that with a family. I think another factor that contributed was that I wanted to more or less be representative of a role model not only for my own children but for my people to get into an arena where some leadership was visible. That contributed also to my moving in the

direction of principalship.

Goldie: So in was 1964, you were principal of Union School in Wilkes County. Now I want you to go back to 1964, and talk about how you supervised your personnel at that school and how were your teachers selected.

Mr. Dacons: I came into that job when there were school board members that were legally authorized to hire and fire for their schools of that administrative unit. There were five members of the board at Lincoln Heights--all were obviously Black. I came into rather challenging situation in that there was some unrest. I inherited a situation that was a bit chaotic. The school was terribly in debt. The moral and the posture of the school somewhat at a low ebb despite the fact that Lincoln Heights had a legacy--a very beautiful legacy over the years. Some very fine people coming out of there including Mayor Lou Harris who became quite famous and people knew about him. Some other persons out here who got into medicine and so forth. But I was able to weather that storm and I think I did and you might be interested in this. One or two board members said to me, you have some staff members that won't work with you. I said please don't give me their names. Please do not give me any names. I think that was one good decision that I made because I never did meet them. I never did know who they were. I tried to be as objective as I could. Establishing rapport was somewhat of a challenge. I could feel in sense that line of distrust that came from administrators and working around that I was able to work with the personnel and to put my finger on what we did--one thing, we had weekly staff meetings. We had an active P.T.A.--parent, teacher organization, I had another hurdle then dealing with them in that some of them were members of organizations that contributed funds to the school and I needed to get all of those treasures together and of course you can imagine what it is like going out and saying, look let me have your treasures.

Goldie: Why did you need their treasures?

Mr. Dacons: Well, auditors were asking questions that we couldn't answer, you see and of course we needed to get--well you see we had a treasurer for band, one for the business department, one for the choir, and one for the lunchroom. I found all of those and they were separate identities and they had their own monies, these kinds of things. So I needed to --it was really illegal because they were reigned in the name of a school and of course the school didn't have any jurisdiction over it because this is my money here and what have you. So it took about two years to get that done after I think we knew each other though--one on one. And I did a lot of that where I would go in and talk with a teacher and ask him or her to tell me what they found and then I would listen and I spent a good deal of my time listening. I found

that even as an administrator a good wise use of my time was to hear and this I did. I listened to where they were, what they felt and what have you. I insisted on, it goes without saying we lived in a community where the Jadayo Christian ethic was, I insisted that we continue and that we have a good moral kind situation and what have you. They rallied around that. They knew and once they found out who I was and by the way that was my first experience in a principalship. We had a good program going. I insisted also and with response that our teachers take advantage of all inservice workshops that came about and of course that worked to our advantage.

Goldie: Did you have direct authority to elect your teachers?

Mr. Dacons: Yes, I did. With my board during the first year they supposedly wanted me to have some help. I had some help offered to me by them. I think they perhaps questioned my ability to choose staff and of course not only that but I had some help offered by them on several other things including what kind of milk I would buy and all that kind of things. But I finally got a hold of that and was able to establish the fact--and of course during that time principals did have, I did, the right to go to a school and pick out a teacher and say to my board, this is a person that I would like to have. And usually if my superintendent... and I was fortunate enough to work under two good superintendents. After we got to know each other and I can talk with you about them telling me that I didn't need any second year algebra book. I didn't find any there when I went and I was informed by some of the staff there, and there weren't that many, in fact there were only two staff members central staff members. One supervisor for grade 1-8, and the other for high school. But one of the secretaries at the superintendent's office said that the children have not learned what is in the back of that first year and so anyway we got the second year algebra and we got geometry.

Goldie: So we can go right into the next question. I was going to ask you is to talk something about the instructional program in your curriculum. It seems as if you went right in there and tried to work with the instructional program and improve the curriculum.

Mr. Dacons: We were fortunate to have students who went. I think percentage wise we had our share of students who went on to college.

Goldie: And all of your students were Black?

