

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

DARNELL FARRIS
December 5, 2004

DAVID CLINE: First of all, if you could for the tape just introduce yourself that would be great.

DARNELL FARRIS: My name is Darnell Farris. I am a former student of the Jefferson County school systems. I was one of the first group of students that was bused during the 1970s, 1975 to be exact and I was first bused to Southern High School. From Southern High School, which I spent the year, I ended up graduating high school from J. M. Atherton High School, which I spent my tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade years. My ninth grade year was spent at Southern High School and that was the first school I was bused to as a ninth grader.

DC: Were you born here in Louisville?

DF: Born in Louisville, forty-three years ago now, but yes.

DC: And how many other kids in your family?

DF: I have an older brother and sister and ironically they were both teachers then going through the system. Both of them are about nine or ten years older than me, respectively. And that being a whole generation ahead of me they were teachers and student teachers going through the same thing I was. They were sent to different schools, some of them not nice, so they have stories to tell too as teachers.

DC: Are they still in the area?

DF: Yes, they are. My brother just retired. He's actually training principals now. He had a school for about twelve years at Whitney Young Elementary. It's in West Louisville. My sister after her eighth year of teaching went to the Greater Clark

County system, which is directly across the river. She's still a teacher but she's dealing with a fluency program for elementary school. So they were both in elementary education.

DC: What neighborhood did y'all grow up in?

DF: We grew up in the Chickasaw neighborhood, which is West Louisville, kind of near Shawnee and Chickasaw Park, which is almost at the edge of the city, the western edge of the city.

DC: So the racial composition of the neighborhood at that time when you were coming up was?

DF: At that time I would say that it was probably about ninety-five percent black. When my parents moved there in 1959 there was probably a thirty or forty percent black population. Over the years and after a series of other things -- there were riots during the war and other race riots that happened during the 1960s here, just like there were in a lot of major cities -- that changed the composition around and the inner city became, that part of the inner city became predominately black. There are still some whites living there but that's kind of where we were when busing began.

I had gone to an elementary school, Stephen Foster, that was about three blocks away from where I grew up. So I could practically skip to school. And that population then during my elementary school years was probably about ninety-five percent black. We did have white students there. So when busing came along one of my first things I wanted to do was to go to Dupont Manual, which is like on the edge of old Louisville here and was along the Hill Street, you know, transit bus line. The bus stopped right in front of my house and it was just easy for me to get around. So I

practically bused myself because Dupont Manual was a school that I always thought had great potential. Now it's like one of the nations, you know, best high schools in terms of Merit scholars and it's even better than some private schools. But it was the only school that I can think of in the whole mix of schools that went through busing that always met the criteria and so it never needed to have busing. But it was part of a program the University of Louisville had started with the school systems where you would go to an elementary school, which was Cochran Elementary, and then you would go to the new school, which I went to [for] the eighth grade, that was called Noe Middle School. It was a new concept school that had open classrooms and stuff like that. Then from there you were to go to Dupont Manual and then from there you would go to University of Louisville. And it was a test thing that was really more math, science, and the arts related. It's a great art magnet school now, performing as well as visual arts.

DC: And you went there or not?

DF: I was going to, I went to the seventh grade at Dupont Manual. That was the last class that they had where they had undergrads, seventh and eighth graders. My eighth grade year was spent at Noe Middle School half the year because it was really a merging of two schools together. So I still ended up down here because Noe Middle is right beside Dupont Manual. My ninth grade year I tried to hardship around so I didn't have to go to a school that I didn't know, only to find out that I was bused. They called it ... they bused based on what your high school cluster was then. They put you in a cluster and it was considered the Male cluster then. And most of the time

you would have to take a bus over to the nearest middle school where they had other buses that took you out to the school where you went.

DC: Right. So it was quite a process you had?

DF: It was quite a process. Sometimes it was really hard. You had to get up a little bit earlier. Buses were always full. Sometimes four to a seat, people on top of, you know, sitting on other people's laps. It's way different than it is now with activity buses and stuff. You miss that bus, you know, it's kind of like, spend a long time. So there was some tardiness and stuff like that that happened. It was nothing for me to get into school midway through first period. So we would miss homeroom a lot. It was kind of hard getting acclimated to school when you're coming in the middle of something and then again we're coming from West Louisville where the black students [are] and I'm coming into a class where, you know, it's just about all white and we're coming in disrupting classes and, you know, I'm feeling compromised myself. I've told the story before. There was a teacher there and she was white and she was a younger teacher and she was real cool and she really understood where things were then. But there were just so many factors that played into that mix. We were very unwanted at that point. It was really a school that was a flashpoint then. And that whole area, you know, we can say it was for people that were from there but I'd say there were also some people from other parts of other counties coming in stirring up stuff too. During the, you know, first couple of days everything was fine but there was one weekend right before school really got into gear that they had a riot out there and, you know, there were state troopers and, you know, they even called in the National Guard.

