

WILLOUGHBY ANDERSON: So today is Tuesday, November the 16th. The interviewer's name is Willoughby Anderson. I'm here at Miles College in Birmingham, Alabama, doing an interview for the Southern Oral History Program's Long Civil Rights Movement project on school desegregation in Birmingham. I am here with Ms. Geraldine Bell. So if you would please say your name, I will see how you're picking up.

GERALDINE BELL: I'm Geraldine Bell.

WA: Okay. So let's start if you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and grew up and about your educational background.

GB: Good, I'm Geraldine Bell. I'm from Wilcox County, Alabama. I grew up in a small town in a rural area in the south that's called Coy, C-O-Y, Alabama. I'm one of eight children born to Simon and Valerie Watts. We lived on a farm growing up, and my mother had a tremendous influence on us children. I can remember her going to see the doctor, and the doctor would give her some of his old magazines out of his office that nobody else was using, and she would bring them home for us kids. We'd just spread them out on the floor all over the house and just enjoy reading them over and over again. We'd take them to school and share them with our teachers because it was hard then to find interesting reading matter. Most of these were like old *Life* Magazines and that sort of thing. We just enjoyed the pictures and reading about it and this added some to what we had to read at home. It really had a tremendous influence on our life.

My mother was a schoolteacher. She was from Mississippi. She taught in a one-room schoolhouse for a number of years, and she became involved in the civil rights movement in Wilcox County there in Camden. This was during the '60s, and because of her civil rights efforts she was fired from her job because the teachers and the professional people had been told not to get involved in civil rights activities or they would lose their jobs. A lot of them did not. Of course some of them did. She was one of those who did. But the way she got involved was to pay the bond, was to put up property to bond people out of jail who were put in jail for demonstrating. Of course she was fired from her job, and she sued the board of education, but she never really enjoyed the benefits of her financial settlement because it was settled financially, and it came on the day she died. It came in the mail like around ten or eleven o'clock that morning, and she died earlier in the day, say around eight o'clock that morning. She did have

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a tremendous influence on, a very brave person. I don't know if you know anything about Wilcox County or not.

WA: Not much.

GB: But it's one of the, it's been known as one of the poorest counties in the nation and whites have traditionally treated blacks very harshly. They're like less than humans. So it was really difficult growing up there, but she was very brave and didn't mind taking a stand. It kind of shaped the person that I am today. So after finishing school there at Camden Academy, which was a Presbyterian-supported school because whites did not want to provide a public school education beyond junior high for blacks in those rural areas then. So the Presbyterian church came in and they set up these schools. They set up these schools all over the county, and Camden Academy was one of those schools. It's a very nice facility. We had teachers who had college degrees. They did a good job teaching. There were dormitories on campus. There were students there from all over the United States who came to go to school at Camden Academy. So that was a good mix I think and a good experience for us to grow up with that.

But after Camden Academy, I went to Alabama State University and majored in English, minored in library science. Then when I graduated I got a job as a school librarian. My further education was done at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. I received my Master of Arts in Library Science there. This is the first time that I really came into and had any significant contact with people of another race. I was thirty years old or maybe even older. But this was the first time that I'd ever had any significant relationship with white people.

I remember there was one woman there who was from the same county, an adjoining county. She was from Monroe County. She was a white woman. I remember her mother coming up to see her, and she was very kind to me when I was there. But that's one thing that I discovered is that white people are very kind to you when you're in a private situation, but when you go out into the larger community, they don't know you. They can do some of the funniest things to try to ignore you as if they don't really know you especially people with whom you work with every day. If I see them at the mall, it's like they don't know me. But they'll turn their backs or they'll get involved in a conversation and get so animated as if what they're looking at and doing is so important. But I just found that very interesting. But she was very nice to me, and of course the reason I went to Indiana University was because we couldn't go to the University

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of Alabama at that time. That's why you see a lot of people my age particularly African Americans who have their professional degrees from some of the larger Ivy League or the Big Ten universities because the state of Alabama paid us to go there. So we wouldn't attend, try to go to the University of Alabama where we could've gotten a professional degree.