Mr. Dacons: All of these were Black and I don't want to mislead you here. We had dropouts too. But our dropout then was not as high as it is now. We perhaps lost twenty-five

percent between grades nine and twelve. But we were below the thirty. We didn't have the monies for a lot of the additional help that you would expect and need in the school. We finally got, my fourth or fifth year there maybe, a teacher's aide, maybe in the primary and one for the, what we called then and I don't like the terminology "special ed". I more or less liked combined classes against the belief of teachers. I was one who didn't really subscribe to pulling students out. I insisted that staff do whatever they could, use their professional expertise to make certain that kids were not labeled and sometimes you find yourself with not being able to handle that very well and I confess it up front. Sometimes you have to pull students out just for the logistics of the learning program but when you pull them out they get labeled and once they get that then the self-esteem just kind of takes a nose dive and you have lost them and they become problems. We were fortunate to have pretty strong, they were few in number, two hundred and fifteen or sixteen, a small high school really. We tried to offer the full curriculum you know for those students. We did have but we weren't able to specialize for science teachers taught all science, science had to do what I did--teach science and math, and the people in physical ed taught athletics and the coach has to coach everything and music across the board and so forth and so on. As small as it was we tried to carry on a full athletic program. We had basketball and football and of course kids were in everything. They weren't pushed there they wanted it and many of those kids were able to just go--they had band, choir, in fact it was a hub of activity for that community. This was it. Our central program dove tailed with two other counties. We bused kids at one time from Watauga and Alleghany. When I got there they had discontinued the one from Watauga. The one from Alleghany continued. We bused 35 children through the 8th grade at Alleghany Elementary School.

Goldie: That was because they did not have a Black high school in Alleghany County.

Mr. Dacons: They did not have a Black high school in Alleghany County.

Goldie: And how long was their ride?

Mr. Dacons: Their ride was about--it's about 38 miles from Wilkes County to Alleghany--one way. When he switched that bus off at night the way he had to pick children, he had a 104 miles on that bus round trip everyday. And of course I also had one bus in Wilkes County that had ninety-six miles on it. You see Wilkes County is a big county and a whole lot of territory and some of the most treacherous roads in the state.

Goldie: Now I know when it snows we get the snow in

Alleghany County when we don't get it in Iredell County.

Mr. Dacons: You take now through the winter crossing the Blue Ridge Parkway, what they call, blowing snow all the time you know that is not unusual. So that bus would come through that all the time. That's not unusual so that bus would come through there all the time. There was a magnetism about the instructional program there. The students took to ride one way. and I don't know how we kept order on that bus. Imagine putting 35 kids on a bus. It wasn't a big jumble of buses but we had 35 people grades 9-12. The dropout there was no greater than it was anywhere else. We had good cooperation there with parents--we had the parent teacher's meeting those parents would be there.

Goldie: They would come the 38 miles too.

Mr. Dacons: Yes they would come on in.

Goldie: What about the discipline?

Mr. Dacons: I want to say that that was not a real problem. We had--let me put this in the proper perspective--parents would say to me before school started, some would say professor I'm sending six younguns to you in the fall. Now we want to learn and if they give you any problem you let us know and nothing about before you let us you know what to do with our children. Now, and of course they went back into those hills saying we believe in not sparing the rod and the rod answers for everything. We did use corporal punishment. I did. I used corporal punishment but I think that my use of it was more psychological than the real physical aspect of it. I shocked I guess not as many but I guess some who came out of families where the parents were on the border of being abusive with whipping. It was alleged that one parent used a chain and I don't know if there was any basis to that. I never--now the if you want to say deserved it--they weren't bad boys. I would go to them and they would come into the office when the teacher would send them to me and were just mischievous as they could be and into something, but what was such a shock though when I would just touch them on the shoulder. They expected me to reach and get my strap. I had a strap that was just hanging over there. They expected me to go over there and get it but I just touched them on the shoulder and said why did you do it--tell me about it. And we ended up just talking. I wasn't thinking about using any corporal punishment on him but trying to figure out what to do though the whole time we were talking because here the corporal punishment is supposed to be the answer but it is not. A good administrator has to know when and you don't always know. We had no discipline. I had one student that I had to send to the probate court to send away during my whole 8 years and I guess it was a bit ironic because they thought that I was crazy when I called. I said to the court,