DC: This was before school even started?

DF: Well, school kind of started on like a Wednesday or a Thursday and, you know, you kind of got the stuff together and then you went through that first weekend where, you know, you went to buy your other supplies and all that and then you really start a full week and the flashpoint really happened that first weekend. And I just remember being really scared and a lot of people said they weren't going to school. There were threats about what was going to happen to kids that went to school. Now there were a whole lot of other things. The road that physically leads to the school, you come off the interstate. The interstate wasn't as wide as it is now. So there were just all these little things that happened. It was dark, you know. A bus, of course, has all this glass. You know you come off and you're on a two-lane road and there's, you know, cars honking, and you know. So it was already bad enough that we had to go in environments like that but they would have like diesel trucks outside the school blowing their horns all day. And there's nothing louder than I think a locomotive that has a sound that's that loud and it would go on all day long, but especially first period, which I'm coming in late having to go through, you know, get your stuff out of the locker late and come into a classroom, people looking at you, you know. But that particular, after that weekend where so much rioting and looting and we made national news along with Boston schools because they were right there with us, you know, News One that was their first story, national news. That was not a proud moment one bit. But I remember the pastor at our church went and he was concerned just like the rest of the parents were and the [sound of phone ringing] thing about busing was, before busing even started a lot of people who had went to the same elementary

schools and stuff kind of wanted to get away off the beaten path, try new schools and everything because we had kind of been up under each other for the longest, you know, and you kind of want to go meet new friends and stuff like that. Busing kind of brought everybody back together that was in the same neighborhoods and everything. Some had went off to Catholic schools. Some had went off to, you know, the junior high school in the Catholic system, was a little bit more education-oriented to get you prepped for high school. That's before the high schools really did what they were supposed to do. And so we had all these people that I've grown up with and some of them were, you know, it was just like redirecting friendships again. And so back to the—

DC: That's kind of ironic though because these are people from your neighborhood who you're reconnecting with being sent into another neighborhood.

DF: Yeah, somewhere else, yeah, exactly. So I remember the pastor of our church being really concerned. He told us all to come up front and he prayed for us. And I remember that next morning the bus was only half full. But what was the most incredible thing about it is everything that I've ever seen about the 1960s that I can remember; forty-three years old I can remember only parts of it. Well, I can remember quite a lot. I have that kind of a memory. But I don't remember the violence aspect of it. I remember from the news accounts and in my neighborhood there were some flashpoints during the race riots but this was a different thing. We got up that morning, got on the bus, and there was an MP. I mean he was National Guard. He had a forty-five. It was cocked and ready to go. He had an M-16 and this was not in a case, this was ready to go. And, you know, when you see stuff like that

and you're trying to get on a bus and you try to be brave and the bus is half full, you don't know what you're going to see. You get off of, you know, [Interstate] 65 going out there. It took probably about forty minutes because, you know, we're talking about narrow roads and everything so you're wondering what's going to go on. You look out front and you've picked up a state trooper escorting you. That's the first thing before you even get off the interstate. Then you pick up another one and then you look up in the sky and there's a police helicopter and we're being escorted in and it's very, it was very scary. But when we pulled into that lot where most of the teachers and the students would park there had to be no less than about fifty to sixty state troopers and just whatever else that it took then to just keep some quiet. On the other side of the street, of course, were protesters blowing the horns and all that stuff and it was just really hard to concentrate. So we would go in the school and sometimes we would have good weeks where nothing would happen and, you know, there would be a day just out of nowhere, no rhyme or reason, where it would really be really, really bad and they would have to tell, you know, I mean if it's not biased enough, tell all black students to report to the cafeteria. And, you know, this is ten or fifteen minutes before we got on the bus. And they would tell us how bad it was outside and to keep your books up beside [your head], you know, [indicates holding a book up in front of a window] the window glass in case it gets broken and to not taunt anybody, got to hold your head down if you can. And we would leave in convoys of thirty buses. They would hold up the street and the buses would come out and they would be *rolling*. I mean like fifty miles an hour taking a curve. I mean you know, until we got on the interstate did we feel any kind of safety. And there were a couple

of areas where there are overpasses and there were some kids from some other private schools that used to come and taunt us. We got shot at a couple of times and, you know, one we think it was a pellet gun. The second one, not the way it broke. And so, you know, that's the first time where I've ever said that anything that I've ever done in my life actually came with a cost. And when you think about the history of this country and wars and stuff like that, people actually paid a price so we can have an education. But, you know, for them to shoot at a little kid is way different than a protest on campus that you don't like the policies of another country. So, you know, it was really quite interesting.

DC: You were fourteen, right, ninth grade?

DF: Sounds about right, about twelve maybe.

DC: Do you remember what you would say to each other on the bus or friends that you had grown up with going into that situation?

