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Interview
with
JOHNNY A. FREEMAN

December 27, 1990

By Goldie F. Wells

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOHNNY A. FREEMAN

By Goldie F. Wells

Goldie: We are in the office of Mr. Johnny Freeman who is now working in the central office of Burlington City Schools. I'm just checking the microphone. Today is December 27, 1990.

Goldie: I want you to tell your name and what you are doing now. Also, I want you to tell that you are being taped.

Mr. Freeman: This is Johnny A. Freeman. I am being taped by Goldie Wells at 1:15 p.m., December 27, 1990. Presently I am serving as Assistant Superintendent of Staff Development and Operations for Burlington City Schools.

Goldie: Mr. Freeman I want you to tell me how you became a high school principal. I'm interested in--you're one of the few that I have interviewed that served as a principal in 1964, and 1989. Right now I want you to just focus on the school that you were principal of in 1964. That was in Halifax County, wasn't it? I want you to tell me how you became a high school principal in Halifax County.

Mr. Freeman: Well, I was a science and math teacher at the W.A. Patilla High School in Tarboro, North Carolina and I served in that capacity for three years. During the summer I received a call from Dr. Fred Young, who was the Assistant Superintendent in Halifax County at that time, relative to a principalship at that time. I had been recommended by the Superintendent of Edgecombe County Schools for that position. I interviewed for that position with the late W. Henry Oferman and Dr. Fred Young, who is now President of Elon College. After the interview Mr. Oferman asked Dr. Young to show me how to get to McIver High School in Littleton, North Carolina and I went up to visit the school at that time and some of the teachers happened to be on duty. Later my principal learned that I had interviewed for a principalship and he in turn told the Superintendent that I was in line for a principalship. The Superintendent, the late C.B. Martin, called me at that time and I told him yes, that I had been interviewed for a principalship. So he told me when I got the job to send his contract back to him. So I in turn called Mr. Oferman and told him that I was under pressure to resign my teaching position as a science and math teacher so Mr. Oferton told me to go on and resign even though the Board had not met and approved me as principal. But the Board had never turned anyone down that he had recommended. He said for me to go on and submit my resignation and if the Board did turn my recommendation down he would have a teaching job for me. So I accepted the job on those conditions.

Goldie: And when the Board met, you were approved.

Mr. Freeman: When the Board met I was approved for principalship for Marie McIver High School in Littleton, North Carolina.

Goldie: How long did you work there?

Mr. Freeman: I stayed there for three years and during the three years that I was there, Fred Young went back to Columbia University and got his doctorate and came to Burlington City Schools as Assistant Superintendent for Instruction for Burlington City Schools. The next year he came to Littleton with a Dr. Breck Profitt who was Superintendent of Burlington City Schools and talked with me about coming to Burlington. So I sort of followed Fred to Burlington. That is how I came to Burlington.

Goldie: How many years had you taught before you became a principal?

Mr. Freeman: I had taught a total of five years before becoming a principal. I taught two years in the Whiteville City Schools, science and math teacher under the late H.E. Brown, and I left there and went to Tarboro and I taught in Tarboro for three years--one year under W.A. Patilla and two years under Reuben Cherry.

Goldie: Well, tell me about that school. Tell me something about McIver School and the responsibilities you had. As you talk about the school I want you to address the supervision of personnel.

Mr. Freeman: After coming to McIver High School, which at that time was a union school--grades 1-12. We did not have very much of a turnover. It was a Black school--union school--all Black teachers and all Black students. I was fortunate in being able to hire some teachers after coming on the scene and when I put together my first handbook as I became principal of that school, the Assistant Superintendent at that time wanted to see my handbook before sharing it with teachers. He was so impressed with the handbook at that time he said to me that he just had that much confidence in me to allow me to hire any person that I wanted. So I was able to go to A & T and talk with personnel at A & T in the personnel office there and to interview and make recommendations. I have never been turned down for anyone that I have recommended for a teaching position while at McIver High School. I had an excellent working relationship with the Superintendent, the central staff, and the staff at the school. I stayed there for a total of three years and Dr. L.C. Dolly, who was President of A & T State University, talked with me, matter of fact he was my commencement speaker one year while I was there. He gave us scholarships

and what have you and when I was first offered the job to come to Burlington, I accepted the position. I had a very good friend in Tarboro at that time, the late James Bass. His backyard and my backyard joined. He was a high school principal and I was a high school principal and we were the best of friends. He did not want me to leave Eastern North Carolina to come to Burlington and the late W. Henry Oferman at that time assured me that the next high school that opened that was larger than the high school where I was that I would get the next high school if I stayed. So with that in mind I resigned the Burlington position and when I resigned the Burlington position, Dr. Profitt then went to Dr. Dowdy, and Dr. Dowdy called me up and talked with me. He thought that I had done all that I could do there and he thought that I should consider a move. He assured me that if I came to Burlington and did not like the job here with the Burlington City Schools, that he would look out for me at A & T. And so he asked me to talk with my wife, Shirley, and for us to talk it over again and so we decided this time that we would come. So we accepted the job here in Burlington and resigned the job in Burlington and then we accepted the job back and we came to Burlington and I have been here now for this is my twenty-sixth year and I do not regret having come to Burlington at all but I felt that we had a good situation in Littleton. I thought that we were able to focus and that has been my focus from day one is trying to surround myself with the very best people available and trying to come up with a top flight instructional program.