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I have a student that is not responding to our instructional program and we can't help him. As a matter of fact we are doing him a disservice and the other students here a disservice by his tenure here. Knowing that those courts at times do this they give the principal a lecture on what they should do, try this. I said now mister I don't want to second guess you but if you plan to send this student back to me then you are compounding my problem. So I must know what you are going to do before I send this child to you. This may be altogether against policy but this has happened before with a formal principal. This boy was a bad egg. He came in to me and he transferred to Winston-Salem and he came back and said, you know what they tried to put me out--that principal tried to put me out. He said, he couldn't. He brought a double barreled shotgun on Mr. Temple. So the probate court just sent him back over there. I said now all the things that you are about to suggest we have done that. We have done all of that. And the only reason I am calling now is that at our school we are going to have to tie up one of our staff full time just to handle him and we will let 32 or 33 other folks or 35 other people, you see. That is unfair to the community so they took that child and they did send him away because he was a case that we couldn't handle. But other than that, no discipline.

Goldie: Do you think it was because of the parental support?

Mr. Dacons: We did have a kind of parenting that went on there then with them. They believe in doing a job of parenting. Plus the fact I think we had more stable homes then than we do now. We had some children who came from foster homes but the foster home was also a parent who had children of her own. The foster home was a father, mother situation and those children came out of well-disciplined homes. Of course we didn't have then, of course there was alcohol but that was the only drug that we had. I think that you had more two-parent families I think. And I'm not discrediting people who are single parents but I don't believe that they are getting the job done. That's just my own opinion.

Goldie: You've already talked a bit about transportation with the buses that you had coming from the other two counties. What other buses did you have and did you have to be responsible for the transportation for your school?

Mr. Dacons: My job was to touch base with the bus drivers. It of course was my job to rent those buses.

Goldie: You didn't have an assistant?

Mr. Dacons: No, no I didn't have an assistant. The nearest thing that I came to an assistant principal was if I had to leave campus I simply would go down the halls and say to a

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teacher who was a bit stronger and it was usually a male but not all the time was it a male. Once or twice I left it in the hands of a female. One of the strongest members that I had on that staff was Mrs. E.A. Brenton, a lady. She is still living in fact she is Director of the Lincoln Heights recreational corporation there where they have gotten some of the Smith Reynolds monies to restore one of the oldest buildings on campus. She was in the elementary area then and if you had problems, disciplinary problems, it would usually be at the high school level. But the need to have someone there to hold the fort in the way of discipline or a referral would come in during my absence. I want to say for the most part nile, void. We didn't have that kind of thing and we had a couple of strong staff members there, men and as I pointed out some women too who could very well do it but I didn't have a problem.

Goldie: Well, how many buses did you have other than those two that came from the other county?

Mr. Dacons: Okay, when I got there there was only one coming out of the county. That was Alleghany. We had nine buses, ten plus that one coming in out of the county. Now some of those had to make two runs, two local runs. We only had 52 students who were within walking distance. Everybody was bused in. This is why the Lincoln Heights was closed as a school because we were busing out folks by all these other schools to get there. It was sad because Lincoln Heights was one of the better schools in Wilkes County. As a matter I heard Rosenthough staff member say that before they had a gym to play in they came to Lincoln Heights. So you had a community that was very active and farsighted during that time in getting things done. They built their own cafeteria. The first bus that was put there, as a matter of fact, the first bus was, pardon a personal reference here, was an uncle of mine through my father's side. It was my father's sister's husband, Tom Riddix, bought one of the first buses for the Black children. So the building that Mrs.

is so instrumental now in providing leadership there they helped build that one. So it's their school really. That did not go unnoticed to me when I had to make a decision.

Goldie: The utilization of funds. You said that you had to use funds from the parent and the community to do some of the things you needed done. What did you get from central office and how did you get things done?