DF: Well, sometimes we wondered if the buses' tires got shot out how far would we run or where would we run to, what would be the safe places? Public transportation only went so far out, you know, and if you missed transportation here you are among the people that you're here in school with. And it's a funny thing about that too because really the protesters that we'd see, sometimes parents would pull their kids out of school, you know. Of course, this was pure racial. But they would pull their kids out of school and sometimes they'd just take them out because they have concerns just like our parents would have concerns about us. You know, being seventeen miles from your neighborhood, not many parents are going to come and get their kids. They're going to entrust the school system. So they would come

and get their kids and some of them would come and get them and they would go home, then others would come and they'd be right on the side with the protest. So some of them we saw, you know, it was never, I didn't feel the tension inside as much as I did outside. I met some real good friends that year. But I just remember the last day of school with all the stuff we'd gone through tensions had gotten a little bit better and you just hoped that, you know, whatever that you could do to kind of make it better for the next group that came along, that's what you would do. So there was a lot of biting of lips and, you know, going to take your F's. Because my grades plummeted.

DC: Yeah, I want to talk about it.

DF: I was on my way to be a scholar. I mean really, I was an A, B all the way through. That's the first place I've ever had an F, first place I've ever had D's and stuff. I had no control over it because what you don't understand is when you're being taught something that you also have teachers that have biases too. And there's one in particular that used to be real good at that kind of stuff, saying just little things and you just know that, you know, you weren't going to get a favorable grade. So I sat and took my F and waited for the next semester and took it again. Keep on taking it til, you know, I got something favorable but it would take me the rest of my school years. I took advanced everything just to get my GPA up to a 3.0, a respectable amount to get in the architecture school.

DC: What kinds of things would the teacher say? I mean how would the teacher let you know?

DF: [Big sigh] It's just how the general layout of it was, whether you were called or not called, you know, whether you'd get a break on an essay or something like that. Just a general demeanor you could tell. You could tell how he put that out without having opened his mouth. It's not a situation where you would say this person is prejudiced or something like that. I mean there are sometimes you can really catch on when you have, because sometimes classes would be so bad that you can't do anything but discuss what's going on outside. And being only one of two you just heard comments sometimes and, you know, you expected an adult in that situation to act like an adult and they're not acting like an adult at all. It's like, you know, so hey I'm in this by myself.

DC: When you say one or two, there'd be one or two black kids in that classroom at the time?

DF: Yeah, usually the breakdown would be that way. I was taking, you know, I was taking a little bit better classes, you know, advanced classes and stuff like that and I put myself somewhat in those situations. But that first year it was kind of really hard to figure it out.

DC: Were there black teachers or administrators out at Southern at that point?

DF: There were a few. There were a few. The numbers were even less than students, even if you got in a ratio situation with teachers, there were very few. But, you know, I kind of felt sorry for them because, like I said, I had a brother and a sister that were still home at the time and there used to be this exercise where it was, you know, the word was, you know, honk your horn if you like busing. And, of course, if you're a teacher you're in before all the kids and the police and stuff get there then

you're going to honk your horn or else you're going to find a brick through the window. So you know, it was kind of like a demeaning thing for them to even get to school and leave. A lot of them had to leave right after school just like we as students did.

It was very interesting and I don't know why a whole lot more people don't have that vivid memory but I can understand why people want to forget. I didn't want to forget. I wanted to not necessarily move it aside but I wanted to take my rage and use it for more, better situations. And it's funny I should end up in something that's more historical architecture than anything. You'd think I want to move more contemporary and be away from it but I respect history and there's just certain aspects of it that still fascinate me to this day because I know that someone built these houses and it wasn't all royalty that actually went out there and laid the bricks and stuff like that, you know. This country is such a melting pot of different people. But, I don't know.

DC: So you were able to get the education to get yourself to the university and move forward then?

DF: Yes. I graduated from Atherton, like I said, with a 3.0, which I thought was respectable enough but it would have been a lot better. I feel sometimes kind of angry that I missed out on the scholarships and stuff like that, which I was truly destined for. And, you know, to a certain extent I had to learn to like school again to a point. It was really hard to try to concentrate on something with all this swirling around and when I ended up going to Atherton and Atherton was what I would call "a school that had blacks that went to it." It was a lot like Manual. It was a school

where, you know, blacks actually lived in that area, not a lot of them, but it still wasn't an area or school where I wanted to go. But, you know, you made it happen and, you know, principals and stuff tried to make it as accommodative as possible. But it's almost like you're not in your homeland so you decide at some point that you're going to be a positive part of that. I tried to play football in my tenth grade, which was my first year there. I was so glad to get out of Southern that I decided to actually try that. You know, you kind of get into that situation where the activity buses wasn't rolling nearly enough so you had to catch a transfer city bus home. And after football practice, you know, you're getting home at eight-thirty or nine o'clock at night in the dark and it kind of wears on you.

DC: And then in the morning you'd be up at what time for the next bus?