Goldie: Now that is the next area I wanted you to talk about--curriculum and instruction.

Mr. Freeman: That has been my whole hog from the very beginning--a quality faculty and a number one instructional program and with a quality faculty you can have that. Now I have been very fortunate since I have been in Burlington because working with some of the student teachers from the University of North Carolina and working with some of the instructors over at the University of North Carolina. They got to know our high school very well and they knew the quality program that we wanted at Cummings High School and so they would call me up and say, "look Johnny, we have a good math teacher coming through here the M.A.T. Broyhill and they would fit well in your program. And that is the way that I have been able to recruit quality teachers. I wouldn't have to go out but Chapel Hill was directing people to us at Cummings High School and at one time I had five Lenhurst Fellows teaching at Cummings High School at one time. And that was because Dr. Gary Stouf and as a matter of fact I had three Phi Beta Kappa teaching there at one time. It manifests itself in such a way that just about every vacancy that came up my staff was hit. At one time for Burlington City Schools, the Director of the Reading Program used to be the Chairman of the English Department of my school, the

Director of the Writing Program was Chairman of the English Department of my school and I am talking about system-wide now., My choral director became Director of Cultural Arts for the City Schools. I had a teacher that taught for me for ten years that is now the coordinator of personnel for city schools--in fact his only teaching experience has been with me. The Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and Pupil Personnel was my guidance counselor, later my assistant principal and later became administrative assistance to the Superintendent and now she is Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel and Personnel. At one time I said to the Superintendent, I said, you are killing me but he said but you have the horses and they were coming to us for that. We have never been hurting because we have always had the reputation of a quality instructional program consequently we have been able to recruit top notch people and in doing so I feel very fortunate to have been able to produce at that school--in the twenty years that I was there I have been able to produce two State Teachers of the Year and one National Teacher of the Year. So I think that speaks well about the academic quality that we have at Cummings High School.

Goldie: Did you consider yourself a mentor?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, I considered myself a mentor and at the same time I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to work for--my first teaching experience was under a dynamic administrator, the late H.E. Brown. Herbert Brown, who was principal of Whiteville Central High School and later became principal of Ligon High School in Raleigh until his retirement and I had the opportunity to go with him to Ligon in Raleigh but I also had an opportunity to go home to teach, so I chose to go home and he went to Raleigh. We left the same year. I have been able to surround myself with some real top notch administrators and they sort of guided me into the paths that I needed to be in and how to look for people and how to do things. I can remember very vividly when I became a principal. Mr. Brown took his job, came to Littleton arrived on campus before the first bus arrived, observed the buses, observed me on my first day all day long. At the end of the day, he sat down with me and critiqued me on what he observed and how he would have done things had he been principal. You just don't find that kind of mentoring going on today. But that is what Mr. Brown did for me and the late J.E. Rastus Best was the same kind of person. He would tell me, John, any problem you have, tell me about it because I have already had it. And with those two guys it was just hard to go wrong because I knew school administrators. They were learned people and as far as I'm concerned they were ahead of their time. And I feel very fortunate that I had the opportunity to work with these people through the years and I learned early in the game to try to surround yourself with good people but I guess I learned that from the book John F. Kennedy wrote named, Profiles of Courage. You know you

surround yourself with the best people that you can and they make you look good. That is what I did by being able to become directly associated with the University of North Carolina and some of the education people there and the M.A.T. Program there I didn't have to look for science, math, English or whatever. They sent me the best and then on top of that they would come by and see how those people were doing and I'm fortunate right now to say that we still have two there now; one left me through a marriage and one was transferred to the other high school to teach calculus at the other high school because he was not teaching math for me and they needed a strong math teacher and so he is teaching at William High School now and he is Phi Beta Kappa. But again, just having good folks--my philosophy is you hire good folks then give them the opportunity to teach. Consequently at Cummings High School in the twenty years that I was there I know that we haven't had any teacher on duty in that school in 19 of those years. I never assigned any teacher any extra duty at all. No bus duty, no hall duty, no cafeteria duty, no duty whatsoever.

Goldie: Well, how did you do that?

Mr. Freeman: The two assistants--the three of us we handled the general operation of the school. The teachers have never been involved in that.

Goldie: So you really left them free to teach.

Mr. Freeman: That is correct. We expected them to teach. Now I had one teacher to say to me, "that you expected a hell of a lot out of your teachers." I said, "Yes, that is true but you have the time to teach and we expect it." I have to say that we had the highest percentage of minorities of any high school in Alamance County. There are six high schools in the county. Our test results usually range from one to two--if we're not number one in the county then we are number two in the county. Usually between Williams High School and Cummings and I knew then that teaching made the difference. I always say that we had a new facility, we had the equipment, we had what we needed. Why can't we prove that we can do the job and we were able to do it but the teachers enjoy it because at lunch time they were free to have lunch in the lounge. They did not have to go out on any hall duty, cafeteria duty, no duty whatsoever.