Let me see what else there is to tell. After Indiana I went to the University of Pennsylvania and studied computer-assisted instruction. Then I got my certification from UAB [University of Alabama at Birmingham], my supervisor's certification from UAB, where I was working at the time. I got my doctorate in education from University of Alabama, and since that time I went to Harvard where I studied the superintendency. This was during the time I was serving as interim superintendent of the Birmingham Public School system. So that's my education background in a nutshell.

WA: Okay, well great. So were you, you had graduated from Alabama State and were working as a librarian when the first students began to desegregate the schools in Birmingham, right, in '63?

GB: Yes. Yes.

WA: What do you remember about the decision to desegregate the Birmingham Public Schools?

GB: I wasn't living in Birmingham in '63.

WA: Okay.

GB: I didn't move here until 1966 or '67.

WA: So after Indiana.

GB: Right. But what I remember when I came here, I worked at a high school. I worked at Hayes—want to cut that off?

WA: It's fine. [I had glanced over at the recorder to check its recording levels].

GB: I worked at Hayes High School, and I do remember that the faculty was integrated although the student body was not. Again we had these Caucasians who knew us at school, but they didn't know us when they saw us in the street. We just thought that was very funny.

WA: Students and teachers.

GB: Yes. Well, there were no students there. There were no those students there to integrate this high school where I was. I was working at an all black high school, but there were Caucasian teachers there, but my impression was that they didn't mind being there. I guess they must've had to ask for a

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transfer to work in a black school because I imagine they wanted to be there. I observed that they were good teachers. They were concerned, but they seemed to have been afraid of the black students. I don't think that they pushed the black students to get as much out of them as they should have. They seemed to have been a little afraid of them. I observed that here at Miles College too. Of course we have an integrated faculty, and it seems that our Caucasian teachers are somewhat reluctant to really push our black students to perform. They don't seem to have high expectations for them. That's my impression.

WA: Do you, so you started in '67 at Hayes. The faculty was integrated. Was that, were you working there, did they start to integrate the student body at all when you were there?

GB: No, that student body has never been integrated because it's in an all-black neighborhood. I think the schools that were on the peripheral edges of the city remained integrated, became integrated until the whites moved away. Because here in Birmingham now we have nine school systems in this area. When I first came to work for the Birmingham Board of Education, we had ninety-two schools and over 60,000 students. Now we have I guess fewer than thirty schools. No, we have about seventy schools and fewer than 30,000 students. So we've had a tremendous flight, white flight. Well, I would say white and black flight from our public school system because they've moved to communities outside of the city limits, and that's where they formed their own school systems and that's where they sent their children. But I also observed that most of the light-skinned teachers, the very fair teachers of the black race, were the first ones to be transferred to work in the predominantly, former predominantly white schools. I guess it was to make the white faculty there feel more comfortable working with them.

But that was an interesting incident too that occurred to me when I was at the board of education at the central office. There was a very light skinned African American woman on my staff, and a lot of people didn't know she was African American. They thought she was a Caucasian. One day one of the little secretaries walked up to her and spoke to her confidentially, "How do you stand it working down there with them?" She said, "Well, I am one of them."

WA: Oh my gosh.

GB: We just enjoyed sharing that all over the building.

WA: When was that?

GB: This was in the '60s.

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WA: In the '60s, late '60s.

GB: Who do you stand working down there with them. One other thing I want to share with you that it was a very, I didn't feel any stress in the situation where I was because I was in an all-black school. But some of my friends who were transferred to predominantly white schools did suffer a lot of stress. In fact one of my very good friends had a nervous breakdown.

WA: Oh my gosh. Was that from student interaction? Was that from the teachers? Just the overall—

GB: I guess it was a combination because she was a very sweet person. [break in tape – tape recorder is turned off] ... Southern College.

WA: So you went to Birmingham Southern after Hayes.

GB: Right and I was the first black to be hired there.

WA: What year was that?

GB: This was in 1971 or '73. I can't remember it's been so long.

WA: Okay. Okay.

GB: But I stayed there one year, and I decided early on that this was not the place for me. The president was nice. *It was Dr. Hounshell.* I don't know if I should call names. The library director was nice who hired me. But I was kind of isolated because I didn't know anyone and no one knew me and nobody made any outreach efforts to try to make me feel comfortable there. So I moved on. One thing I observed there is that this was during the time that whites were setting up academies all over the South to get around going to integrated schools. Birmingham Southern being one of the best schools in the South, of course, had always said that they would not take any students who were not graduates of accredited high schools. But they did. They took those students and I observed that.