Mr. Dacons: This is quite amusing to you and probably you have never heard this before. I received a light bill at central office for \$1700 and so I said, I've seen decimals misplaced and so I said it's \$176 but I know it's more than \$1.76 so I pondered a little while over that and then I called. I said, I received the light bill. You see, when I

went there each school paid its light bill. You had to pay that through fund raisings and this kind of things. I found out that it was not--it was \$1760. So I didn't know what was going to happen but I knew that I wasn't going to take the responsibility for that. I told you when I came in he was \$800 in debt. The secretary said you may want to talk to him and I said, yes, I do. I said, I don't mind being responsible from here on out for the electrical bill like the other schools but I really don't think it is fair to me, to the students, and to the parents because many parents think that their bills were being taken care of and hadn't. You see some mismanagement of funds was coming down the road. I don't want to discredit anybody but he said if you can take care from here on out, I don't know where I'm going to get the money cause at times his supervisor who would have painted the window ledges on some of the schools out here for free if C.B. Eller had the paint but he didn't have the paint so I don't know where I am going to get the money for that. But if you will take care of it from here out--so from then on I did and he wrote that off. From the board you received your regular pupil per capital expenditure there but if you were going to have a business department you have to buy a typewriter. If you are going to have a choir, you have to buy the robes. You're going to have to buy the band instruments and uniforms. All that. Now and then you might get X number of dollars that came into your cafeteria program and that had to run itself. You had to make your cafeteria operate yourself. Now and then the board would buy some furniture but that was just periodically. It may be this year and then it may be three years before you got anymore furniture and that kind of thing. For textbooks, they bought your supplementary textbook..

Goldie: Did you get brand new books or did you get used books?

Mr. Dacons: That's another thing. You see these books here at Lincoln Heights had, many of these books had been used. They were coming in there from other schools cause the names would be in them. There were a second year algebra book, a geometry book, maybe another science book that wasn't even there. They weren't there. They had never been in the curriculum at all and so I said our children deserve this. That's like cutting down on the size of the gym that you're going to put in here. Don't put in a gym that is not regulation size and doesn't have a stage for drama productions. We had drama then and they weren't going to put that there at that school, just a hall and a platform. I said we don't do just little plays, our department compensate the state level, the regional and district. Our kids expect it and our parents expect it and they deserve it. They don't know if Lincoln Heights is getting it--they think that they are getting everything. They're not. We didn't have a stage or anything. We were adding a gymnasium, they're not the

best things but it would seat 550 and so he said that would cost me \$12,000 and I could build a classroom and I said we need that. I said, another thing you have that gym 4 feet shorter than regulations. The Northwest Athletic Conference meets here and the old Rosentrough had regulation size and you're building this smaller. We need one here that we can accommodate these people. But we got it. We got a regulation size.

Goldie: But how did you get the books--the algebra books?

Mr. Dacons: Well, just saying to them, how are our kids going to college. When they meet here, when they're on the college campus they run across kids from New England, from the West Coast, Southland and Florida. They have already had these experiences, they've had this learning and they are so far ahead of our kids. It's not fair. It's not right. Our parents think they're getting the best but they're not. I'm here in their behalf. This is a role that I played myself. to help our children and we're trying to help our folk to achieve and to do something out here in life and they can't do it here with just being--we don't expect our kids to leave and just go to work at the sawmills, we expect our children to leave here and go on to higher learning and they are. So I was able to get myself thirty books. That's not a big feat but for that era that was a big feat.

Goldie: Well, you said the cafeteria--you had to make it run and you had a manager but you did you have to see about the money or did the manager see about the money.

Mr. Dacons: I had to see about it. She wasn't trained in that area so I had to. Even the cafeteria report she did a good job but after they start you find out how much they can do. But I had two people, I had one manager and an assistant part-time. They cooked the food and served it.

Goldie: Did you have a nice cafeteria or did you have to see about getting that.

Mr. Dacons: No the cafeteria was one that the community had built. They had constructed it out of blocks. Everybody worked with the masonry work on it so it served the purpose but you could tell it was not a first class masonry.

Goldie: Did they have a cafeteria up at the White high school? Did they have a cafeteria?

Mr. Dacons: Well, you see at that time you had twenty-six White schools and you had four high schools, five--let's see East, West, North, Central. Well a year or two before I came there were seven high schools so they did some consolidation there you know and some of it was during the time when the building program was taking place there at Lincoln Heights.

Because you see they added on to the gym and a library shortly after I got there so to answer your question, no that's the way they got theirs. Now when they built the new ones they added the cafeteria to them. Now we had a cafeteria that was going and of course didn't get a new one but we did get a new gym and new library and two more classrooms.