Goldie: And you maintain that program. Is that going on since you left Cummings?

Mr. Freeman: I maintained it but I'm afraid they have changed it since I left. Things have gotten a little hectic since I left. But I will say this to you. On top of that, that's the way it was when we had grades ten through twelve. The Superintendent said to me, "I know once you put the ninth

grade over there you won't be able to do it with the ninth grade over there. It took us a little while but we never did put any teacher on duty with grades nine through twelve. As a matter of fact we have had people visit us from several school systems to see how we did it. But then again, we talked about pride, we talked about feeling good about yourselves in school. When I came to Jordan Sellis in 1965, we talked about pride and when I went to Cummings we talked about pride and everything was centered around pride.

Goldie: Tell me about the names of Cummings and Jordan Sellis. Was Jordan Sellis the traditional Black high school.

Mr. Freeman: Jordan Sellis was the traditional Black high school and I want to say this to you. That is where I started the process then with no teachers on duty. Now when I went there discipline was pretty bad but we were able to put it in line and I got total support from the Superintendent and the central staff and we were able to put the discipline in line. Then when I went to Cummings I didn't see why just because we had an integrated situation we had to change and we went through some turbulent times as you well know. We went through the riots and all that kind of thing. The year before we closed Jordan Sellis in 1969, and we went in the Fall of 1970, we had that school organized and we had plans for having grievances--everything was outlined in writing for every child and parent when we opened that school and consequently, we never had a demonstration, we never had a walk out; now the junior high school which adjourns the campus had several walk outs. But as I explained to the parents and the students, I've never seen kids walk out of school when it was raining or snowing or on a sunny day. So I told the kids, if you walk out, the procedure for coming back is going to be different. You are just not going to walk out and walk back in. So consequently the kids knew and yet we had grievances if you have a problem this is the procedure that you will follow. You go to guidance, and from guidance to me, and then on up to the Board of Education but demonstrating is not the way to handle a problem unless we can't get a resolution to what the grievance is. So that is how we have been able to do it for twenty years now.

Goldie: So you really haven't had a big problem with discipline?

Mr. Freeman: No, we haven't had a big problem with discipline or anymore than any other school would have had.

Goldie: Did you handle it any differently in 1964, than you did in 1989?

Mr. Freeman: No, I wouldn't say we handled discipline any differently because I look at kids as kids. Kids will make mistakes and as long as they profit from their mistakes that

is all I ask. But what I would say to a kid if a kid is referred to the office then I would say to the kid now what do you want me to do? Now can you do what the teacher asked you to do? If the student says yes, that is all I want. If the student says no, then I say, "You're not going back to class. We are going to have to talk to your parents" and there have been times I have said to the parents, "You're going to have to take the kid back until the two of you can get together so you can come up with the expectation that we have for our school but he's not going to stay here and disrupt the school." And the kids and the parents understood this. And I've had parents to say, Mr. Freeman, when I was here do what you did. That's been a long time ago. You know It's been a long time but no we just didn't do it. We did not put teachers on duty. I just don't believe in that kind of thing. Mrs. Wells, when you have to post teachers all over the building and parking lots there is something wrong. So my point is that when I was talking to my Superintendent just last week I believe, I said, you don't need a lot of rules in school. Schools are being criticized today as having more rules than having . I said you need the basic four rules. Rule number one is that you come to school to learn. You want to respect yourself. You are going to respect others and I said that is about all you need.

Goldie: Three good ones is all you need.

Mr. Freeman: I said, they are about as pervasive as you need. That's it because the more rules you have the more enforcing you have to do. So don't paint yourself into a corner. Because you learn that by experience. I'll say it again. I had some darn good teachers--when I say teachers I'm talking about the administrators that I have learned from. I went through graduate school at North Carolina Central University and back in those days they used to have what they called the Principal Institute and that was where all the Black principals went. Andy Anderson who was the principal of Paceson High in Winston-Salem taught at the Institute and the late H.E. Brown who was the principal at Aiken High School, those were the veteran principals. They were well respected. They taught at the Principal Institute at North Carolina Central and that is where I learned from guys like that. I knew how to handle a situation and they were not afraid to speak up and tell you or correct you when you were wrong. They weren't afraid to do it and Mr. Brown when he would leave and go places he would take me with him. When Mr. Vance would go places he would take me with him and when I was just a classroom teacher back in those days, principals did a lot of commencement speaking. You probably don't remember that far back but when Mr. Vance would speak he would always take me to ride along with him and I was just a classroom teacher. I was not teaching for him but he had that much confidence in me and he saw that I possibly had the potential so he took me along with him and that is how I met

principals across the state when I was going to North Carolina Central. I met a lot of Black principals and I knew a lot of them.