WA: From the academies.

GB: Right. I also observed, I was the reference librarian there, that while I was behind the desk on duty if there was a white person behind the desk, the faculty and students always went to the white person even if it was a student. It was obvious that I was an adult who should be able to provide more help than a child, but they would always go to the student rather than coming to me and then the student would refer them to me for their reference issues. I observed that and I thought that was interesting. But it was a

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tremendous feeling of isolation there. I guess some of it might have been my fault too. I don't know, but I just knew after the first year I couldn't, I wasn't going to stay there another year.

WA: Okay. Was that, was the student body mostly white.

GB: Yes, it was.

WA: At Birmingham Southern. Okay. So you stayed there a year.

GB: Yes.

WA: Then you moved to where?

GB: To UAB and I felt entirely comfortable over there. It was a different faculty situation. The library director was nice as was the director at Birmingham Southern. The staff was nice. I was one of about three or four reference librarians, and I had a specialty and they had theirs. My specialty was education. Then they had science and social sciences and other areas. So I felt very comfortable at UAB. So I stayed there for a while and then decided to leave because I had young children and we had to work nights and weekends, and I always had to pay babysitters for nights and weekends and it got so that it wasn't financially feasible for me to stay there. I started looking at going back to the public school system and that's what it did.

WA: So you went to, I'm sorry. I know you have it here. So then you moved to which school?

GB: After I came back to the public school system, I came back as a supervisor.

WA: You came in as a supervisor.

GB: Of libraries.

WA: Okay.

GB: The Birmingham Public School system was getting ready to accredit all of its schools, all ninety-two of them at one time. We received a lot of national attention because of that. My responsibility was to build the budgets of the school libraries to make recommendations for space allocations, to decide how many shelves we needed for how many books we needed and how much furniture. That was just really very exciting for me. I enjoyed it very much. So we got all of our schools accredited at one time. All the high schools were already accredited. But we got all of our other schools accredited at one time.

What I observed there was the way, well, I found some books on the shelves that I--. Although they had what they called libraries, they were not structured libraries as such because they didn't have

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certified librarians. They just had rooms with some books scattered here and there on the shelves. It was interesting to see some of the book titles that were on the shelves for the children to read.

WA: Like what?

GB: I remember *Little Black Sambo* and I remember *Diddy, Dumps and Tot*. I bet that's one you've never heard of.

WA: No.

GB: I hadn't heard of it either. It's a stereotypical presentation of blacks in a position that I don't think our young children need to see. *Diddy, Dumps and Tot*. I also—

WA: Was this the mid '70s?

GB: Yes. I also observed the way the principals reacted to me as a black supervisor going into these formerly white schools because these were white principals. For the most part I was accepted. I would say ninety-eight percent, but you don't expect a hundred percent anyway. But there was this one principal who really was determined that I would not visit her school and give her any advice in terms of what should happen in her library. She just came out and told me just stay away. Don't come back. That if I need any library service I'll get it from the Birmingham Public Library. But I didn't pay her any attention. I kept coming back anyway. As far as my supervising the white librarians, because there were black and white, but most of them I hired because we had to hire about sixty some odd librarians at one time. Most of them I had hired or had recommended for hire. So I had no problems supervising them. They loved me and I loved them and we got along very well. At that time I was also supervising white employees in my department. I did have a problem with one of the employees then who did not want me to supervise her. But my assistant superintendent who was my immediate supervisor spoke very plainly to her and told her this is the way it's going to be. But she really was very, very hostile and was very difficult to supervise and didn't want to do anything I asked her to do. And I can't say that she finally changed. She stayed that way as long as she was there. She was really determined to keep her point of view and she did. That was an interesting observation. I observed also her relationship with the other white supervisors in the school system. I shared an office with a white supervisor who was a supervisor for elementary language arts. She would always tease me about my name, Geraldine and Gerry and Jessie and Jessie Bell. Why

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that Geraldine Bell sounds just like Jessie Bell. She would always try to tell me what to wear. Here I am a grown woman just as she is. But I found that to be very interesting.