Goldie: The buildings and grounds. Did you have to supervise that?

Mr. Dacons: Yes, there were 19 acres in the building and grounds there. It is landscaping there, usually without any, it wasn't my suggestion but usually your ag students thank goodness for us. In one way you look at it, we were using children there as maintenance but they learned. Unless you got a major breakdown of equipment this is when your county people would come in--like you've got a backup on sewage, or that kind of thing. Now the county would offer fuel, like coal and that kind of thing. We had both steam and hot water on the campus.

Goldie: Now how did you see your school, Lincoln Heights, what was its relationship to the community?

Mr. Dacons: The center of the community. All of your community activities in addition to what had out there but you might say it was the solidifying factor, the institution that really gave the oneness of mentality here in terms of direction of Black folk. You knew here where we were. You knew all the way from Boone over to the southern end all the way to Roaring Rivers which is the northern end of the county. You knew what Blacks were thinking. Our goals, I represented the core and so it was the huddle of activities here. They looked forward to and had tremendous support for all athletic programs. When it came down to your culture program, your coral group, your band, and what have you the people rallied around that kind of thing and were willing to have all kinds of money raising projects to keep that thing going and so Lincoln Heights was the community.

Goldie: How much administrative power or control did you have over your school site and responsibilities?

Mr. Dacons: I personally had quite a bit of control. Maybe at times more than I wanted. I certainly was not the type who would flaunt it but my suggestions would go. That leadership there was pretty big role because see if you make the wrong decisions it's nice to be in those leadership roles as long as the decisions you make are good and sound but if you make some wrong decisions friend by the same tokens you are still the guy who they are looking to and what have you. So the principalship then had a lot of clout, a lot more than it has today. You have a lot of people who have to make decisions and perhaps that is good in a way because then if

it fails you can share that but then on the other hand sometimes I wonder if everybody knows where their lines of demarcation are and who is responsible for this and that and the other. Parents, as I view it, parents then saw and I think perhaps it still goes, you can correct me on this, and I'm probably not right. Parents saw the chief persons and that was the classroom teacher. They saw that individual. They also saw the principal. They saw the superintendent, the one superintendent and when you left those three people, parents as I view them and as I talked with them were not quite clear on what other folks did. In other words, they had not problem with the classroom teacher. They had no problem with that one principal at all, they had no problem with that one superintendent, but when you get in here with this person here and that central office around them and some of them have responsibility, some don't. In other words it depends on what that superintendent says. If the superintendent says, you've got it, that's your period, you have it. Nobody is going to second guess you. Now sometimes the superintendent doesn't say that. But see in the statute books, those three that I named are written in there and the other folks unless they have put it in there recently are not in there. Your librarians, your teacher aides, and your guidance counselors and these people do a tremendous job but many parents don't know what they really do and all. That may have changed. They come in on campus and say look I want to see the principal and there are eight or ten other people that they could see.

Goldie: How did desegregation of schools affect your role as principal?

Mr. Dacons: I was told that I had three choices. (1) I could, our board--the Wilkes County Board of Education had contacts with Wilkes Community College. I could replace there, (2) well, let me back up, the very first one was this, if we had a school, we would place you but no principal has resigned but my school is going to be closed. So I could go to the community college, I could go to the classroom and I could go with the central staff. And I said to the superintendent, I said, I have worked here for eight years for the Wilkes County Board and I don't know a thing about Wilkes Community College, well, I know something about it because we helped bring it there but I don't know anything about it. You can mark that off. I said my children, my people don't expect to see me in the classroom. I suppose the more Black I would live longer but they don't expect to see me in there. So that brings me to one thing and that is the central staff. Now you call that a supervisor now were you talking about telling these children to get dental work done and to carry them for clothes and shoes. I want to understand what you are talking about. I need to understand that because not that I'm any better than anybody else to do it, somebody has to do it but so that I'll be clear as to

