

Cecilia Davis
4/19/01
Tape 1 of 1

RG: This is Bob Gilgor interviewing Cecilia Davis at her home at 2011 Bedford Street in Durham on April 19th in the year 2001. Good afternoon, Cecilia.

CD: Well how are you, Bob?

RG: I'm very well, and yourself?

CD: Finally met you.

RG: Well I finally met you too, and it's a pleasure.

CD: Thank you.

RG: I'll start with the question where did you grow up and where did you go to school?

CD: I grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. I went to elementary school at Oberlin Road School, and to high school at Washington High School. And then I went to Shaw University.

RG: What year did you graduate Shaw?

CD: From Shaw? 1950.

RG: And then what did you do?

CD: Came to Chapel Hill to teach.

RG: You didn't get any graduate work after Shaw?

CD: I came to Chapel Hill to teach, and then I went back to get graduate work at North Carolina Central, at night and in the summer.

RG: You got a masters?

CD: Right.

RG: In –

CD: Social studies.

- RG: Where did you teach in Chapel Hill?
- CD: I taught at Lincoln High School, but I taught one year, that was in 1950, I taught –
- RG: The Northside location?
- CD: At the location, Northside location.
- RG: What was it like teaching at Lincoln High School?
- CD: Lovely. I taught wonderful kids. We were in a pretty new school, and I loved it. It wasn't integrated, and I didn't know anything about integrated schools, cause I never went to them, and I never worked at one. But I loved workin' at Lincoln. And I always said I taught a bunch of lovely kids, and I meant it from my heart. I remember when I used to go to the dentist, he would say well, how are the kids? I said Great, they're really wonderful. He said you're the only person who teaches kids in 8th and 9th grade who comes in here and tells me they're lovely. I said well they are, and I meant it. I taught some lovely kids. And I think they knew I thought that too, because I still hear from a lot of them.
- RG: What did you teach?
- CD: Well, I taught everything in 8th grade at Lincoln, all subjects.
- RG: All subjects.
- CD: All subjects.
- RG: What were they?
- CD: I taught math and health and science and history and English. Whatever else had to be taught, I taught it. So a lot of times, I had to study at night with the kids.
- RG: So did the kids stay in the same class all day long with you?
- CD: They did, they did.
- RG: So they didn't move around.
- CD: They didn't move around.
- RG: Until what, ninth grade?
- CD: Ninth grade.
- RG: Tell me about the methods of teaching that you used at that time.

CD: Well, I don't know – you mean the different ways that I taught? Sometimes you have to, after you'd get into it you'd have to think about what will work, and try, so I, what I'm saying, I didn't have *one* method. It was what would work. And if I was doin' something, and I didn't think it was goin' over well, then I'd try to change it. Yes. And I found that kids like games. And sometimes I would make games out of some of the things I did.

RG: Can you elucidate on that?

CD: Well, some of the games on television, like Jeopardy and different things, I would make up games with those rules. And divide the class into groups, and one group would play against the other. And that helped a whole lot. Because they liked what they were doin', and they liked the competition. Then I'd come back and try to talk about it, and we would take a light test to see if they really learned anything. We would discuss it after we'd played the games, and we'd test it to see if it really worked. So once I found that that worked, then I'd try it with other things.

RG: How did you handle the students who were the quick learners and those who were the slow learners?

CD: Uh huh. Well, you're right, we always had them. But I would just take more time with the slow learns. I'd start the quick learners on workin' on something, and then I'd work with the slow learners, to try to speed them up. And most of the time, you'd get to a point where they were workin' together. They just didn't get it as fast as the other kids.

RG: Did you ever have the quick learners work with the slow learners?

CD: Yes, I did. I would pair them off, and we called that the buddy system.

RG: The buddy system. That's something that you used regularly? Or...

CD: I used it whenever I needed to.

RG: Did you make home visits?

CD: Yes, I did. I knew my parents, because I made home visits, and the principal required us to go to church in the community. So you met some of them at church.

RG: Did the principal ask you to make home visits, or require you to make home visits?

CD: Yeah, he asked us to make home visits. But I have been to the homes when he didn't ask.

RG: Did you visit all the students' homes?

CD: I tried to.

RG: How difficult was that?

CD: Took a lot of time.

RG: What was the value of that?

CD: Well, to get to better know your children that you're teachin'. To understand the circumstances that they have to live with everyday. Whatever you could get out of visiting. You could learn a lot about goin' into the homes. And then you knew why some things were like they were.

RG: Did it change your relationship with the students?

CD: Sometimes it did. Because they like the student – they liked the teacher comin' to their house. And it made them feel closer.

RG: Uh huh. Did you live in Chapel Hill?

CD: Yes.

RG: Was that required also?

CD: I guess it was. I don't remember anybody saying you have to live here, but I'm trying to say – think what I came when I left Chapel Hill. Because I left Chapel Hill and I still taught there.

RG: Uh huh. While you were still at Lincoln?

CD: That's what I was tryin' to think, did I leave while I was still at Lincoln? Well maybe one or two years before I left Lincoln.

RG: Tell me about the discipline at the school. What techniques were used to discipline children.

CD: I don't know too much about it. I guess I was just lucky, cause I didn't have a lot of discipline problems. And by, we kept the children in a group all day. They didn't go from one place to the other. So I don't remember any real discipline problems that I had. I can remember more after integration than before. I just can't think of any – if I had to think of one or two discipline problems that I had at Lincoln and tell you about them, I don't think I could.