Goldie: Transportation. How did you deal with the transportation at both schools? Did you have buses?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, we had buses but I must say now you might not believe this but at McIver High School, I don't recall the exact number of buses that I had but I guess fifteen or sixteen buses. I didn't have an assistant principal.

Goldie: You didn't have anybody to help you?

Mr. Freeman: I didn't have an assistant principal. I only had a secretary.

Goldie: How many teachers did you have there?

Mr. Freeman: I guess I had forty-some. But I didn't have any assistant principals at all. I had a person that I called my assistant principal but he had a full teaching assignment. He couldn't help me and so I handled buses myself. I was on the campus when the buses came and I was on campus when the buses left you know unless I was off campus. Then when I came to Jordan Sellis in 1965, I didn't have a full-time assistant principal then and I had grades 7-12 and I had 1200 more kids and I had a part-time assistant principal. He taught mathematics a half day and was my assistant principal a half day. Now he helped me out with the buses. And that was about the extent of what he did. He taught in the morning and I had to deal with the discipline in the morning so he couldn't help me that much so things have changed. We learned how to do things because you didn't have help. You learned how to short circuit things that you needed to short circuit because you had to-- not by choice but by desire. You had to because you did not have the help. I had a secretary but not a full-time assistant principal. And that stayed that way the five years that I was there until I became a principal at Cummings High School. Then I had a full-time assistant principal, that's all I had then.

Goldie: You just learn to do what you have to do. Someone was telling me that they had to pay the down payment on their yellow buses. Did you have to do that?

Mr. Freeman: No, no. I take that back. When I went to Littleton as principal they had a new activity bus that they had purchased the year before I got there. The teachers made contributions to purchase the bus with the understanding that money would be raised and they would be reimbursed. And so we had to raise money to pay the teachers back. The bus was there when I got there, the brand new bus but it was paid for that way and I had just followed the commitment that was made

by my predecessor as to how the teachers received that bus.

Goldie: How did you utilize funds? Where did you get your monies from?

Mr. Freeman: We had fund raisers. Back in those days it was understood that you had fund raisers and I had been against it all along. I just wasn't for fund raising but I did as little for that as I could do.

Goldie: But did you need it for survival?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, because you had some obligations. You had your bills, you had your kids having to make trips and stuff like that. You had no choice. And when I came to Burlington Jordan Sellis didn't have an activity bus and the Superintendent had given the school an old school bus.

Goldie: Do you think it was because of the color of the bus or because the bus was not new?

Mr. Freeman: Well, it was the idea that the bus was painted black and that was a symbolism. I guess they thought that they were being put down or for whatever reason. They refused to buy it but I can remember very vividly Williams High School had a brand new activity bus but we could not use it. Our kids were going to Greensboro to play for the State Championship in basketball and the bus gave out with us between here and Greensboro. So I called the Assistant Superintendent at that time and he told me to call the principal and ask him if we could use his bus to go pick the kids up. He talked with the coach and the coach said no, we could not use the bus so then the Assistant Superintendent told me to call maintenance and so I called maintenance. They said the only thing that we have is a truck that we could put some sides on and go get the kids. I knew that that would not work so I had to rent a bus from Moore Brothers out of High Point to come and pick our kids up to take them to Greensboro. Of course we had to pay what we called "deadheading" at that time. As we were moving toward integration we had reached a point that we could not get schools to play us. There was not a single school in Alamance County that would play us in football.

Goldie: Why?

Mr. Freeman: Because they had integrated and they refused to play Black high schools. Even Williams High School which is right here in the school system refused to play us. So we went all the way down to, boys who played basketball, Little Washington, North Carolina to play basketball. We went as far as South Carolina to play football. They were the only places because schools all around us had integrated.

Goldie: Why had your school not integrated?

Mr. Freeman: Well, the Superintendent had a plan for integration and his plan worked extremely well I thought. He integrated the grade by the year--one grade a year. And at that time the county schools were consolidated and when they were building the high school they were consolidating. But the Burlington City School System I had personally took the 7th grade and then the next year the 8th grade, then the next year the 9th grade and the following year we got the new high school. Then we went to the new high school.

Goldie: Those were some of those trying years.

Mr. Freeman: That is correct and I might hasten to add that as I recall when the Blacks were leaving the old Black school going to the new integrated school they literally destroyed the Black school but this did not happen. The kids did not destroy the school. It was open the next year as a 9th grade center and consequently it continued to be used as a 9th grade center.

Goldie: What do you attribute the difference in leaving the building?

Mr. Freeman: Well, because we talked to the kids and we told them that the school would be used by their brothers and sisters and why destroy the school. They should be able to enjoy the same comfort that they enjoyed and by talking with the kids and what have you. They listened to us and they did not do it.

Goldie: Did the funds change the amount of funds and the way you were issued your funds after desegregation?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, because as I said, I did not have a full-time assistant principal and I did have after integration. I did not have an activity bus and I got an activity bus when we integrated.