DF: In the morning you'd be up to catch that bus at six-thirty or quarter til seven. So it's just, if you want to go to the school you want to go to, that's fine. You would take that kind of thing. But when you don't really want to be there, even though it's a nice school, very nice people, very courteous, the second one, but you know, it's like all of the baggage from the first one kind of rolls over and it manifests itself in a different way. So at that point I just wanted to be out of high school and get college, you know, underway and all that. And I would end up going to University of Kentucky to architectural school, which is a place that didn't graduate a whole lot of blacks either.

DC: You went to Kentucky, all right, so that's a whole different...

DF: Yeah, so that's a whole different ballgame. So, you know, I've just constantly thrust...you know, when I look back at my education things, you know, I

believe the biggest hurdle was being in a professional school in a place that isn't traditionally assigned to blacks. So that was the layer that I think was the hardest to get over because I had to chunk all my baggage to the side. I had to say, "I'm more mature than this. I want to get on. Now I'm paying for it." I just remember when my father let me out there he said, "Are you sure you want to go here?" And only to come and find out that it was an excellent school. It wasn't the school. It was more of, Lexington is just a whole different place than Louisville just like I guess some parts of Carolina are different than others, you know, and you have different kind of people, some you like, some you don't like and it's just the general attitude. So I don't know what a Chapel Hill person thinks about a Duke University person but I imagine not favorable. (Laughter)

DC: No.

DF: I imagine, N.C. State, but you know, anyway. So you know what I'm saying about certain set biases vary from reality. So I went through school. It's a five-year program. I got out in five and a half years. I had two and a half jobs actually, work study job and a couple of night desk jobs because I knew I was going to be up anyway. And then, you know, another thing hits. My third year into school my dad loses his job to outsourcing. No, they actually closed down then. He worked for a distillery. They made barrels.

DC: So he got laid off when they closed down?

DF: He got laid off and, you know, so that of course put another layer of urgency to my education, with trying to get out. I was already serious about getting out anyway but it really put another sense of urgency to it. But we did it. I don't have

any problem working. Probably work harder now than I ever did when I was in school. You know it's a character building thing I guess.

DC: Right. And you mostly, I mean your environment now is it mostly white folks working around you too or is it a fairly, is it a more mixed group?

DF: Government has a tendency to be more mixed. My track into historic preservation is probably not going to have as many blacks that are going to be working as that but you've got a lot of people that respect it. So, you know, I find myself going to conferences and stuff and seeing a lot more blacks now because I'm learning that there's more interpretation of already existing national things like the Sally Hemmings story, you know, and all those kinds of things that kind of pop out. Those are bits of history that are never told that anyone who has any affiliation with the area already knows that story. But it's just not something that always makes the history books so the question is, you know, your tours, how you look at things always has a certain bias to it based on your eyes and your upbringing and, you know, your just how you go through your day-to-day don't have the same, you know, experiences as some others do. You can't just turn your color off and just go and do your thing, you know. As an inspector sometimes I end up going to places where I have to make sure I am identifying myself correctly and sometimes you have to wear a tie, sometimes it's not good to wear a tie because now we are dealing with classes of folks and whether they're white or black, sometimes people see you in a tie they don't like that. So they think you're up here and they're down there, makes them feel small.

DC: Absolutely, I know exactly what you're talking about, yeah. There's a great quote at colonial Williamsburg in Virginia and they have a really complicated thing about African American interpretation there.

DF: Oh, yeah, really.

DC: Yeah, you know that story and one of the guys that works there -- I just really love this quote -- he was talking about working there as an interpreter and he said, "as a black person in America I wear my history twenty-four-seven."

DF: He does.

DC: That was a really, that was very powerful to me.

DF: You do and to a certain extent you always feel like you're on point, you know. There are people that will ask that question well, what do you think about that; what do your people think, like I'm going to know the answer.

DC: The spokesperson for.

DF: Yeah. But you know my experience is still not like the other person's even though they're black. It's just to think of yourself as an American first and then start to break down what your experiences are and tell certain stories. I think the workplace is starting to get like that a lot. There are some areas where people of color can bring a different perspective on things and it's starting to show itself a lot in mainstream America. There's always that little smidgen of interpretation that almost needs to happen.

DC: I mean talking about history and talking about these things, you know, when you were gearing up to be bused in that first year and you had siblings who are

in the house, right, who as teachers experienced the same thing, how did you talk about it at home? What did your parents talk to you [about]?