- RG: So the students were pretty well-behaved.
- CD: Right.
- RG: Did you see poverty?
- CD: Oh yes.
- RG: In the students?
- CD: Yep.
- RG: How did you see that?
- CD: Well, you can always tell when kids, when there's poverty. Some of them don't have lunch and don't have lunch money. You can tell if their shoes are worn. I saw poverty.
- RG: How was that handled?
- CD: Well, different people helped some of them. Yeah, sometimes we helped children. So, you walk, you don't, you just walk up to them and say "You eatin' lunch today?" "I didn't bring any money." "Well, you get your lunch." You know. You'd give 'em money. *I would.*
- RG: Did they ever work off the lunch, in other words, not pay for it, but do some service?
- CD: I think, I think they had free lunch for kids some too.
- RG: Uh huh.
- CD: I can't – yeah, they had free lunch. But sometimes, you know what it is about qualifyin'. Sometimes if you don't qualify, you don't get free lunch. And you're still hungry. Yeah.
- RG: What'd you have to do to qualify to get a free lunch?
- CD: I don't know, I think it was something with the welfare or something, you know. Some, I don't know the details of it. But I know some children who didn't get free lunch, who didn't have lunch sometimes.
- RG: What about the facilities at the school? When you moved into the school did you get new equipment? New books?

- CD: Yeah, some of both. Some that were used as other schools, and some new, and some we didn't get. Because I think as long as we stayed at Lincoln, there were not lockers there. Kids didn't have lockers. They just had to keep their things in the classroom. And it wasn't as hard on the junior high kids, keepin' it in the classroom, because they didn't move around. But it was hard on everybody else.
- RG: Where did they keep their things?
- CD: They had to take them with them.
- RG: Now in your classroom –
- CD: All day long.
- RG: Yeah, did you have a place to hang them, or –
- CD: Oh, in my classroom?
- RG: Yeah, or drape them on the chairs, ro –
- CD: Well the chairs had a little part under the chair that you could slide books in. And you had a bulletin board in the classroom that had coat hangers on the back of it.
- RG: But no lockers.
- CD: No lockers, until we left. When the sixth grade school came in, they put lockers in.
- RG: Did you have a paved road to the school? Pavement?
- CD: No, not at the beginning.
- RG: So the kids had to walk in the street to get to the school.
- CD: Uh huh. You know about Merritt Mill Road. I think it's paved now, isn't it? All the way down Merritt Mill? See, I haven't seen it lately. Yeah, seem like I went with somebody down there.
- RG: Was the parking lot paved?
- CD: No.
- RG: Did you have a gymnasium?
- CD: Not at first.

RG: Did you have a cafeteria?

CD: Yes.

RG: It was there at the beginning.

CD: Yes.

RG: And how about an auditorium for assembly?

CD: Well, when they built the gym it was an auditorium-gymnasium combined. They had chairs they could take in and out the gym to make it an auditorium. It had a stage.

RG: Did they call it a gymtorium?

CD: It's still there now.

RG: It is. I haven't seen it, I need to go see it.

CD: Uh huh. Yeah, I think they did call it a gymtorium.

RG: Did you have adequate materials – paper, pencils, things that you needed for the children?

CD: Well, now let me, I want to tell you right. The children had to supply their own paper and pencils. Unless, well, most teachers then and now I guess they do spend a lot of their money, because I remember buyin' stacks of paper and pencils just to have in the classroom.

RG: You yourself purchased them.

CD: Yeah, and buy other materials, just to have.

RG: I meant to ask you before, did they have showers in the school? For gym class, after gym class?

CD: I guess they did, after they built that gym.

RG: So you didn't have them until they built the gym. Which was what, four or five years later?

CD: I think so.

RG: Tell me about the walking in the hallways. Were the hallways noisy and crowded, or – between classes –

CD: Not really. I remember you walked down one way and you come up another way. And that worked pretty good.

RG: Did you have monitors in the halls? Safety patrol or something like that?

CD: Mmm, I know the teachers were required to stand in the doors.

RG: But you didn't have to do that, I assume, because you were, you had your class the whole day.

CD: Right. Sometimes. Depending on what was going on at the school.

RG: Mm hmm. Can you tell me about assemblies?

CD: What about them?

RG: Did they have them? And how often did they have them, and what took place at them?

CD: Oh yeah. Well, depending on what was being celebrated. I remember, I think they required every teacher to have an assembly program. And it was left up to you as to what you wanted. Say Negro History Week, if you had that, they would expect that. But at one time, I think each teacher was required to have an assembly program.

RG: Now, when you say the teacher was required –

CD: That class.

RG: It wasn't the teacher who performed it, it was the students in the class.

CD: The students in the class.

RG: What kind of things did the students do at assembly.

CD: I just said it, Negro History Week, and maybe at Christmas, something Christmas related. But they weren't so much about not celebrating holidays then. Whatever occurred about that time, the teacher would find something related. A play or a speaker.

RG: Was the church and religion a part of the school?

CD: Well, the church was not a part of the school. But I don't know when they started this. You couldn't pray in school.

RG: You prayed in school. Students prayed.

CD: We.

RG: Every day.

CD: Yes. In the mornings. We would start out maybe with a prayer. Sometimes the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Different things.

RG: What are your memories of the principal, C.A. MacDougal?