Goldie: What about the materials?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, we were not hurting as far as supplies but I'm sure that was a difference but having been segregated its hard to say what you would lose and not lose because you don't know. But I do know there were some differences. At that time I had only two coaches and I had football, basketball, track and everything and that is all I had.

Goldie: Did you believe in a good athletic program too.

Mr. Freeman: We had a good athletic program. As I said we won the State Championship in basketball. So we had a good program and that's all we had. So I would wager that they had

more coaches than that at the school across town, but I can't swear to it.

Goldie: I'm sure.

Mr. Freeman: I'm sure of that but those were the kinds of things that we..

Goldie: What about cafeteria management? Was there a difference in how much authority you had over the cafeteria?

Mr. Freeman: Well, we had complete authority over the cafeteria as far as the supervision. When I came to Burlington we were way ahead of a lot of school systems I had worked for prior to coming here because we had written evaluations because I had never been in any school system where we had any type of evaluation. So we had that and the cafeteria was under the principal's supervision but we didn't make food purchases or anything because we had a system-wide cafeteria manager so that worked that way. The only thing I was responsible for was scheduling a kid in and out of the cafeteria.

Goldie: Did you have anything to do with the monies?

Mr. Freeman: They all went through central office. And that is true today.

Goldie: What about buildings and grounds?

Mr. Freeman: Well, the buildings and grounds were neatly maintained but there again I attribute that to the principal. I expected it to be clean and every custodial personnel that has worked for me has had a job assigned to him so I knew who was responsible for what area. I didn't have any person going to this person and saying, this is not clean or the grounds are not being kept or what have you. I knew who was responsible.

Goldie: When you were at McIver, did you have anyone from central maintenance to take care of the grounds or did you just have to make sure that it was done.

Mr. Freeman: No, as a matter of fact, as I recall that was done by my staff which I had one male janitor, maybe a maid but there again we didn't have a lawn mower, we didn't have any grass cut because we didn't have that much of a campus.

Goldie: But you kept it neat and it was your decision how it was maintained.

Goldie: What about the school and the community and the relationship in the community especially back there in

Halifax County.

Mr. Freeman: It meant a whole lot to the community. We provided everything that we could possibly provide and I tried to make the school open to the community from funerals to whatever we had it at the school. Then there was an Episcopal Church there. They were without a rector there and the three years that I was there, I served that church as a lay reader for three years. Every Sunday in the month except one and we had a rector from a White church to come in and serve the community once a month. So we had good community support as far as having community support. I feel very strongly about that. Even until today. This is one of the things that I am happy to say I was able to do. Some things at Cummings because I made the parents responsible for... for instance I don't ask a teacher to serve on any athletic event just to collect tickets, to sell tickets, to work at concession stands, to work in the bleachers. The parents, that is their responsibility. I left there this past June, the parents handled the concessions, they sold tickets, they collected tickets, whatever they had to do with athletics they did. And I never had to ask a teacher to sell a ticket. I did encourage teachers now to attend athletic events but attend with the responsibility like supervising bleachers or supervising in the stands or the press box.

Goldie: Well, do you think this had an effect on your teachers?

Mr. Freeman: Sure, there is no question in my mind about that.

Goldie: It helped teachers to maintain status.

Mr. Freeman: Their moral and status. Sure and I would suspect they would resent it having to do it today but they realize that it is a new ball game. There again that's why I expect teaching because I relieved you from all these things you discredited as your responsibility. And we did it, the administrators, the three of us did it. It was hard because for twenty years I ate in fifteen minutes.

Goldie: And now you still eat fast, I bet. You still eat fast.

Mr. Freeman: That's right because the three of us we ate between lunches and there are only fifteen minutes between lunches. Some days if you have a problem you don't get a chance to eat at all.

Goldie: So you knew all the children didn't you?

Mr. Freeman: Basically all of them.

Goldie: But you would see them.

Mr. Freeman: That's right. And of course you know the ones you get to know first.

Goldie: Oh, sure! How much administrative power or control do you feel that you had at both places?

Mr. Freeman: I think the principal is a very powerful person if he handles himself properly. And if he can get the respect that the position calls for he is a very powerful person. I think that is evidenced in the way some of the Superintendents are trying to go about now relieving principals of some of the power by moving principals around. That is the method of diluting the power. That is all that is. Now I've been fortunate that I haven't had to contend with that kind of stuff in the school system. I've been in the school system for twenty-six years and this is the third position that I've been in.

Goldie: Did you choose to come to the central office?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, the Superintendent came to my office and told me that he had a vacancy and he asked if I would be interested and I was. I felt to be perfectly honest with you that I had shot my authority as a principal and I didn't see us as losing ground but I didn't know anything else that I could have done that I had not achieved while I was there.

Goldie: And you wanted to go out while...

Mr. Freeman: That is right. And I had had one State Championship in football, played for another State Championship in football, played for State Championship in basketball, two championships in track, I've taken a group of kids to Russia and I've had two State Teachers of the Year, one National Teacher of the Year, a number of science winners and of course last year I was one of the three finalists in the State for Principal of the Year so I didn't know anything else. I had served as a County Commissioner, you name it and I've done it.