DF: We would always talk about it at the table. My dad only got through sixth grade. He came here from Richmond, Kentucky, which is a much smaller town and when he left the war -- he was an only child -- when he left World War II he came home and married my mother who came from a large family but she had only gotten through twelfth grade. So one of the things is, they wanted to put their three kids through college, which I think is amazing considering he was just a common laborer. But we only had one choice, you were either going to school or you were going to Porter's which is the local funeral home. (Laughter) And it was very much, you know, that's what it was and all during that year where my grades plummeted there was like a little war going on at my house because this was like, "Don't let them get to you. You're supposed to keep your head in a book." I'm like, you don't understand. I'm being shot at. It's impossible to concentrate, you know, XYZ. So, you know, you're being in high school, a rebellious high schooler, you know. [There] was a point where I even thought about do I need to run away or what, they don't get it. Then you take my stereo away from me. I hate that. (Laughter)

So it was just interesting on a whole lot of levels. It's not a likable place but now looking back over it I think it's probably one of the best things that ever could happen to me. You know how you say sometimes you go through a bad situation and it makes you stronger, it really does. It's makes me end up being a fighter because I can sit in a room and, you know, I can sit and listen to conversations going on and I can debate the issue without getting upset about it. But there's just certain things that

I'm just going to hold to and I'm just not going to sit there and let people, you know, just sit there and impose their will on me, you know, because they don't know everything. No one person knows it all.

I try to travel. I try to do as much as I can to learn others' points of view on things so I can have a better dialogue with them. And that makes me a better person, not just, "I'm going to study this book from cover to cover and be the best that I can and, you know, forget everybody else. I got my own thing, you know." It seems like I've surrounded myself with wiser -- and that has a tendency to be older -- people and those people are always grounded. They're not flighty. They're not like this is the newest way of thinking. I mean, you know, I think we kind of get away from that in academia these days. It seems like academia now is more geared toward equipping people for certain jobs, not intellectually thinking like it used to be. Unless you're in that professional school where you've got some old fashioned professors that really do, you know, whip it into you, I mean that's kind of what's missing these days and I see it in just about every university. I'm kind of saddened by it because you're becoming an intellectual school turner. You're not becoming a person who can actually think on their feet about things and, you know, tell me about astronomy. I took astronomy. Tell me about meteorology. You know, I took that. I took, you know, I didn't take statistics. (Laughter) But I understand trends and everything else. I had to take somebody's advice on that one. But you know I've found myself being a news blurb [junkie] of sorts, lots of little short stories and things. I'm a news junkie. I want to know about the thing even if it hurts. I want to know about the news because there's just so much out there to learn. It's just amazing.

DC: You were, it sounds like, really sort of made stronger in a way like in the fires of adversity you could say. Did you have friends in the neighborhood who didn't make it through that same adversity, who really, you know, crumbled in that situation?

DF: Yeah and those are the people that people who watch the news would just say this is a wasted individual. You know, this is just a person who's sitting up there half drugged out or whatever. But you know I have to thank my family and friends for getting me through that. I did not get through that all by myself. I actually had some grounded people just kind of beat me into this. You can do this. If you don't have someone who can help you through your bad times and they are stable people, you can go a number of ways and there were a whole lot of people who really got, excuse the pun, fucked up in the mind and it had nothing to do with drugs. So the drugs were just something you put on top of that to make it worse. It was really just a really tough situation. That's just one of many things that I see out now, you know, the economy. There are more drugs and more mean people on the streets. I just remembering hanging out, just like my walk to elementary school, you know. You wouldn't want your elementary school person or kid to be walking three blocks now. You'd almost want to take them to school because these people are abducted. I've never heard of this until, you know, recently. I'm like, what is wrong here?

DC: Were there any teachers or anybody that really was sort of a mentor or anybody that you really did connect with or was it mostly family that got you through?

DF: I think it was mostly family. When you're in a household of teachers, of course, they know it all. But they're your siblings you can just kind of sit around the table. We all ate dinner together. That was one thing. Even though they were much

older and could have went on their own route. I had a mother at home. Had a dad that, you know, when my sister and brother were going through college and were away he had a second job but mainly our family ate around the table and we discussed everything openly, non biased, go at it, if you've got an opinion you don't get slapped over the wrist for it. Sometimes it got really loud. But, you know, regardless of what did that, two minutes later, you know, we're still laughing at each other. And that's respect you have. You know, there's a respect that you can have in debate. If you cross that line then it gets to a point where no one's listening. You're just screaming at each other. You know, if you're going to have a debate, have a debate with some ground rules, which is this is not going to get stupid. And that's kind of how I'm been living my life since.

DC: Did it ever get so bad they thought of pulling you out of that school or going out and talking to the administrators?

DF: That wasn't an option.

DC: Wasn't an option?

DF: That wasn't an option. We're just mainly talking about that first year. But that just wasn't an option. Everybody was trying to get out of there. Actually I tried that from the very beginning. I'm like, look, I've been going to a school that's been racially balanced, why can't I do that? I wasn't in the zone [for that school]. I was like three blocks outside of the zone so I had to go. So actually when I got there, you know, the first day or so was like almost get to that second week. Like I went that one day and then that was that weekend that stuff started so I couldn't bribe my way in. (Laughter)

DC: You did end up making some friends out there at Southern?

DF: Yeah. But you know when you're an eighth and ninth grader you don't keep up with them the same way you did if you were a high school senior, you know, beyond that. People are people and sometimes you have to realize they come to the table with parents that have biases and they hear it around the table a different way and they have to check you out the same way you have to check them out. It was a lot of checking out that year.