CD: Well, I have a lot of memories of him, because he is the person who hired me. And I remember when I went for the job, he said he would let me know after the interview, so I said "Well why do I have to go home now? Can't I stay here and see what's going on in the school?" And he said yeah, you can stay. So I stayed all day. And then I said "When are you going to let me know if I have the job?" I said "Have you interviewed anyone else?" He said "Yes." I said "But I want to know. Because if you're gonna hire me, I won't spend my time going to other cities. If you're not, just tell me." So he told me "You're a persistent little lady, aren't you?" I said "Yes." So before I left that day, he took me by the superintendent's office to sign a contract. And then he was all right to work with. I guess he was like me and everybody had their own ways. And as long as you understood him and worked with him, I didn't have any problems with him.

RG: What were his ways?

CD: What were his ways? He wanted you to, not to waste your time. To work. Which I didn't think was so bad. And I can't think of, as I said before, they asked you to go to church and visit the families and what have you. And I didn't think that was so wrong. But I didn't mind visiting the families. And I went to church when I wanted to. So that was that. I didn't make anything out of it, you know. What he required, I went along with it. And if I didn't go along with it, I let him ask me. Like he'd say, "Lady, when you been to church?" I said "I don't know. I'm gonna tell you the truth." He said "You haven't been to church?" I said "I've been to church at home. But I can't think of when I've been." And laugh it on off. I didn't get upset. Some people got upset with him, but it's the way you handled him, you know what I mean? If he, if you tried to understand him, you could. I'll say that. And I didn't have any problem workin' with him.

RG: Were there people who didn't understand him?

CD: Oh yeah.

RG: Who didn't get along with him.

CD: Oh yeah, I guess. But I don't know who they were. But you know, at the time, I remember people makin' certain remarks. But I didn't say anything wrong with what he required. Because most of the time when people require anything they're not going to stay right on you and see that you do it anyway.

RG: Was he a strong disciplinarian with the students?

CD: Yeah. I thought he was. Yeah. Yeah, I thought he was a strong disciplinarian.

RG: What was the, what makes you say he was a strong disciplinarian? What were the things he did?

CD: He kept order in the school.

RG: How did he keep order?

CD: He didn't, I don't – he didn't have any particular way that he went around demanding this and demanding that. It didn't seem necessary for me, to me. And as I said, I can't think of any real discipline problems that we had. So if you didn't have a lot of discipline problems, you didn't have to do a lot of things. We didn't have nearly the discipline problems that we had after integration. Now don't ask me why, because I don't know why. But I worked in it, and I do know we didn't have not nearly the problem that we had then. You always have a few kids who are off the narrow path. But they come back.

RG: Do you have any idea of the number of students who started in seventh grade at Lincoln and the number who graduated from Lincoln? What the fall-off rate was.

CD: No.

RG: Or maybe I should put it, what the graduation rate was.

CD: Right. I don't know. And I don't know how many dropouts we had. And why. I really don't. But I know it isn't nearly what it is today.

RG: It's higher today that it was –

CD: Oh yes, much higher. I read in the papers every day about dropouts from school. There are more dropouts today than we used to have.

RG: Do you have any idea of how many of the students who graduated went on to get more education?

CD: I don't have any idea. I do know quite a few of them did. And I don't know the number. And I know some of them went to work, and got good jobs. Whatever they could get at the time.

- RG: Did the students every come to you for counseling, for advice for personal problems?
- CD: Yes. Different personal problems. Students always kind of felt that it was all right to talk to me. And that was at Lincoln, and afterwards at Phillips. I always had kids come to me. I can think of a child at Phillips who was unhappy at home, and would run away, but he wouldn't talk to his parents, and he wouldn't talk to the counselor. But he talked to me. His mother would give me mother so I'd have it when he come to me to borrow it, to give to him. And he's doin' all right now.
- RG: Good. I hear from other interviews former students say that "the teachers all encouraged me. They had a can-do kind of attitude, and pushed me to do the best." Can you speak to that? Can you talk about that?
- CD: Well, I did the same thing. A lot of kids didn't have confidence in themselves. And I encouraged them. I said to do what they could do. And they appreciated it, and they tried to do it. I believe in encouraging students, because sometimes they don't think they're worth anything, I'll say. But if you try to teach them that they are, they'll try to live up to it.
- RG: It just seems to me that this is a universal comment made by the students. And they philosophy that you just expressed was that of most of the teachers. And I wonder where did that come from? Did that come from the principal? Did that come from –
- CD: That came from the teachers, I would say. That's the way *you* feel, cause the principal can't tell you to feel that way if you don't feel that way.
- RG: Do you think he hired people who were like that? Did he have any idea that you were like that when he hired you?
- CD: I don't think so.
- RG: Did the teachers talk about that among themselves?
- CD: I don't remember it. It's a part of their growin' up, I guess.
- RG: Were, did you go to the PTA meetings?
- CD: Yes, I did, all of them. That was a requirement. That you go to PTA every time.
- RG: How often did the PTA meet?
- CD: Once a month. I think that was all.

