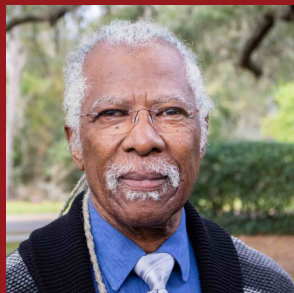
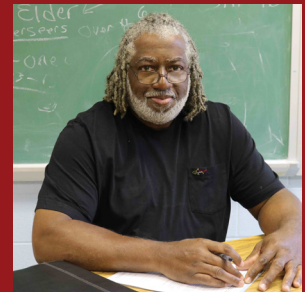
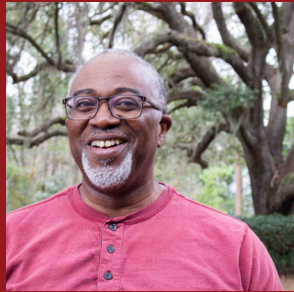


A Journey to Equal Education:

Stories from Historic African American Communities,
W. Gresham Meggett High School,
James Island, South Carolina



Prepared by New South Associates, Inc.

Disclaimer: This project is funded by the African American Civil Rights program of the Historic Preservation Fund, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material do not constitute endorsement or necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior or U.S. Government.

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For the 2017 HPF AACR-Charleston County Government Project
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Prepared for the County of Charleston Planning Department
and the National Park Service

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Charleston County staff have also played a strong role in the project. Thanks to Joel Evans, Andrea Melocik and Niki Grimball for their guidance and support.

Finally, we have tried to let the voices of those interviewed tell the story, for each has a remarkable story to tell.

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1929 Grimball Road,
Charleston, SC 29412

February 23rd, Saturday
12:00 pm-3:00 pm

W. Gresham Meggett School Revisited

Speaker: Professor Candace Cunningham University of South Carolina
Music by Rodney Goodson St. James Presbyterian Church
Lawrence Gordon National Performing Artist



Bring
*historic
photos and
annuals* to be
scanned and
shared!!

*Festivities start at noon: presentations, food,
music and other entertainment!*

This event is sponsored by the Charleston County Planning Department in partnership with the Heritage Community Development Corporation of South Carolina. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service to conduct an oral history project focusing on narratives collected from alumni and faculty members from W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School. This school, a product of South Carolina's equalization program, provided education for James Island's African American children from 1953 through 1969.

Invitation to Gathering to Announce Project, February 2018

I. Introduction

Charleston County was awarded a grant in 2018 from the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct an oral history project on the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project focused specifically on oral histories collected from alumni and faculty members from the W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School on James Island, South Carolina. This historically significant school, a product of South Carolina's equalization program, provided education for James Island's African American children from 1953 to 1969. Named for W. Gresham Meggett (1903–1990), a former chair of the James Island School Board, it later became home to the Septima P. Clark Corporate Academy vocational school in 1994 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017. It is located at 1929 Grimball Road, James Island, Charleston County.

"One of the most compelling aspirations of the newly emancipated African Americans was to get an education" (S.C. African American Heritage Commission and South Carolina Department of Archives and History 2016). Racism and poverty would ensure that it would be a long time coming as Jim Crow-era schools would be opened after the Civil War and then closed in an economic effort to reduce costs through consolidation in the 1950s. Public schools for African American children in the South from Reconstruction into the early twentieth century were predominately funded by local communities and social, philanthropic, and religious organizations. While struggles for civil rights preceded the end of World War II, the socioeconomic changes brought about by the war intensified the efforts of individuals and led organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to fight for equal education for African American children.

Predicated on the rationale that separate but equal facilities for white and black students in South Carolina would forestall pending federal mandates to integrate schools, South Carolina passed legislation that, among other objectives, earmarked funds for the construction and improvement of the public school system. What resulted was the statewide Equalization Program, which made additions and improvements to existing schools and constructed new schools from 1951 to 1960. South Carolina had 80 African American high schools when the equalization program was enacted in 1951; an additional 145 were constructed by 1957. While the program's early years focused on schools for African American children, the program spent



W. Gresham Meggett School Location, James Island, South Carolina

more than half of the funds – a total of \$214 million – to improve schools for white children as well (Dobrasko 2005a).