WA: So it was sort of, was she trying to joke with you or was it sort of not?

GB: That's hard to tell. I don't know how she meant it, but I just took it as a joke. Yeah. I also observed how the housing patterns changed in Birmingham while I was a the board of education because right after the schools were integrated—. I think when was the housing act passed, 1968?

WA: '68, yes, I think so.

GB: Right. But that is really what I think caused resulted in a lot of people moving out of Birmingham to other areas, to unincorporated areas, setting up their own school systems because they did not want to live next to black people, which meant they would've had to send their children to the same schools as blacks. So I observed that transformation as well.

WA: So that was sort of white flight was really starting when school desegregation got rolling which was () '64, '65, '66 but then '68. What about through the '70s and '80s? How do you see the pattern there?

GB: Well, what I observed is that our enrollment kept declining every year. As I said when I went to the school system, there were ninety-two schools. When I retired, there were seventy-eight. I expect that that should've been even fewer because of the dual system we had a black school and a white school perhaps in the same general area. When integration came about we closed the black school, and the black kids attended the white school. Then the whites left. But we probably need fewer than, we probably needed fewer than seventy-eight because the enrollment in some of them was very small.

WA: So we were talking about when you were working in the Birmingham Public Schools. Tell me about becoming superintendent.

GB: Okay. I was the library supervisor, and I had worked to help accredit all of the schools, the library part of the puzzle in helping to accredit the schools. We were having a tremendous turnover of superintendents because urban superintendents don't last very long because of the problems unique to urban school education. I don't think it's just here in Birmingham. It's probably occurring in Detroit and Chicago and other cities as well. But we had a superintendent to leave and another one to come in, and then he became ill, and I was appointed interim while they searched for a superintendent. I had already

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been working, let me see, almost forty years and I was ready to retire. But I took the job with the understanding that I would not apply for the job on a permanent basis. So I worked for two years as interim superintendent of schools, and I'm very proud of what I did while I was interim superintendent. We balanced the budget for the first time in six years. We implemented the uniform policy where students in all Birmingham City Schools wear uniforms now. We implemented the point of sale system in the lunchrooms because we had a problem with our lunchroom program, and we implemented the point of sale as a strategy to solve that problem. We also constructed, began the construction of a school out at Southampton. It's a new school out there and finished the construction of twelve new classrooms at Smith. Renovated several other facilities and did some retrofitting of wiring to upgrade the technology and telephone system and all of that. We also implemented the effective schools plan.

WA: What's that?

GB: The effective schools plan. That has to do with having high expectations and parental involvement and that sort of thing in all of our schools. I was not successful in raising the test scores as I had hoped because when I left we had only thirty-two schools in academic clear. That's thirty-two out of seventy-eight. But I felt that I had put the programs in place to help bring about better achievement of students. So that worked well. It was interesting when I took that position because I was the first woman. I was not the first black. But I was the first woman and I was seen, the press looked at me as a little old library lady [laughing] although I had the credentials. I had my superintendent's certification, and I had studied at Harvard, the superintendency. I had all of this years of experience, but still I guess it was hard to accept a little library lady. But I'm very proud of my background because I think librarianship is a knowledge profession, and it helps to prepare you for a whole lot of things and you accept the idea that if you don't know where it is, you'll help somebody find it. So I said well, librarianship is a knowledge profession. I'm very proud of it. I'd rather come from that background rather than being an old social studies teacher or coach that they usually bring in and give these top positions to. So that was interesting.

The press did not treat me very kindly for the most part. I survived and again I'm very proud of what I did, and looking back over it now, history is really treating me more kindly now than it did then because we had had such an uproar in the school system with the superintendent who had left. He had been here about seven years. The system was divided between those who wanted to keep him and those who did

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not. But the state passed some accountability legislation, and the legislation had to do with achievement and finance. When the board looked at where our achievement test scores were and where we were financially, they decided to let him go. They hired this other person who became ill, and then I took his place. But I think that I moved in the direction the board wanted me to move in. I had the majority of the board members on my side, and before I left they asked me to stay. But I did not. I had already agreed that I would not. They brought in a new superintendent.

WA: Great. So then you moved here to Miles.