- RG: And what was a PTA meeting like?
- CD: Well, the parents expressed some of their feelings and what have you. You discussed the school at the PTA: what went on, what they were saying, what you were saying.
- RG: Was it argumentative?
- CD: Not necessarily. It might get off into that sometimes, but not necessarily. That wasn't the purpose.
- RG: So there was an exchange of ideas between parents and teachers at the PTA meeting.
- CD: Right.
- RG: Did the children perform at PTA meetings?
- CD: Sometimes. If it was something special.
- RG: Would you say that they performed at half of the PTA meetings?
- CD: I wouldn't.
- RG: No. Were they well-attended?
- CD: Sometimes. Dependin' on what's goin' on.
- RG: What kind of things would bring up the attendance?
- CD: Integration of schools was one.
- RG: (laughs) I'll bet that did. How did they feel about integration of schools?
- CD: I guess they felt like the students. They knew that we were not getting' our share, and that I guess they thought it was better. Not everybody thought integration was better, I don't think.
- RG: So there was a segment of people from the community who felt that keeping the schools segregated was ok.
- CD: Well I always think that there were people everywhere, there were some, that rather for them to stayed. They had, I guess they had their reasons. But I always thought there were some people who would rather be segregated, if they had equal
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RG: If they had equal –

CD: Everything. Right. And I remember, I remember some money that the government gave to the schools to buy some things. I shouldn't, maybe I shouldn't say this, but I do. They gave the schools some money to buy some things. We didn't buy it. It was bought and sent to us from the superintendent's office. But we knew where the money came from. Maybe I'll say, *I* always felt that we didn't get all of the money. And sometimes, I remember televisions, we didn't have any televisions in the school. And we got some new ones and we got some old ones. So I think some of the other schools got some new ones too.

RG: Even though the money was earmarked for the black school.

CD: Yes. Right. I don't think all the money came to us.

RG: Anything more about the PTA meetings that you can remember?

CD: Can't think of anything else about the PTA meetings.

RG: What do you remember about the sports at Lincoln High School?

CD: We were a winning team, most of the time. And some of the state games were played, I think, at Lincoln. They played somewhere out in Carrboro, Lyons Park or somewhere like that. But I know there would be so many people, they could hardly get in the park. And I remember that the Carolina players used to always come to our football games. And I went to all of them, because most of the time I helped to sell tickets at the football games.

RG: Were you required to go? Were the teachers required to go to the football games?

CD: I don't think so. I don't know. I don't think so. I know R.D. Smith sold tickets, and I sold tickets for the big games. And I sold at most of them.

RG: What was the band like at football games?

CD: The band was good. We always had a good band. They played at the football games. Played for parades in town and around town and other towns. Yep, we always had a good band, a good football team. And the kids loved the band, and the football team.

RG: It was a big part of the school.

CD: Right.

RG: when you say you had a winning football team, can you remember how winning it was?

- CD: Well, I remember winning some state competitions.
- RG: State titles.
- CD: Yes. So that's winnin' enough, isn't it?
- RG: Sure is. Can't win any more than that. Unless they had a country title too. US title. They still haven't figured out how to do that for colleges. What about the chorus? Was the chorus any –
- CD: They had a chorus. But I can't tell you much about it. I tell you, until you asked, I hadn't thought about that.
- RG: What about the Echo, the newspaper?
- CD: Yeah, they had the newspaper, and they had a yearbook. But that was done mostly by the high school people. And I taught in the junior high part.
- RG: So the seventh and eighth graders didn't have – what was junior high school then, seventh, eighth and ninth?
- CD: Right.
- RG: Was ninth part of junior high?
- CD: I think ninth was a part of the high school.
- RG: High school. So it was seventh and eighth was junior high. Did they do anything for the newspaper?
- CD: They always put article in the newspaper, or whatever. But they sent their articles in to whoever worked with the newspaper. They didn't work with it.
- RG: I see. Are there other things that took place at the high school that stand out in your mind, Cecilia?
- CD: I can think about something that took place in my classroom. And that was - we taught North Carolina history, and as we talked about North Carolina, the kids hadn't traveled much. And so when we talked about the mountains, they didn't know much. You know, one or two children always had, but they didn't know anything about the mountains. Go down to the sea, they didn't know about that. I told them that they lived in the Piedmont. So they knew mostly about Chapel Hill. But as I went along, I found out that there were some places in Chapel Hill they didn't know about. You had one or two, not the majority, but there were one or two kids, there were some places in Chapel Hill they didn't know much about.

So one year I decided that we're goin' to see all these places. So they said you can't take the children away from the school. So I said can the PTA take them? Yeah, if the parents want to go with you, you can go. But you can't go on a school day. I said we can go on a Saturday. So I worked with one of my parents, Mrs. Booth. She was a cafeteria manager. And planned these trips and gave children some projects to do to get their money, and we decided one week, one Saturday, we were goin' down to the coast. And we were goin' to keep a list of how many counties we went through in goin'. So we started out goin' through Chatham and all around, and down through Fayetteville, because I remember showin' them the old slave market. Goin' on down to Wilmington, and put our hands in the Atlantic Ocean. That was a lot of water. And we came back up through New Bern, on up that way, New Bern and Kinston and Raleigh, back into Chapel Hill. And they kept a list of all the counties that we went through. And that was an enjoyable trip. They talked about it a long time.

They we decided later we were goin' to the mountains. Now to tell the truth I don't know how we got all that money to get a bus to go, but we went. I think, where is Tweetsie Railroad? Boone, is it Boone?

RG: It's somewhere up in the mountains, I'm not sure if it's Boone. It's been so long.

CD: I remember that bus that we were goin' in, when you would go around those mountains, you'd see the back end one way and the front end somewhere else. And the kids almost had a fit on that. And we went to the Tweetsie Railroad. So some of them rode a train for the first time. And we spent that Saturday up there all day. Came back. So our next trip that year was the Piedmont. They said but we live in the Piedmont. I said but there's a lot we haven't seen. We won't go far. And I remember we came to Durham, and we went to Duke. And went, what is that –

RG: North Carolina Central?

CD: No, we went to North Carolina Central, but I, the reason I remember Duke – you can't go up there now, at Duke. A tall –

RG: Oh, the tower?