what my moves are I want to know what you are talking about. He said we are talking about supervision in your area of certification. I said well friend, we can do business on that. My area is science and mathematics and but then first administrative duties out here are principalship, then I said you know--he said yes, you can have that. And so I got into that for a couple of years but during that first year the superintendent, C. Wayne Bradford, and Wilkes County Board of Education said we have too much money tied up in Lincoln Heights. We can't close that facility. So they had looked at some other areas out here where people had used facilities like that--all kinds of things were being tried across the country--so he decided to get into this business of career education. There wasn't one like that in the state at that time--that was in 1968. He said, he may have to go out of state and look at one and said if you are interested in the Career Center now I was working then as supervisor and then he was talking about the wheels turning to open this center. So I got out and went to South Carolina to the Alexander area of the Vocational Center which is on I-26. I spent a whole day down there and I came back then and we established the Career Center so my second year I was supervisor of science and math with the central staff. My office never did move. I still remained at Lincoln Heights School facility itself. And of course when the Career Center came here and my people really didn't know what he was talking about but they said as long as our facility here can be used for training of some kind--now I make no bones about it, I was really as strong, I was motivated a whole lot in trying to assure that that school area would not be a dumping ground for broken down furniture because a little of that had happened at Rosenthough facility. And I said I will do what I can but in the meantime about the second year, well the first year after we got the Career Center going about three principalships opened up and they said E.V., do you want to do it and so I turned them down. I was involved in this new program and the fact that I could build something here in this Black community plus the fact we are trying something that hadn't been tried in the state. Now Winston-Salem and Greensboro have come up with a Career Center but we had that before and of course the kids came in and some said the White kids won't come in down there to a Black area. But we had news for them. We had a Black principal sitting up here. No problem. And then when we started out we didn't have White girls coming in. As a matter of fact, the first year we didn't have any girls period. So I said this is a make believe. Women have as much need for career skills as the men. We really need occupational home ec, we need health occupations, we need clothing, all of it. I was able to get health occupations then and one principal out there said, well, he didn't think he would be able to send his girls there and I said well that is fine and one other principal told me to tell him that I had enough girls here who want to take this. I was only allotting them three each. I would take East,

West, North and Central in the afternoon because it was a larger facility. He said, Mac told me that's good because I've got fifteen here who want to get into that program. Now when it came down to almost time to open I said well we are ready to go and North said, now we don't want to be left out. I said, listen I'm getting ready to open school. You told me that you didn't think your community, your people would support your sending girls here. So I've got a full class. He said, well, now listen, it's not fair--I said, come on now. Let's play ball and we are man to man. I guess I can call East and tell them to just hold but I don't know what he will do because I had told him to send them on. It was a funny thing. You had this fear I guess that we might fight. In Wilkes County you only have about a ratio of 1-14. It's a very small populated county in the first place.

Goldie: Did you have any different supervision of the Black teachers? What was your competition with Black and White?

Mr. Dacons: Okay, after it grew into about eleven courses, we didn't have-- most of the staff there was White so you had electricians, mechanics, health occupations and we finally ended up with Mrs. O.B. Harris, who has always been in home economics. She and I worked together prior to the integration of Lincoln Heights and she went to central. She and I were able to get back working together when I got funding for clothing and textiles. And she came in and taught a class and so she was the only Black on the staff there and of course, I did have a Cliff Morrison there for a while with a 7th grade exploratory program.

Goldie: Did you enjoy your job? And why?

Mr. Dacons: I enjoyed it thoroughly. I suppose one key thing and I don't know how this came about. I have always made my own assignments and that sounds real strange. The work that I did--and I worked hard all the time and there were long hours. The clock had no meaning but I enjoyed it. In other words, if I decided that I needed to write a proposal I would write that to get a course in. I just enjoyed it so much. The superintendent very seldom told me what to do. I went in for the staff meetings and these kind of things--but that was not helping us as a school as a program to get from here to there. It was in those areas there where I had room to try and fail. I guess I enjoyed that more.

Goldie: And as long as you kept that school running well, the superintendent wasn't bothering you. And he really didn't bother about what was going on over there.