GB: Yes, I—

WA: And tell me about what you're doing here.

GB: Yes. I tried to stay retired, and I was not successful in doing so. Being a workaholic, and really that's nothing to be proud of, but having worked all of my life it was very difficult for me to go home and sit down. From the high powered job as superintendent of schools, 250 million dollar budget to going home, nothing. I didn't handle it very well. [laughter] So when the president asked me to come out here and direct the library, I was so happy.

WA: Yeah, on your resume you have a gap of two months I think from one to the other.

GB: I didn't handle it very well but I'm delighted to be here and work with the faculty here. I also want to share with you my experience in the library association. Now I served as president of the Birmingham Library Board for about thirteen years, and during that time we had one of the most fantastic growth spurts in the history of public libraries in Birmingham because we built or renovated thirteen new libraries in Birmingham. You often wonder when you look back on your life, why were you at a certain place at a certain time. I believe that I was there because that was preparing me for the superintendent's job that had to do with management and selecting architects and building and that sort of thing. So that prepared me for that. We also instituted the "One County, One Card" library program where everybody regardless of where you lived, the city or county, you could just use one card for the services. So I'm proud of that work. Professionally I was the first black president. I hate to keep saying first black because it seems so time-worn, but I guess then that was significant. I was the first black president of the Alabama Library Association. The Alabama Library Association had been in existence for almost a hundred years and they had never had a black president. So—

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WA: So what year was that?

GB: That was in the '90s. I believe it was '96 or '97 or something like that. It wasn't that long ago. The first black president of the Alabama Library Association. I was named Birmingham Woman of the year, which was like the first black to be named Birmingham Woman of the Year. I received a lot of rewards for my community service work. I've been involved in the community for a number of years in various capacities working with United Negro College Fund and NAACP and SCLC and my church and other social organization. So it's hard to go home and sit down when there's so much out there to do.

WA: Well, thank you.

GB: Let me share that experience with you too about the integration of the Alabama Library Association. Well, the American Library Association—there were two library associations in Alabama. One for the black librarians and one for the white librarians. So the American Library Association had to decide which one they would recognize. So they told the Alabama Library Association, which is the one they had been recognizing, that they would have to merge with us. They did not like that at all. So we had a meeting to discuss the strategies for merging, and I remember vividly my white friends who would not ride on the elevator with us.

WA: When was this?

GB: This must've been in the '80s. They would not ride on the elevator with us.

WA: To the meeting.

GB: To the meeting. So that kind of stands out in my mind too as something that's kind of funny that white people do, that white people did.

WA: So let me ask you sort of some general questions about school desegregation in Birmingham. These are sort of the questions at the end. What and then maybe we can talk a little bit more about your time at Hayes High School and with the integrated faculty. So what in your opinion do you think the goals of school desegregation were?

GB: I agree with Sheryll Cashin in her book. She wrote the *Failures of Integration*. Have you read her book?

WA: I have not.

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GB: Well, she is a law professor at Georgetown Law School, native Alabamian, but she thinks that integration was intended to improve the conditions of education for blacks to provide better resources and facilities and provide better access for us. It did for a while. But I think the policy makers underestimated the depth of intensity of the hatred. Hatred is a strong word. But yes, hatred that some whites had towards blacks and would not send their child to a black school if it was the only school in the world. I think our policy makers underestimated that. They thought that by passing the legislation that southerners particularly would come around. But at the same time they were planning how to get around it. Although the legislation was passed, it was years when *Brown versus Board of Education* was passed, it was years before integration actually took place. This is because southerners were developing strategies so it would not occur. They were determined that their children would not go to school with black children. They have not so to speak because they developed their own school systems and that's where their children go.

WA: So would you say that your views on desegregation are representative of other, that's kind of a broad question, representative of—

GB: Of African Americans.

WA: That'd be fine. Of African Americans in Birmingham.

GB: Yes, I think so because I've talked with my friends, and often we lament the fact that our children, we don't feel now that our children are getting the education they used to get. They are not getting this higher expectations that the black teachers had for them and that they held them to it, and they are not getting the role model, the exposure to role models. Quite frankly I think that the quality of teachers has diminished because we have a lot of teachers now I feel who are doing a good job, but overall I think the quality of teachers has diminished severely. You don't have teachers who are as concerned about teaching as they are used to be.