CD: The tower. You couldn't, you could go in the tower then. So we went in the tower, and went to the top. And if you go to the top, you can look over and see a city. And the children said where's that? And I said look good at it, now. So they looked over to Chapel Hill. And we went to North Carolina Central, and we went to – just went all over Durham. And then we came back to Chapel Hill. And went to – and I can't tell you how to get there today, where it is or anything. I think I might know something. But we went to Gimghoul Castle. And we could stand over there and look over to Durham. Now where is that?

RG: I think that's off of –

CD: Franklin?

RG: No, um, off of the business, it's the road up to where the old Carmichael Auditorium is. I don't know, is that South – where the student union is. I think it's on that road.

CD: I thought it was off Franklin somewhere. I remember goin'. That's where we went. So we got a chance to visit the three regions of North Carolina that year.

RG: So some of your students hadn't even been to Durham.

CD: Well, they had, maybe, I wouldn't say that. I might have had some who hadn't. But they hadn't been all over Durham. Maybe to the bus station, or to shopping, cause you know Sears was up there by the bus station.

RG: They hadn't been to the beach, most of them.

CD: Oh no, that was something else.

RG: I'll be they were excited about that.

CD: I thought – they were excited about it, but I thought that I wouldn't get over the fact that ooh, so much water. I can't believe it's that much water. And they – what is all of it? I said that's the Atlantic Ocean. So they wanted to go down and put their hands in the Atlantic Ocean. And we went on Saturday. We couldn't go on a school day. And so I got a parent to work with me. And we arranged it for Saturdays, and I went on Saturdays. Because I think seein' things in travel is very important. And I don't think anybody saw it like I did at that time. So I was just determined to go, and we went, on Saturdays.

RG: Well I can see why the kids would be excited about being in your classroom.

CD: Yeah.

RG: Did you, were you able to teach black history on a regular basis, or was this something that was taught during Black History Month or Black History Week?

CD: Well, that's what I've always done. I've always taught black history where black history occurred. And if the books didn't put the blacks in there, and I had some black history books that I knew where they put the blacks, I did too. So I said now this isn't in your book. And I'd take my books and let them use them. I said because this isn't covered in your textbook. But it is history. And black history occurs not only Black History Week.

RG: How important do you think it was to the students to hear that? To hear black history taught?

CD: Very important. I certainly think it was very important to see the worth of their own people. And they appreciated it. They knew that we were a part of building this country. And they saw it in books, because I took the books there. That's one thing, I never believed that you could teach from one book. And I used to collect old books, until I, and when I retired, I had shelves and shelves and shelves of old books. Books that the school system threw away. Cause they kept them at Lincoln Center, and I'd go down there and ask for them.

RG: Was black history not in the history books that were being used by the school system?

CD: Maybe at one place or another. You know, but not throughout the book.

RG: SO it didn't have –

CD: And then one author will always do more for a subject than another. That's why I always believed that you can't teach out of one book. That was part of the teaching, to have kids take different books and see what your author had to say about it. So we always had a lot of book. I don't know what they did with those books I had collected. I had lots and lots of books. And some of the old books were better than the new ones. And the children said Oh, look what this book says! And they got used to doin' that.

RG: Comparing.

CD: Yes.

RG: What made one book better than another book?

CD: Well, it's how it handled the subject that you were using. To me, that made it better. And it got to the place that kids could say, Oh Miss Davis, I know which book you can find something in there. I saw that in such and such a book. And some books would handle a subject a little better. Maybe everything wasn't bad about the book, but what are you doin' today that you need that book for? If it doesn't handle it, you can use another book.

RG: Did all of your children have a book to take home?

CD: Oh yes.

RG: So there was an adequate number?

CD: Yes, some of them might have been old books, but they had em. You could tell where the books had been used by the –

End of side 1.

Side 2

RG: I wanted to ask you what preparation there was at Lincoln High School for integration.

CD: I don't remember any preparation for it. We were just assigned to another school. And there was an integrated school. But I don't know of anything we had to do to get ready for it. Just go over there and teach.

RG: And the students? Did the students want to leave Lincoln High School?

CD: I don't think the students really wanted to leave. Because they felt like that was their school.

RG: Lincoln was their school.

CD: Yeah.

RG: Did they take any kind of a vote to stay or leave?

CD: No, it wasn't done like that. It was passed down for us to go. I don't know who made the decision. The system, I guess, just made the decision to integrate their schools. So, we had to go. If you wanted your job.

RG: And your new teaching position was at Phillips?

CD: Phillips.

RG: What did you teach there?

CD: I taught social studies.

RG: Eighth grade?

CD: Eighth grade. When you changed classes there, they had you to teach one subject.

RG: What was it like the first couple years at Phillips?

CD: A lot of things happened. You didn't know when they were going to happen. The kids weren't happy, both black and white, and if the teachers were unhappy, they tried not to show it.

RG: Was Phillips a new school?

CD: No, it wasn't a new school.

RG: So it had been open for a while and was –

CD: Right.

RG: All white before? Or was it integrated?

CD: Was all white before. If they had integration, it was token, one or two. Now they had built the high school, hadn't they? Yeah.

RG: Yeah, '66 the high school opened.

CD: Yeah.

RG: Did they have sit-ins at Phillips?

CD: Oh, yes. There were days when the kids would come to school, and let's see, the white kid says "We're not going to school today. We're not going to go in those classes with black kids." So they wouldn't go. And –

RG: Where would they go? Would they stay at the school and sit in the hallways?