Mr. Dacons: No, he didn't bother us. Now and then--you see the message feeds back--it has a way of feeding back--he knows what is going on. It feeds back to him but as I said

when I first got in there, with his 9-12 in the buildings, grades 1-8, he, C.B. Eller, there was no way for him to get into 26 students. Now when C. Wayne Bradley came in, I worked with C. Wayne for about--after Lincoln Heights closed, I worked with C.B. two more years--maybe three years. About eleven years and then C. Wayne Bradley fourteen years and now C. Wayne Bradley got in because he had two associates. He came in with two associates so he could get around. Plus he had some more staff--he had a couple vehicles that C.B. never did have. He didn't have a vehicle so they did get in and see what was transpiring.

Goldie: What did you see as your major problem with your principalship?

Mr. Dacons: I guess lack of finance for programs that would help our people. I hear people talking about money but money isn't the answer to all things but you see if you've got money you can buy specialists, people who are trained to help you. Many times our children here and our teachers did an enormous job but if they had had a psychologist, a therapist, people here who were well-trained and specialized in this area I think it may have helped us get a little further. More cultural experiences, you take a group of kids and you need to take them for a program that is going to happen at the Fine Arts Center down here--you just put them on a bus and let them experience that. If we could be hooked up now to a satellite program where they could come in and witness that. I guess maybe that would probably be the biggest problem.

Goldie: What do you consider the most rewarding about your principalship?

Mr. Dacons: The most rewarding thing is when I have students come up to me and say, Mr. Dacons, I want to thank you. I just want to thank you. Some I went and pulled out of the pool when they would play hooky and brought them in. I just maybe had given that student lunch money out of my pocket but I paddled him after I brought him in. Not hurt him but paddled him. I saw students who would be in the corridor during lunch hour and I would always say to them like I would say the first day--I don't talk promotion and grades and honor roll in May. I'm saying this at our first assembly because I will not talk with your parents, your teachers, school board members, or superintendent in May about whether you passed, you didn't pass, you didn't have quite enough units, and my office is off limits for that. You have to find someone else to talk to in May about that. Then of course all the little ground rules about this or that--during lunch hour the corridors are mine. That is off limits to students. You are in the cafeteria eating. If I found a student in the corridor I would say, "Look young man-- what is the problem? Why are you here?" He would say, "I don't

like what they are serving down there today." I said, "What are they serving?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Look, you know what the policy is and you know that right now you are off limits." I said, "Come here." And I would pull him into a lunchroom so that no one could see us and I would pull one of the sandwiches and give it to him. He would say, "I'll pay you back." I would say, "Wait a minute, no, no you won't have any more money Monday than you have now. You don't owe me anything. We want to make that clear now and when you depart now and what exists now there is no indebtedness. You don't owe me a dime. Maybe one day in life I may need a dollar, not a dime or twenty cents, or three dimes--I may need a dollar, or ten dollars and you might have it." He said, "Thank you." And later I see that young man over at the pool room where he plays hooky and I bring him back and it may depend on what his home condition is like if I spank him. But those kids--my most rewarding experience is when they come back and say, I thank you. I want to thank you for what you have done.

Goldie: Well, when you were principal back in 1964, there were over 200 Black high school principals in the State of North Carolina. When I started to do this research I called down to Raleigh to find out how many Black high school principals there were in 1989. They sent me a list and there were 41 and of those 41 some of them were not full-fledged high school principals. They were in alternative schools so there are less than 40 Black principals in the State. If you had to give some advice to any Black young person aspiring to be a principal, you know now we have male and female, just what advice would you give?

Mr. Dacons: Take all the courses in human behavior as you possibly can take. Be convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that that is the direction that you want to move into. I guess that would probably come first and then learn all you can about human behavior, learn all you can about your community relationship and as John Nesbit points out in his book, what the high tech, low touch means here and its impact on learning and child behavior. And make certain that you understand the school and its relationships with other organizations now especially the impact of media. You see in our time we didn't have the strong impact of television and what have you but if you are an aspiring principal, you are going to have to know that relationship and be prepared to deal with it. The impact that the media has on that school setting think that you are also going to have to examine your own heart about where you stand with regard to whether knowledge can be classified into great, greater, and least worth. Whether or not that all knowledge has some value. Be prepared also to unlearn some things that you held dear as you go in. Be inflexible but also adaptive to a worthy needed change.

Goldie: What should you be inflexible to?