Goldie: You have a whole wall and box full of awards. The wall is not even large enough for them all.

Mr. Freeman: I just don't know of anything else that I could have accomplished. So I felt that this was the time for me to move out and I feel that the school wasn't downgraded or didn't have the respect or what have you. That wasn't it at all. And I have to say Dr. Tab Scott, one of those chairmen on the State Board of Education, she called me up one night and she said, J.E. I've got to hand it to you. You saved us. People were under the impression that we were going to come up on the low end because of the high minority ratio but

I made a statement to my teachers and they knew this that we are going to teach them I don't care if they're green. We're going to teach them. And I want the teachers to understand that I expect you to teach I don't care if they're green and so I didn't have the situation with the hangups. They didn't come to me with those kinds of things. Another thing that was the expectation I had with the teachers and the same thing with the parents. They knew what I expected as far as discipline. They knew. The kids knew you weren't going to walk the halls. I don't care who you are, you aren't going to walk the halls. The kids knew that I expected them to be in the classroom and the teachers knew that I expected them to be in the classroom. Another thing that has been my philosophy and that is I've tried to learn from mistakes I've seen other principals make. All of our staff members were maid service so the teachers knew they couldn't complain because they were in charge and when I say they were in charge, they were responsible at faculty meetings. For instance, we would sit down and we operated the school on a management team concept. We would sit down and map out everything. We met once a month but we had a theme and our theme was when we opened our school we created a climate for maximum learning. That was the theme and everything centered around that. If there was a problem dealing with a group, next month, you, you, you and you are responsible for doing all the research and presenting it to the faculty and some of the teachers take a different view when they have to stand up and preside but that is the way we did it. In fact, I never called a faculty meeting where I go in and stand in the door. That is ridiculous. They had a theme to develop.

Goldie: And you continued that all the years that you were there? That every faculty meeting was a learning experience.

Mr. Freeman: It was a learning experience for the teachers. Designed by the teachers. Now that didn't preclude me from having some special comments of some things I had to say about some things but I was not there to hold them for hour to hour listening to me. And there were times when I would have faculty meeting that the teachers would get so involved. My wife would say to me, "You kept the teachers over there that long?" They kept themselves.

Goldie: They kept themselves. Well, how do you think the desegregation schools affected your role as a principal?

Mr. Freeman: I don't think it affected my role any differently as principal. I just looked at it as another opportunity to try to educate boys and girls. But as far as having a direct effect on them, I don't know that it did. I would say that I think that in some situations we have profited tremendously by it and I think in other situations we may have been hurt by desegregation. Let me clarify that. It is disturbing to me to see the powerful band that I had as

principal of an all Black high school and ended up with a band now with just a handful of Black students. That disturbs me. And of course, I realize, and I have to be honest and say this, it has to do with the late issue of the person that has done it. And I don't understand that however, I think that the parents are going to have to be concerned to ask the question why rather than wait for somebody to fix it for them because it is not easy to be fixed but I think if parents are inquisitive enough to ask the question why then some of the things can fix themselves. So that is what I mean when I say I think it is a good thing that has happened because there is no question in my mind as to who will suffer but they were not equal. They were separate but they were not equal. I think now that the schools are equal in that sense as far the opportunity being available. They are unequal in the kids being made aware and made to feel, I'll put it that way, that they are an important part of this operation, and I have to clarify this too because that is an exception, because some kids in the community that are for separating and there are others and I think that is where the leadership comes in where we have tried to set the climate for getting the right focus.

Goldie: So the teachers are still the key. When you are all Black, I have the philosophy that it is so bad because the Black teachers could push the Black children and say things to them and push them along but you just think the good teachers would do that no matter what.

Mr. Freeman: Let's face it, when we were all Black you could call assembly and say to the kids basically what needed to be said to give them a shot of adrenaline but you can't do that now and the only institution that we have left right now and I hate to say this but they have fallen tremendously and that is the Black church. They just are not living up to what I think they ought to be doing. That is the only place that we can speak to the issue.

Goldie: What did you enjoy most about your job?

Mr. Freeman: What I enjoyed most about my job is meeting people and seeing people achieve. I've had a very successful principalship. Very successful principalship. This is not being cocky at least that is not my style, I would say few principals can boast of the successes I have had. I was appointed County Commissioner and then ran for County Commissioner and during the primary lead the ticket then lost in the primary because it became a racial situation. The people put out a lot of negative literature and I ended up going to court, having a heart attack, and of course they were found guilty for putting the literature out. One of them happened to be on the City Council. The thing that disturbed me most about that was I couldn't believe anybody could dislike me that much because I thought I had done everything

humanly possible to make it good.

Goldie: But then it wasn't really you anyway. But then you wanted to think--you know that you are a good person and you have done all you can and then for someone to say something about you was really their problem. I'm sure that is what you came to realize was--that it was really their problem.