CD: Yes, sit in the halls or anything. But the thing that I remember most was, you had eight – they would sit in halls. And I remember that they, (pause) they separated 'em, since they came out and weren't going to sit with each other. So the black kids went in the library, and the white kids went in the gym.

RG: And they just sat there.

CD: And sat there.

RG: And refused to go to class.

CD: Refused to go. They finally went, I think, that time.

RG: Did they have to call people in to get them to –

CD: Oh yes. I was trying to separate things, because I remember several things that happened. I know one time they called Central Office, and all the people from Central Office came. And I guess they thought they could handle it, but they couldn't. The kids talked to them just like they talked to anybody else.

RG: How was that?

- CD: Get out of my face, leave me alone, and I don't care if you're a superintendent.
- RG: Did the white kids and the blacks kids –
- CD: Yeah.
- RG: Both talked the same way.
- CD: Yeah.
- RG: What was the problem that they didn't want to go to class?
- CD: I don't know the root of the problem right off, but I remember that happening. And I was standin' out there in my door and heard them talk to some people like that. But the thing that I remember most was one day they decided that they weren't comin' to class that day. So the black kids and the white kids were against the teachers. So they said black and white together we can't be moved. So they went and sat out in the middle of the road in front of Phillips.
- RG: On Estes Drive?
- CD: On Estes Drive. And I remember the guidance counselor went out and told them, said "We don't care if you don't come to class. But we wouldn't like to see you get killed." And said "Some people would be crazy enough to run through this crowd." Said "If you all are going to sit in, come and sit on the parking lot." And they listened. And the parking lot was right outside my window.
- RG: Did they ever call any of the leaders from Lincoln High School to get the black kids to go back to class?
- CD: I told you they called them.
- RG: From the Central Office.
- CD: Right. And that's when they were talking to them anyway.
- RG: Who were the people from the Central Office that you remember coming in to talk to them?
- CD: I don't know. I'll think about that later, who was over there. But anyway, they sat out there on that parking lot. And they sang "We Shall Not Be Moved. Black and white together, we shall not be moved." So they didn't bother them.

RG: It sounds as though it's very different from what happened at the high school, where people describe a wall being built between the blacks and the whites. Did you see that wall at Phillips?

CD: No. Well, sometimes, and this didn't happen every day. I don't know what happened that, you know I told you the day that they separated them in the gym and in the library. I don't know how that got started. I do know that some people came out from Central Office for that. And they thought they could handle it. And it made it worse. Cause they talked to them any kind of way.

RG: That's very different from what I have heard about the discipline at Lincoln and in the African American community, where you just didn't talk back.

CD: Yeah, they talked back.

RG: To their elders.

CD: They talked back. And then, I remember some kids didn't want to be involved. They were afraid to go out there with them. So when I knew anything, my door was opened, and they said if you any of you in here come out, come out now. They were afraid to stay and afraid to go. And I remember some kids hid back, I had a little office, and some kids went back there and hid. Cause they were confused. They didn't know what to do. But in that black and white together, we shall not be moved, they just sat there about an hour. They sang, carried on.

RG: What did they want? I mean, did they have a list of demands, or concerns?

CD: I don't know what happened to start those up, those things up. When I knew anything, they were into them.

RG: Was that the first year, that that happened?

CD: Yes.

RG: When did it end?

CD: I don't think it – every now and then something would happen the next year. But it wasn't an ongoing thing. Something would happen that'd make 'em break out again. But anyway, nobody bothered them. Let 'em stay there as long as they wanted to stay. And everybody was doin' what they had to do and payin' it no mind. And after a while they got up and came inside. Went on to their classes. We used to laugh about that.

RG: Did you see physical abuse? Did you see fighting among the races?

CD: No. I don't remember seeing that.

RG: Did you hear verbal abuse?

CD: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I did. From both blacks and whites. And then there were some parents who didn't want black teachers teaching their children. And I always had good rapport with my kids, the kids that I taught, black and white. And I remember one time when Sears was across from the bus station, I was in Sears and I saw a little boy that I taught, and he was with his parents. And he said, he was so glad to see me he was making me see him, and speak. And his daddy said "You get in front of me and get on up those steps." They were goin' up the escalator. "And don't say nothin' else."

RG: This was a white family?

CD: Yes. And so, the little boy really did like me. And do you know what? That was in the early fall. And I'll never forget it. At Christmas time, he bought me a little gift. And he said "My daddy told me to give this to you, and tell you they send it."

RG: Sort of "forgive me, please"?

CD: Yes, yes. I'll never forget that.

RG: Did you continue to make home visits?

CD: No. Home visits weren't in style over there. But, if it was somebody I needed to see, I would see. But the parents came to school to visit the teachers. They had times set aside for that. Yeah, I remember that, because especially before, when the kids got their grades, the parents would come and see sometimes why they got something. And I'll never forget, when I issued my first grades, I looked outside my door and there was a line of parents. Mostly white. Anyway, I got through that.

RG: What was the thing that brought the parents there, that line of parents?

CD: Well, they had conferences with the teachers. But everybody had a conference with me. And I think most of the whites, you could tell what was what with the white people. Because the ones that didn't want you to teach their kids, they were there.

RG: How did they treat you?

CD: They were all right. They said "Why did my child get this, that and the other?" I said that's what they deserved. I didn't change anything, I remember that.

RG: They give you a tough time?