DC: Did it change the way that you felt about white people?

DF: I never had a problem with them because I always had, like I said, I had gone to Manual and to other places too. My parents got me out and about so I was always, you know ... the whole situation in the 1960s -- I was born in 1961 -- when the '67-'68 riots and stuff were around, the only thing that really bothered me [was] if I saw a whole lot of tearing up. It just didn't affect me like white versus black. Of course, it was a black power movement, you know, and all that but it was a different thing to me. It was more of a spirit than it was actual, you know, "We hate white people," you know, and stuff like that. You know, you hear the Richard Pryor's and all that making jokes about it but it just wasn't, it didn't ring out that way because I was too young to really understand the depth of that. And so, you know, being a kid you learn these things from your parents and my parents just weren't there with that. Plus I had a sister and brother that were going into teaching so they were going away to school and they were learning things too. But it just wasn't, we never had a household that, and that goes a long way too. It's about your etiquette in dealing with other people. You really do have to get some parts of it at home. You cannot expect a

teacher to be able to be your mentor, counselor, with all the current things that are going on. To me a lot of it's politically motivated. We're going to test ourselves to death and that is pure politics. They're putting it all on the teachers, nothing on the parents and it's biting now more than ever because we've got two or three generations of people who have not [unintelligible] for their mistakes. And the mistake is you're a single parent or your situation or whatever might be bad but you can at least parent your kids. And so when it doesn't happen there and you allow somebody else who you don't know to parent your kid, your kid learns it out on the street from their friends, the bad friends, not the good friends. So if you're in a bad neighborhood and you're getting all this stuff out in the streets, the streets never were kind to anyone, especially if they're bad streets. But even if it's good streets, you know streets never were kind to anybody because they don't care.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

DC: I was just trying to think and you can I guess answer this maybe from how you thought about it as you were a kid and then later on too looking back, but did you think that busing, that desegregation was going to accomplish something?

DF: Well, I was at least smart enough to know that the way busing really started in this area was this: We had two school systems and, of course, there's all this bias that the county had all the money and in the city we knew we had some raggedy schools going on. So we come to find out that they were really both financially strapped and trying to make it better. But when you start seeing, again, after the '68 riots and the whole complexity of the neighborhood changes and there were some

pockets of blight and stuff. You remember the old urban renewals and stuff like that started coming through so you really knew blight in neighborhoods. Louisville was blessed by not having like thirty, forty, fifty blocks of blight, like in Detroit or Chicago or places like that. But you still had a feeling that for all of the folks that grew up in the projects, the housing projects and stuff were getting into the third, fourth generation, probably the third generation because a lot of it around here came into being around the '40s maybe. And whereas there were people who cared that were in those areas, now you've got mean people that live there too and you've got the poverty aspect of it. And, you know, that period of time there wasn't a general knowledge that there were different classes of folks. Everybody then was, I guess when you look at all the TV shows and everything everybody was kind of almost in a middle class kind of situation. That's how they kind of call the '60s, you know. Everybody got a car and when you got a car, got it delivered to the house and it was a big thing and the whole neighborhood came and they all touch the car, you know, when a dealer used to deliver it. It was just so much simpler then. Now you got poverty situations that really affect how people's behavior was and some of those kids that grew up in those areas that only see the drug dealers and stuff like that, they'll never get out of that sense unless they actually physically move.

Now I had to go back a little bit about five or ten minutes when I said my parents got me out and about. We got out and about and would see things and would go down to the parks where, you know, the river was, in the East End parks as well as the West End parks. And just that change of scenery was the kind of thing that really sparked my architectural interests. It's like these are nice houses here but the

neighborhood I grew in had some of the most stellar houses around for a neighborhood that, you know, everybody, if you looked at all the statistics, would say that it was a bad neighborhood. And it's being renovated just like a little mini Harlem, you know. You start seeing the gems. The buildings didn't do anything but it's probably why I'm at where I am now. The buildings didn't do anything to anyone. People live in them and it's the policies that surround the neighborhood. If you want to make your neighborhood better you're going to have to get out and roll up your sleeves and you're going to need some help. And that's kind of where like, I'm empowered by what I do only because of that. I'm going to make some enemies, going to make some friends at some point in time. Just like the place that we're in now [indicating the Galley House Bed & Breakfast], you know, that we've dealt with these clients, back and forth, and she said she's had some dealings with some of my other staff members [Mr. Ferris was in charge of making sure that the Gallery House met the building restrictions of its historic neighborhood.] But generally speaking, you know, the finished product should be something we can all be proud of, not just [better for] somebody's pocket, you know, [a] better handle with a cheap door or something. That's kind of where I am.

DC: So I mean you really do see a direct connection?

DF: I'm one of the rare people that actually see a connection in what I do and where I was. And I don't take it for granted. It can be fun. It can be very taxing sometimes. Sometimes I really have to pull back and realize that I work for the government (Laughter) and it has its different little biases. One is, you know, got to feed the monkey a different way.