Mr. Dacons: Moral standards some absolutes here that has to do with our family unity. Absolutes here uncompromising as it has to do with the sacredness of some social institutions like our church. Absoluteness when it comes down to staying as we are Americans on defending our shores from enemies from abroad. I don't want to get into the Persian Gulf but I don't see that as off shore. But I think when we see someone knocking on our door I don't think you ought to keep them out. Those are some things that--the achievement here that as a principal, if you are--you've got to know I guess I started to say--know where we are with regard to your racial overlays, racial overtones, your White principal over here, you've got to know something about the learning styles of Black children. The Black principal needs to know that too. That is such a thing that even though it is disputed, it is debated and what have you. You must know something about the learning styles of how our students move ahead. Let me qualify something here. If you are going to be in a public school, what I have said up to now has to do is for a public school person and of course in your private I think your job is easier there because you have policy. Your gut feeling about what comprises a home. See in 1964, during the time I was in principalship, I had no problem knowing what a home is; you've got a mother, father, Sally, Dick, Jane, Spot, white fence and what have you and now as we move toward 2000 we've got two people of the same sex in this home and they have children here and they are raising some children. That impacts on what is going to happen out here in the school. So as a principal you are going to have to know how the school fits in and adapts to and deals with the variety, if indeed the variety of homes, configuration of homes does exist. I'm not so sure that they exist but they are here upon us and somebody says, yes, they are. My age shows but I still go back to mother and father, and Dick and Jane.

Goldie: Someone mentioned to me that they are really concerned about the Black male. Do you see any problems that need to be addressed in the school?

Mr. Dacons: Yes, yes. The schools invariably kind of reflects the community what is happening out there and of course I am concerned. As a matter of fact I'm a member of The Brother to Brother Group that we've got here locally trying to at least give some thought toward that problem. It is kind of a universal problem. The Black male--I am concerned. Every other target group of people have increased their span except the Black male. It is actually decreasing. So I don't know how the school can really address that but I think that here again, human behavior and what makes our children move and what makes them feel good about themselves. Not a pie in the sky, I'm not talking about frivolous kind of things but our Black male many times fails because he does

not have a good image. He doesn't have self-esteem. I don't know how we can deal with it but I think the fact that when we are grouped I think we have failed. We need to find a way.

Goldie: Now do you think that the role of the Black male principal helped Black males?

Mr. Dacons: I think it did. There was somebody there that he could say, look, here is a fellow here who's my principal and he's not quite sure if that White principal is his principal or not. He's just not quite sure. He knows that that White principal is there but he is not quite sure that that is his principal. And when he says this Black principal is his he is showing ownership here. This is my principal. He feels good about that. This motivates him to go on and do--it's kind of like a father. To some of them it is their father because every Black principal picked up these boys here and after a game and they had no way home and you carry them on home. So you are a father and if they didn't have lunch money, you just reach in your pocket because you didn't have any fund drive so that Black role model that we had there. Right now I think if we could get some more Black coaches out here that probably does or certainly helps that Black male to see that. The White coaches do a good job as long as we are winning but the Black coach is interested in that whole child and what that child is under. Look at the fellow, McCoy over at West Charlotte or look at Robinston down at Granville, John Thompson up here at Georgetown, these folks are concerned about Chainey here at Temple. These folks are'n't concerned about where these folks go, what they do after they quit playing basketball or football or what have you and it is that kind of thing. It is that caring, you see. So the Black principal I think did a whole lot to establish that good role model there.

Goldie: Well, this has been very interesting and I am so pleased that you took time out of your busy day.

Mr. Dacons: You know what, I don't have a busy day. I don't know whether you saw the car out there or not. The Buick out there in the front--that's my son's car. I couldn't have done anything today anyway because it's raining but you see I'm forced to put a waterpump on that car. No problem because he's driving my car. He's not stuck. Since I've retired this is what I do. Usually I end up--I just finished up with Pierre's chimney up there. I'm carrying cement up on ladder and helping Wally Passon, helping my grandchildren and my children and these kinds of things. I do gardening, etc., and a lot of reading. I enjoy that. But no, there's no duress or rush or anything.

Goldie: I certainly appreciate it because this has been an interesting interview and you shared a lot with me.