- CD: They did. "Why did they get so and so? Why didn't they so and so?" I said "Well what do *you* think they should have gotten? Tell me how you come up with that." And in the end it worked, cause I didn't give up an inch. And anyway, I just didn't have any trouble after they got, after I got over that. They got, well she's here and's gonna be here, and I guess she's right.
- RG: What's the difference, in your view between making a visit to a child's home and having the parent come to the school?
- CD: Well, you can see more parents if you have 'em come to the school, cause there's no way you're gonna get around to seein' everybody. Especially teaching social studies to eighth graders, and you have five different classes.
- RG: Oh yeah, you couldn't make every home visit. But let's say that it was one class. What would you prefer, to make a home visit or have the parents come to your school? In the way of benefit for the child.
- CD: Well, I would prefer that parents come to the school, cause if I needed –
- RG: The parents come to the school.
- CD: The parents come to the school. Because if I needed to visit a home, I could call and try to make arrangements for that. It wasn't that I didn't do it anymore. I taught too many kids, but I felt that I need to go here and see, then I could. I didn't feel like I needed to go to every home.
- RG: What were the other problems that you saw during integration besides the sit-ins and the verbal abuse from both sides?
- CD: Well, I don't know. I don't think some folk were very patient with kids who had problems. If you had some slow children, some teachers didn't want to teach them. And then too, that's when they started –
- RG: Tracking?
- CD: Tracking, and what else did they do? Labeling kids.
- RG: Oh, labeling them.
- CD: Right. That's when all that started. With integration.
- RG: So you could segregate the kids within the school.
- CD: Right, right.
- RG: The smart ones and the medium ones and the slow ones.

CD: Right. I'll tell you what I did. If I saw a parent needed to come and see about that student's being tracked and what have you, I took it upon myself to call them and tell them. I would say "So and so, your child is gonna be put in a slow class, and your child isn't slow. And you need to come out here and see about it." And they'd come.

RG: Who made that decision to put a child in a slow class?

CD: Well, say the math teachers would get together, and they'd say "He shouldn't be in this class. He can't keep up with these kids." And like that. And they would make the groups. And then too, you had to watch that. That's one thing that happened with integration. And I said if I lose my job, I'm gonna tell it every time. And I'd called parents and tell 'em, "Come out here and see what is about to happen to your child." Because as soon as I found that out I'd call them and tell them. That would really segregate them. Put them all together.

RG: And I take it that they segregated the black students to one group?

CD: Right, according – *they'd* say according to their ability.

RG: And the ability of the blacks was, how was it different from the ability of the whites, from the view of the teachers?

CD: Well, the blacks were always the slow learners and couldn't do, so they would end up in a group together. And they would end up bein' labeled. Send them in to be tested, cause – I said don't ever sign that stuff. Don't sign it. They'd get your parents to come out, and show 'em what they're gonna do, and make it sound all right. Then the parents would have to sign.

RG: To put them in a slow class.

CD: Right.

RG: How long did tracking go on? And this –

CD: Well it wasn't so much tracking as it was labeling kids.

RG: How long did the labeling go on?

CD: It was there when I left.

RG: And you left in 1990?

CD: Yeah.

RG: Is it still there?

CD: I don't know about that. Cause I haven't been back since I left.

RG: Were there benefits of the integration to the school, that you could see?

CD: Well, there were. I'd say that they were able to get the use of all the materials that they hadn't been able to, yet. Cause they had everything in an integrated school. Tryin' to think if I can think of anything else. One thing, they said that the blacks caused, had a lot of discipline problems. They'd – sometimes, the teachers made the problems. Because you see, found kids that never were in any trouble before. Now they're a discipline problem.

RG: How do you think the teacher created that problem?

CD: Well, you can, I mean, kids aren't crazy, you know. They know how you say something and what you say. They were able to tell. They know how you speak to them and how you speak to somebody else.

RG: Did you hear that from the students, that the white teachers treated them differently from the black teachers?

CD: Yeah, they'll tell you.

RG: Is that a common thing?

CD: Yeah, I knew who they were. I knew when the kids were tellin' the truth and when they weren't.

RG: So this wasn't uncommon to hear.

CD: No, it wasn't....They demanded so much respect from the black kids. But they didn't do the same for the whites. You're black and you don't talk to me, or you don't do this, you don't say that. They demanded so much from them that they didn't demand from white kids.

RG: It sounds almost like it's let's keep the status quo.

CD: Right.

RG: Did you see that change, Cecilia, over years?

CD: Yeah I did see some change. It got better. But I don't know, we lost a principal at Phillips because of integration. But I think he was the fairest principal that we ever had.

- RG: Who was that that was lost?
- CD: Austin Simpson. He was very fair.
- RG: Was he a white or black principal?
- CD: White.
- RG: So you thought he was a good principal.
- CD: I did.
- RG: Why?
- CD: And I still think he is.
- RG: Well why did you lose him from the school?
- CD: Because of all that integration that he couldn't handle, that nobody could handle, because if people from Central Office came out there, they couldn't handle it. But they said that he couldn't do it. But he was the best principal that they ever had at Phillips. He was very fair to the students, and he was fair to the teachers. I enjoyed working for him. And if I had to pick the best principal at Phillips while I was there, it would be Austin Simpson.
- RG: How long did he stay there after integration?
- CD: A year or two. A year, I think.
- RG: Do you think the students followed the lead of what was going on at the high school at that time?
- CD: I do. I think they did. And I think it was discussed at home, with the older siblings, and they followed their lead.
- RG: What was the effect on the students when Martin Luther King was killed?
- CD: That was in April, wasn't it?
- RG: '68, I believe.
- CD: Mm hmm. And we went there in '66. We could have had a confusion then, I just can't bring it all together.
- RG: Were there other things that you recall that took place during integration that stand out?