WA: So the quality of the education is suffering.

GB: Right.

WA: So do you think that school integration is something that is an ongoing issue for Birmingham or is it something that is thought of as being a closed part of Birmingham's history?

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GB: I don't know because at one time I recall discussions being underway of having one great system, one great city, one great school system where the city and the county would combine its systems. I think that occurred in some cities. I believe Chattanooga is a good example of where that occurred. But it did not happen here in Birmingham, and I think as long as there is a Birmingham School System, we're going to be constantly faced with very close scrutiny by the media that keeps us in the headlines all the time for the slightest infraction. It just makes people not want to send your child to Birmingham City Schools because it appears that there's always a mess and that people are not accountable as if we haven't heard the word accountability before. We've heard that before. We are accountable, but there is that feeling, I think, among blacks and whites that there's a lack of accountability in our school system and that the quality is not of that that you find in some of the other schools, in some of the other school systems.

WA: So what the, these newspaper reports are unfair then, and they're not, they're kind of creating a problem or they're blowing it out of proportion.

GB: I don't think they're creating the problem. I think the problem is there, and I'm not saying it should not be reported, but I'm saying that it should be reported equally because we're not the only ones that have the problem. For example when they were scrutinizing us so closely about our finances, we had six million dollars that we had saved. The school over the mountain here, Jefferson County, that nobody was paying any attention to is the one they should've been scrutinizing. When Dr. Ed Richardson at that time was the state superintendent, he came to me and he apologized, and I appreciate him for that because it takes a big person to come to you and sit down and look at you and say I apologize. Most of them want to go on and pretend it didn't happen. But he apologized. He said, "You know Dr. Bell, you really got a handle on that finance. I was wrong about you." So a couple of years later they started looking into Jefferson County, and things were so bad over there that they got rid of the superintendent and charged back some of the monies that had been spent by the board members—[break in tape]—. Some of the supervisors were people who had spent money that they had to pay back because it wasn't approved by the board or there was something that they had done that wasn't exactly right. But all I'm saying is did we have problems? I don't mind it being in the paper. It should be told. But then let's just give equal reporting to what's going on in other systems as well because they are not perfect. Then research tells us that socio-economics has a lot to do with achievement in schools. We know that Birmingham's income is

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considerably less than that of the residents of surrounding areas. So if we are to believe research then we our expectations wouldn't be that children in Birmingham would perform at the same level as those in Mountain Brook because of socio-economic factors. If we believe that research.

WA: So have your views on school desegregation changed since the late 1960s?

GB: Yes, I was looking forward to it. I thought that, I thought that things would be better for our children because I worked in black schools all of my life, and I knew what was lacking and I felt what was needed. I thought we could get, if we could get equal funding and we could get the resources and the facilities and all of that, that our children would be better. So I believed in integration and I was for it. I guess I still am, but I don't realistically see it occurring in Birmingham, Alabama, any time soon.

WA: Okay.

GB: We've had—excuse me—we've had superintendents who've implemented strategies to try to prevent white flight. We've had magnet schools. We've had other strategies that they've implemented that would try to keep whites within the school system. It worked for a while, but for the most part it has not worked. Now we are at, I think Birmingham City Schools is about ninety-five percent black or maybe a little more.

WA: So I remember when the Alabama School of Fine Arts was built and that sort of thing. Those were the kind of strategies. How do you think that desegregation could've been handled differently?

GB: By the policymakers or by local people?

WA: Both. I'm going to start with the policymakers.

GB: I don't know. I guess they did the best they could at the time given the roadblocks that were put in the way to keep it from happening. I guess they did the best they could do because they had legal experts looking at it, they had politicians looking at it and all of those. But again I think they underestimated the depth of intensity of the resistance that it would face particularly in the South. I think they thought the good old boys would soften up a little bit after time. But that has not happened. They have gotten more into the separation of the races rather than, they're more in favor of the separation of the races than ever.

WA: What about on the local level, the same thing?

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GB: I think we had superintendents during that time, in fact we had a Harvard-educated superintendent and his assistants were Harvard-educated as well. They developed all kinds of strategies—

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GB: I hope you would—excuse me—I hope you would () name off there that I called, edit it. Okay.