Mr. Freeman: And yet, what I suffered with that heart attack. The editor said that he had never seen such a response to it. He came to me and said he had to publish something because the people were worried.

Goldie: The people wanted to know how you were doing. You touched so many lives--all these children and their children, and their children...

Mr. Freeman: But then again, it's the people and the achievement that I have seen and hopefully I've paved a new road.

Goldie: What did you consider the major problem of the principalship?

Mr. Freeman: The major problem I see with the principalship is the politics of the principalship today and the politics involved in the education of children. That was probably the most frustrating to me because I've had a chance to be a principal but the politics today is just not what principals like to see. For example, now they're talking about this probably will be the last year of tenure for principals. And during my many years of principalship tenure has never phased me because I want to feel that I am doing a good job. It's never been problem with me but I'm not naive enough to think that there are some good people that have lost their jobs because of politics.

Goldie: That's right--because of politics.

Mr. Freeman: So those are some concerns that I have and then I have not been afraid to move marginal people after trying to get as much help as much help as I knew how. In all my years as administrator I've only been through one professional relief and I never had to go to court on a teacher and there again, I think that I have been able to talk to teachers and say what is in your best interest is what is in our best interest.

Goldie: It cancels them out.

Mr. Freeman: That's right. That is the best way to go and in ninety percent of the cases I only had one that refused to go that way.

Goldie: They should have done what you suggested in the first place.

Goldie: Now if you had to--now we know that back in 1964 there were over 200 Black high school principals. Last year there were 41 and some of them were alternative school principals. If you knew of a Black person that aspired to be a principal of a high school, what advice would you give them.

Mr. Freeman: If that is his or her aspiration, I would continue to do so but I think the thing that disturbs me today and I see this happening to so many young Black aspired administrators. They don't even have a job description. That would be the first thing that I would want from someone. He's going to have to give me a job description. Every assistant principal that taught for me had a job description because what has happened is once you go through an interview then they want to talk with you about curriculum, they want to talk about exceptionalities and what have you and your experience is in buses and discipline.

Goldie: That's right.

Mr. Freeman: How are you going to be effective in an interview process when your experience hasn't been there in the beginning. And that's by desire. There is nothing mystic about that and I've had to talk to some of the young people about that. My advice to promising young administrators, the first thing is sit down with your principal and let your principal know that you are interested in learning as much as you possibly can about principalship. Not just interested in the three B's, books, buses, and buses. In order for me to do this I'm willing to take the courses and I want to do what you suggest I might do. But I want to know the program and I want you to put it in writing what you expect of me because a lot of people don't even know what is expected of them. Then when you come in for an interview then they want to talk to you about curriculum, exceptionalities, new research in education. You don't have that kind of training and yet you have been an assistant principal for years. So when a person comes in to me he's going to get a job description from me and I'll tell him that I'm going to hold him to it. This is your job description and color has nothing to do with it but this is just what I expect of you.

Goldie: Do you think it would be more difficult for a Black person to become a principal of a high school in North Carolina.

Mr. Freeman: I think it is going to become increasingly more difficult because I think, to answer your question, yes, I really do unless he shows that he is very sharp and a very

articulate person and has shown or has demonstrated these qualities that I have talked about. And I have talked about curriculum, management and what have you. For example, I have one assistant principal handling the instructional budget and another assistant principal handling the operational budget.

Mr. Freeman: They need to learn that. I said I'm going to tell you right now if you are scared I'm looking for me another one because you know what the budget is in the beginning. But I never had that problem.

Goldie: Do you think those who are aspiring should try to find mentors. You were blessed with mentors.

Mr. Freeman: And not only that, you'd be surprised at the number of principals that I have shared the tears with. But you know I've been fortunate I've been principal since 1977. So I've had a chance to learn from some of the best minds in the country.

Goldie: So that is still the key to it.

Mr. Freeman: That's it. My point is and you've got to be willing to make these sacrifices because you might rather be out playing golf but you are going to have to make those sacrifices. When I came back to my job in the Fall the teachers knew that I had something new for them. They didn't have to hear me rehashing the same old stuff that they heard five years ago. They knew I had one of the newer trends. This what I used to tell my people all the time. Study the trends. We are going to be on the cutting edge of what is going on in education. This is where we are going to be. Because as you well know, they are going to put in the Writing Program across the state. Jeff Hunt came to Cummings High School in his helicopter and this is the Writing Program at Cummings High School. You've got to aspire to be--to learn again. You've got to be a student again. When I went to Cummings, they saw me in one light--a disciplinarian, that's all. They didn't see me as an instructional leader but I wanted them to know that I had been an instructional leader before I came over here. The first newsletter we published in high school. Now they are publishing it everywhere. They took out a newsletter and carried it out to the NCAE. The first writing program was started at Jordan Sellis. The former superintendent sent every principal in the school system to Jordan Sellis to see how we were teaching them to read. All came except one. He didn't come but he didn't stay here as principal too long either.

Goldie: He headed up.