DC: Do you ever consider living anywhere other than Louisville?

DF: Well, actually when I came out of architecture school I wanted to live in Chicago and Miami and Portland, Oregon and San Francisco. The economy during the '70s, that's when the oil embargo and stuff was, so the economy wasn't that great. The schools' placement service had a job opening that was in Louisville. I didn't put a whole lot of thought into it. I just got out of school during December. I didn't get out in March. I got out one of those off semesters and came home Christmastime. I said I'm going to spend about two or three months putting my portfolio, architectural portfolio, of projects together and I really wasn't going to look for anything until about February or March. So the school calls me sometime around Christmas and said there's an opening there, you really ought to look at it. And it was for a community design center that was here. And, you know, of course, community design centers would invite architectural and other systems to neighborhoods that can't afford it and just need some planning direction. And I thought that was pretty cool.

But I grew up as a bike rider. This gets again into the mobility thing. When I got my ten-speed I was all over this town. I mean all over this town. And, you know, it opens your eyes to be able to go from one part to the other. I spent more time here in Old Louisville or out at University of Louisville than I did down in West Louisville. We used to take a basketball all the way over to campus and would be playing with the University of Louisville basketball team who used to play outdoors just shooting around. We used to shoot with them and, you know, it would just be easier then. Now we've got college basketball where they've got their own little self-contained little pods and, you know, dorms and stuff like that. Everything, you know, we create

our monsters. We do. And so, you know, having that kind of background where you were a bike rider you notice details a lot better. So I remember going, it was a snowy day, and I went into the community design center and there were two persons that worked there then and I looked at all these photographs and I knew where every one of them were, you know, bits and pieces of little Polaroid's and stuff like, "this is this, this is this, this is, you know, this location." And I guess it fascinated them because, you know, I was wearing, I just had like a blue jean jacket and some other things on and I was really kind of in the neighborhood and thought I'd grab an application and get my act together and come back. I was being interviewed there on the spot and not knowing it because I'm a big dumb kid. I'll come back with my portfolio. That's exactly what I said. So I came back with my portfolio and my nice clothes on and they had already decided pretty much that this is probably what I needed, you know.

DC: That's great. That's a great story, yeah.

DF: But I haven't had a normal trek.

DC: And you've been at the same organization then the whole time?

DF: After leaving the community design center, well, let's see. I was at the community design center for about sixteen months. We were working on a neighborhood controversy that involved a tearing down of the theater and a group of the buildings that were around it and my boss at the community design center was doing some proforma analysis of tearing the building down versus leaving it and stuff like that. And I was providing some drawings along with the staff of the city's landmarks commission. And before I know it I'm being recruited. Somebody asked me if I'd like to come work for the city. And my boss then and this person at the

landmarks commission were friends anyway. They just made this kind of little deal, you know. They gave me an offer I couldn't refuse. So after that I've been working for landmarks and it has evolved into other things. We first started we were with inspections and now we're with a larger department called planning and design. But before that we were with a consortium of things called Louisville Development Authority, all the development entities including urban renewal and historic preservation. We're in the same office so it made sense from the standpoint of working as an agency to know what's going on and is this really a demo versus a, you know.

DC: I don't think this conversation is happening in a lot of cities. It makes sense.

DF: But really, you know, nine times out of ten it's a communication thing and it's a turf thing and so you take the turf issues out of them because you needed a permit to do any one of them. If it's urban renewal you're using, you know, federal dollars and they've got to do it a certain way so they need some design professionals to be able to do what they do. Plus from our standpoint, most of the stuff that they're wanting to take down, some of it has some historic implications or else they wouldn't have designated it as blight barrier. So, you know, the two get together. And then there's other planning in other agencies that were part of that also. So after working for the development authority from about I'd say probably about '92 'til actually last year, we were pulled over -- one of the former staff of Landmarks is now director of Planning and Design and he wanted our small urban design division to go over to that. So in that mix I had been doing review and new architecture actually for an area called

Park Duvall and it's a replacement program a lot like Cabrini Green [in Chicago] and some of the others, hundred and twenty-five acres of really building a new town, a new section of town but we've found a way of integrating it into the current neighborhood fabric using traditional neighborhood streets that were already kind of running through there.

DC: Just extending them?

DF: Yeah. And in doing that we also took some of the concepts of working with the city's own parkway system and having some of those elements and stuff go out. That's kind of where I am, that and still doing landmarks commission, case business, and whatever else comes on. They've got a couple of overlay districts and so people want us to kind of look at. And so it's busy all the time but it's very rewarding when you see something actually come to fruition and it happens much faster than you want it to. So you have to make the call and it really is good that you have some institutional memory on things. That's where my memory I guess gets sharpened. You have to visualize to the point where it hurts.