WA: I will. I'll note that.

GB: Thank you. Because she should not be singled out because there were others as well as herself.

WA: One thing I wanted to ask you about at Hayes High School when you started teaching there, what was the leadership like at Hayes High School, the principal, and what sort of things did he do to make integrating the faculty run smoothly or not?

GB: Excellent principal. Excellent in every way. In fact I give him credit for training so many good teachers that went on to serve at the board of education in supervisory capacities. I was one of them. We had a woman who came to supervise the English, she was an English supervisor, came out of Hayes High School. The social studies supervisor came out of Hayes High School. There was another supervisor, but looked like all of us were just trained there under him. He was good. He's deceased now. John Norman was his name. A lot of people didn't like him because he was a stickler for quality, and sometimes when you expect the best and you have people that don't want to perform their best, they don't like you. But he really pulled us together as a faculty. He had frequent meetings. He would take faculty members to lunch. I remember him taking me to lunch () a faculty member of another race at his own expense. He just really tried hard to pull us together, and I don't think there were any problems at Hayes High School, not administratively with any of his white teachers because he was an excellent principal there. There were two principals that I've had throughout my career that affected me. He's one of them, and the other one is J.F. Shields who was my principal down in Monroe County. He was another no nonsense type person that expected the best. When you have high expectations for persons, oftentimes they rise to the occasion and try to perform for you so you won't be disappointed in them. Those two gentlemen were really outstanding in my view. They were outstanding high school administrators.

WA: Great. What about parent and community reactions to Hayes High School being integrated, the faculty? () any problems or instances that you remember.

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GB: I don't remember any because we had PTA meetings, but I don't recall any white parents coming to the meetings because there were no white children in the school. It was only white faculty. But the white faculty came to the PTA meetings. But I don't recall any problems in the community as far as that goes. In fact I don't recall any problems in any of the communities even, of course I would not have known all of it. But I guess I would've heard it somehow on the grapevine. But I don't recall there being any problems with the PTAs or anything of that sort during the time that the schools were first integrated.

WA: Let's see. Did you have children and did they go through Birmingham Public Schools?

GB: I have children. They did not go through Birmingham Public Schools. They attended private schools.

WA: Did you speak with them about your experiences with school desegregation?

GB: Yes, they could see it in the household.

WA: Okay.

GB: They could see it in the household because my husband is a teacher too. They could observe it I guess from first hand.

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

GB: I can't think of anything. I think I've covered my whole life, my whole career. I would like to go back and talk about my friend who had a nervous breakdown. I was trying to describe her to you as a very sensitive, caring person who had been accepted and loved and nurtured within our circle. Here she was thrown out here to the wolves. She was not accepted at all. I think she was treated rather poorly. It was just more than she could take, and it just destroyed her life completely. I guess there are some people who are more sensitive than others, and there are some tough kinds of people that can take that and just won't bother them at all. But it completely destroyed her. So that was very tragic for me and for the rest of her friends too.

That's about all I can think of. I've covered the public libraries. Of course I taught library education. I've been involved in libraries. I always wanted to be like my high school librarian down there at Camden Academy. Can you believe we had a high school librarian who was certified back in the '50s, back in '53 which was really something. But I always wanted to pattern my life after her. I guess I've done so. When I was at Hayes, now I was not teaching there, I was a librarian. I was the school librarian

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there. I was not a teacher. Although librarians have to be certified as teachers and as librarians in order to serve because you have to have that knowledge of the curriculum in order to work with teachers and to help them make the best use of the library. What is your field?

WA: I do southern history. My research is on Birmingham after 1963. So what I have started doing my dissertation on, the memory of the civil rights demonstrations and violent resistance in Birmingham looking at the Sixteenth Baptist Church bombing trials and the Civil Rights Institute. I want to look at Mayor Arrington's campaign and police brutality in that.

GB: He's here on the faculty now.

WA: I know. I'd love to interview him.

GB: Did you know that?

WA: I do know that.

GB: He's here.

WA: Well, thank you so much. It was an honor to meet you and I appreciate you giving us some of your time today.

GB: Well, thank you for coming. I appreciate your coming and being—

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by L. Altizer, December 12, 2004