Mr. Freeman: But my point is, I had to teach, we had the reading program, and then later the program became validated as a national program. It changed some things. They had

someone from California come here and put it together and we got more money from a grant. And people can't forget those things. They can't forget--they may try too. Just like the other day I told the principals here that I'm here to make a difference. I want to make your job as powerful as I can and this is what I am proposing putting together--a staff development program system-wide. I'm outlining the whole thing with the superintendent. I've already called Al's restaurant for June 10th. I told them to fix a fruit tray because we have to become more health conscious. This is a challenge. I told the Superintendent, I want you in the workshop because I want all the principals in there also. I'm going to have about thirty-five.

Goldie: It seems like the J.A. Freeman way is excellence.

Mr. Freeman: I'm glad you said that. That has been our theme for years. If you go to Cummings high school today or go to some of these people right here in this building and ask what B.O.J. is everyone will tell you what it is. Bundle of joy. I want it done right and I don't mind saying this to you--we had a young lady that I inherited. She was secretary for the assistant superintendent before I came. Her typing was terrible.

Goldie: Do you have any problems speaking to the issues? If something is not right, you have no problems with straightening this out.

Mr. Freeman: If you go back with one of my old handbooks The most widely used one they use is called a "scape goat." The one that should be used the most and is the least used is "confrontation". People don't want to confront people.

Goldie: They do not want to do that. That's what I call "nipping it in the bud."

Mr. Freeman: That's right. You have to confront people. She said, I know that we can work together and I listened and I said I want it right. I know my penmanship is poor but if written by me that was not typed.

Goldie: That was one of the things that impressed me with your response. You had yours typed. Some of them had them typed but most of them were hand written and I know that a lot of them are retired but some people do not like for anything to come out of their office unless it is absolutely right.

Mr. Freeman: I don't recall what was wrong but those are some of the quirks that I had and the teachers know that. If you don't try then you don't teach in that school. They know that and just like I was telling the secretary, look you

know the rules and the teachers know the rules so don't you bring it to me. This is your job and I expect you to do it. Now if you have something to say, now you say something to the teacher but don't come to me with it. You know what you are supposed to do and I know what you're supposed to do and the teachers know. But everyone of them are older, they've worked with me and there are some teachers over there today that started teaching with me when I came here in 1965, and there are some people over there that quit when I left.

Goldie: I know it wouldn't be the same.

Mr. Freeman: This is what some of the people feel and its so frustrating to me because of different philosophy but there's nothing wrong with that but a smart person never goes into a situation making wholesale changes. I learned when I went overseas and landed at Camp Drake in Tokyo. The guys over there on R & R told us, now if you want to be a hero they will leave you but if you listen to the First Sargents, they'll tell you how to get back home. So what I'm saying is you have to listen to some of these people because some of these old teachers around here can tell you a few things.

Goldie: And they know what goes around comes around.

Mr. Freeman: I've seen it go around three or four different times.

Goldie: What do you think is your motto?

Mr. Freeman: My motto for what?

Goldie: For life. For success.

Mr. Freeman: Seeing people grow through life experiences, whether it is a child or whether it is a teacher. That's what I enjoy. People--I have tried--you take Bob Earle that you are going to see. Bob Earle was good to me. I did my first teaching under him and to this day I get Bob Earle a pass because he loves sports, I give him a pass to all football games, all basketball games and even though he goes asleep by the time he gets in the car, Bob is in his eightys, I pick Bob up and I carry him with me and what have you. He loves me to death. If he thinks something is wrong with me, he's going to find out what is wrong with me. That's the kind of thing because Bob is good to me, Mr. Brown is deceased now, Mr. Bass is deceased now, but those people I don't forget.

Goldie: Mr. George Foxwell is training under Mr. Brown too.

Mr. Freeman: That's exactly right. I know George very well. George Foxwell--matter of fact I had a chance to become the assistant principal before George got that bid when Mr. Brown

first went there. I didn't know that you knew George Foxwell.

Goldie: Yeh, I'm from Edenton.

Mr. Freeman: Oh, you're from Edenton. You know some Walkers down there. They used to own a cleaners.

Goldie: Yeh, Clenon Walker and his wife.

Mr. Freeman: One of the girls taught with me down in Whiteville. That's how I knew the Walkers.

Goldie: Do you know Golden Frinks?

Mr. Freeman: Yeh, I know Golden Frinks.

Goldie: That's my dad. He was with the marching and the Civil Rights and all of that.

Mr. Freeman: Golden Frinks, yes, yes, I was trying to associate that name. How did you get to the Western part of the state?

Goldie: Well, what happened was when I married and moved to Greensboro. I taught the first three years in Raleigh, then I married Lucian Wells over in Greensboro. So I stayed with teaching in Greensboro for 17 years and the opportunity came for me to go to the central office in Statesville so I moved over to Statesville.

Mr. Freeman: Do you know Sam Kennington?

Goldie: Yeh, I know Sam.

Mr. Freeman: Sam Kennington taught for me. Sam taught distributive education for me.