- CD: No, I can't, not right now, I can't think of other things. The main thing was that black and white together.
- RG: Sort of odd, isn't it?
- CD: Right. That I won't ever forget. And you know, as I talked, later on the kids said "Miss Davis, can we have some time to talk about integration some days? What did they do out here?" They want to know about it. I guess they heard it discussed somewhere. "Can't we talk about it a little bit?"
- RG: How did you handle that?
- CD: I'd say sure we can talk about it. We talked about it. They said "They were kind of crazy weren't they?" I said "sorta.:
- RG: It sounds as though discipline was different at the integrated school.
- CD: It was.
- RG: How was it different.
- CD: Because, as I said, the kids, the teachers sometimes created friction between them and the students, and the students ended up in the office and being expelled and all that. And there were black kids who didn't respect them.
- RG: It's really, it's amazing to me that here's a group of students who had great discipline at Lincoln. Quiet in the hallways –
- CD: Right.
- RG: No hats.
- CD: Right.
- RG: No chewing gum. A dress code. No smoking.
- CD: And they got over there.
- RG: No talking back.
- CD: They were terrible. And they talked back sometimes. But they were provoked.
- RG: Do you think – I understand that they were provoked, and I'm not trying to make that a minor issue at all. But do you think that they were also angry that they had lost Lincoln High School?

- CD: No, I don't think that's what it was all about. I really don't. I never heard it voiced that way from any of the kids. I always heard em like, this is what it's gonna be everywhere. They didn't want to lose Lincoln High School, but they saw it as this is what it's gonna be everywhere.
- RG: What do you mean when you say this is the way it's gonna be everywhere?
- CD: Everywhere in North Carolina and all over, you hear on the radio what is bein' said about integration and the schools that integrated. And it's a thing that's gonna come to all schools. And we'll have to accept it. I never heard them really say that we want to go back over to Lincoln. Never.
- RG: How long do you think it took for this discipline problem and the sit-ins to end at Phillips?
- CD: I don't know. Just two or three years, I guess. I can't remember when it actually came to an end.
- RG: Did the black students participate in student government and sports and clubs?
- CD: They did, sure.
- RG: Right from the get-go?
- CD: Right.
- RG: So there wasn't an issue there.
- CD: No, it wasn't.
- RG: Now Coach Pierman was there, as I remember. Is that not right?
- CD: Right.
- RG: The first year or two?
- CD: Right. I think. Yeah.
- RG: Did he play any role in what went on there?
- CD: At Phillips?
- RG: Yes.

CD: Sure. He tried to keep them straight. I guess he was like anybody else. When he found out, it had already started. (pause) The kids would listen to him. That's why I said that I know that the students, they aren't crazy. There's such a thing as spittin' in somebody's face and tell him it's raining.

RG: That went on?

CD: Well, literate. (?) You can spit in somebody's face and tell them it's raining. You can say anything and think they gonna believe it. And children aren't that dumb. I mean, I talked to kids who had problems. If I thought they were wrong I would explain, tell them they can't do that or the other. But if they weren't wrong and the teacher asked me about it, I'd tell 'em that I don't think the child was wrong.

RG: What were the PTA meetings like at --

CD: All business.

RG: At Phillips. How were they different from the PTA meetings at Lincoln?

CD: Well, they were different. You had an executive board and you worked mostly through the executive board.

RG: Committees?

CD: Right, you didn't have that comin' together, and everybody talkin' and participatin'. Strictly business.

RG: And at Lincoln it wasn't strictly business?

CD: Well, but I mean if you're working on a project, you worked on that project. You didn't discuss students. You talked to them at parent conferences when they lined up outside your door. So PTA business at Phillips was mostly to see what the parents could do for the school.

RG: Whereas at Lincoln they talked about that *and* the students' performance?

CD: Right. Well, not so much the students' -- well you could see the parents at PTA to talk about the students' performance. They maybe stopped early, so anybody who needs to see anybody.

RG: How else would they talk about students, if not performance? You seem to be saying that there were other things about students that were discussed.

CD: Huh uh. I didn't mean that.

RG: Well that was, maybe I just inferred that. You hadn't really implied it. Are there other things that I haven't asked you that you want to bring up?

CD: I can't think of any. If I do I'll write them down.

RG: I'd appreciate that.

CD: Call you by a second time.

RG: Thank you. Appreciate you taking the time.

CD: I enjoyed talking to you.

RG: Well I enjoyed talking to you very much. Thank you.

CD: I enjoyed teaching.

RG: I can see you did. You had a nice big smile on your face when you were talking about your students.

CD: Well, that's how I felt when I was teachin' em. Before integration and after integration, I felt that same way.

RG: Do you think all the teachers felt that way?

CD: I don't. Because I feel that there are people teachin' who aren't interested in teaching. They're just in it for something to do. You gotta love children, you gotta want to help them, and you gotta like what you're doin'. And I figure there are some people who don't do any of that. And when I told you every time I went to the dentist he said, he'd ask me just to see what I was gonna say. And that would tickle me, cause I, he knew that I loved the kids. He said "I wish I could find some more that'd come in here and say that."

RG: Well, that's a great place to end right there, on a positive note. Thank you. Appreciate it.

CD: I enjoyed talking with you.

RG: As I did with you.

End of side 2