DC: Well, let me, we'll start wrapping up I guess but I just want to give you an opportunity to tell me if there's anything I haven't asked you that you would have liked to have heard me ask or anything that's on your mind in thinking back about those times that comes to mind.

DF: Well, you've been to a couple of, I'm sure you'll be going to a couple of cities and learning a couple of things. Is there anything that maybe I'm not touching on? With past administrators and students and anything else, do you see anything in the educational process I guess that happened then that's not happening now or vice

versa, in terms of the quality of education? Not necessarily the quality but just quantity, you know, what was put into it then? You know is the same love being put into it that was then or vice versa? Is there more stuff with No Child Left Behind or is it less? You know, can we test a kid too much and still get mediocre results or is it all societal I guess?

DC: Yeah, it's been interesting. I mean I haven't done that much work in the current system but talking to folks in Louisville who, you know, were around in the '70s but are still working in the school district it's really interesting. It seems like a lot of people are sort of swinging back towards this idea of neighborhood schools because of, you know, from the social point of view, okay, you know the people in your neighborhood and you walk to school and that kind of thing. But also in terms of resources and things like that. I'm just thinking about, I interviewed Dr. Dan Withers who's over at Central, is the current principal at Central, and you know, he was basically based around as a teacher in those times.

DF: Well, that's what I said. Teachers went through it also.

DC: It was interesting talking to him to sort of get that perspective of sort of coming back around again. Like Central coming back around to being a predominately black school again.

DF: But it's still not the same. Have you ever heard the thing "you can never go home again?" A lot of that neighborhood school concept, especially involving Central, has to do with seems like ever major town has a Central High School and it always has a tendency to be predominately African American or some kind of racial difference than the majority. But that was really the parents' fond memory of it when

they didn't have to go through the busing. My brother and sister had already gone through high school. My brother went to Shawnee, deep West Louisville. My sister went to Dupont Manual. That's how I know a little bit about it. I like the Manual experience a lot better than I like the Shawnee, you know. There was only like four or five other city schools there. But you know I just find it being interesting and why I say you can't really go home again is what really you don't pick up is a lot of parents made massive sacrifices. They tried their best to take the neighborhood school to the neighborhood, which means that instead of waiting for busing to come around and their child can go back to the school that they went to, they actually picked up and moved closer to the school that they were at. So they actually moved into some zones that were hostile but they wanted to be near their kids. And so now you've got a racial mix that is in this town that's kind of amazing that doesn't happen in a whole lot of big cities, that still stay segregated. There's a segregation here. It may be ever so, you know, underneath the radar but still you've got a housing situation where, you know, blacks and other races are all over the county. There are some that's still [all]white. There are some that's still black predominate neighborhoods. But in terms of the neighborhood school concept I just think that people want to be close to the kids and all that other stuff is a fondness [for] the way things used to be, which I don't think we're going to get back to.

DC: Doesn't really reflect, yeah.

DF: I don't think it really reflects. I just think that you've got a whole lot of parents who can't afford to get into an automobile and go twenty miles out to pick their little kid up and provide childcare. Whereas, if you were in, if the neighborhood

school was closer you had way more choices. It's just like I choose to live in the central city because I can do the town and the country and the rural and whatever, just by picking a direction that I want to go into. I have choices. A lot of people don't. That's why a neighborhood concept just sounds so appealing and politically appealing is because, you know, that's the way it used to be. When you're in town and you're close to your neighborhood school you've got way more people that live in that same neighborhood that you can carpool kids and everything else too. When you're so far away it's really hard to get parents involved in PTA when your school is on the edge of town.

DC: I did talk to a woman last time I was here who was part of, let's see, her kids got sent to Pleasure Ridge Park and she was part of the group called United Black Protective Parents that would go out and sort of deal with the administrators and physically protect the kids and things like that. And she lives right by Shawnee and she's been in the same house for thirty-some years. She was talking about how that neighborhood has changed in terms of when she first moved in she said it was about fifty-fifty black and white and then I think with busing a lot of white families left and black families and other families came in.

DF: That was the second half of white flight. That was the second half of white flight because it had gotten so polarized that the whites that were still there that had kids decided it just didn't feel comfortable. Between that and the riots in the '60s and everything [sound of phone ringing], it just completely wiped out just like every model that you've ever seen of cities, it just totally turned that around as a nation. And that's why I keep saying that I'm not sure you can ever really go back to what

you remember your neighborhood school as being. Because I still think that the politics of it is if you have a so-so neighborhood, meaning economics, meaning, you know, infrastructure, meaning housing conditions, chances are your neighborhood schools are going to be like that too, unless it's built from the ground up and has a good administrator, you know. It's going to fall apart. It's not going to have what the best schools in the best zip codes are going to have, private or public.

DC: You want to end there? Anything else occur to you?

DF: No, I'll leave it at that.

DC: I really appreciate your time. I really enjoyed our talk.

DF: Thank you.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED APRIL 2005 BY CATHY MANN