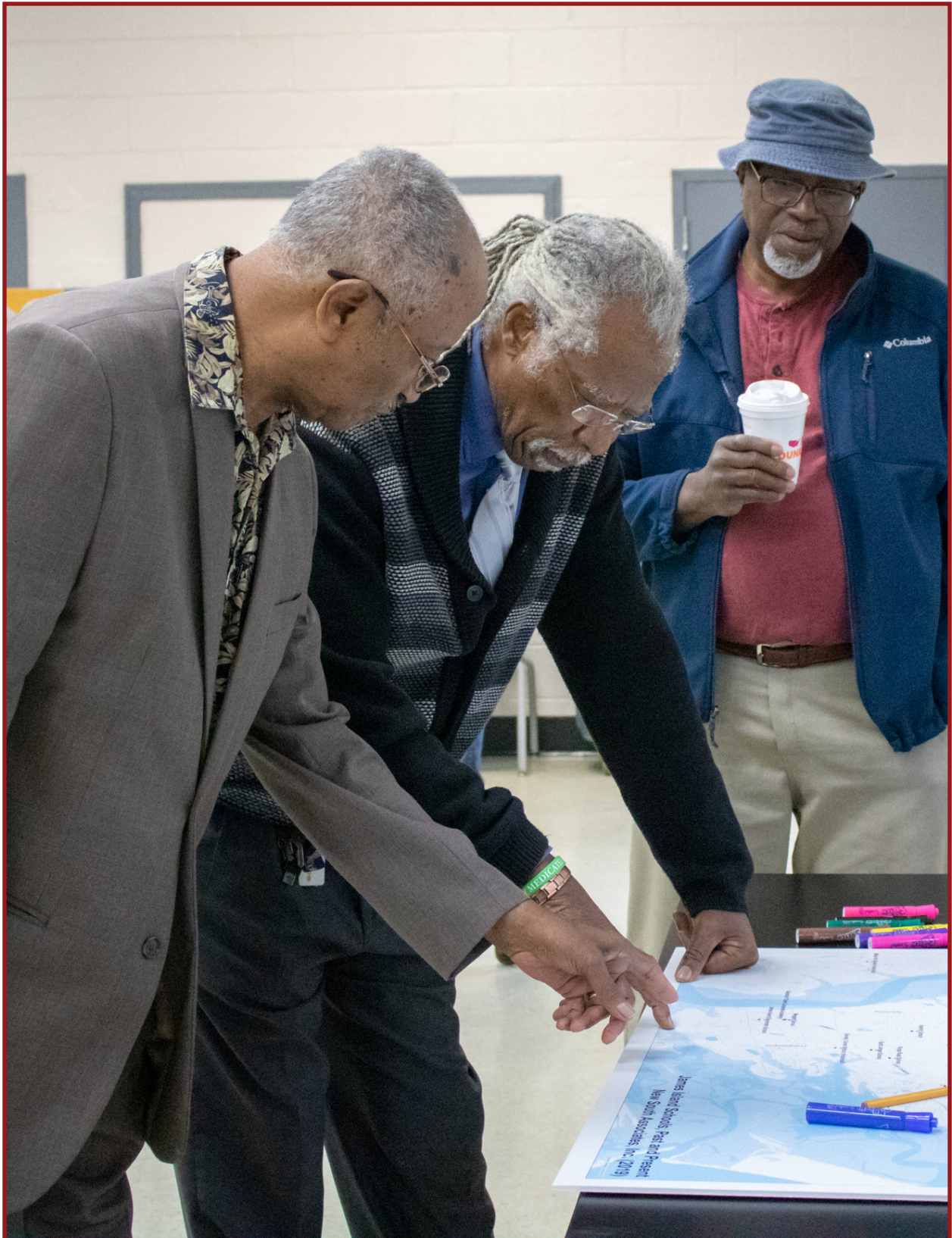
The newly-constructed schools were designed by architects and built by licensed contractors using modern designs and materials. The school designs were grounded in postwar educational philosophy intended to create functional and child-friendly environments. In an effort to express equality materially, all schools were constructed similarly, regardless of whether it was planned for white or black children, in an urban or rural setting, or for high school or elementary students. However, while these modern schools created identity and purpose, they were not always equal and the African American community went on to challenge the system in the 1960s through such means as the 1963 court case *Millicent Brown et al v. School District 20*, which eventually led to the desegregation of Charleston County schools.

W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School was a product of South Carolina's equalization program. It was constructed in 1953 and served the community until 1969 when it became solely a vocational school. Located on James Island, with its history of cultural and physical isolation from the urban center of Charleston across the river, Meggett School consolidated several of the rural schools. Meggett School was one of two equalization schools built for African American children on James Island. Before the initiation of the equalization program, the African American schools on James Island – as elsewhere across the South through the mid-twentieth century – were small, underequipped, and overcrowded. Public education for most African American children, especially in rural areas, ended at the 7th grade. Meggett's presence meant that teenagers of James Island had a viable choice to continuing their education other than the often unattainable, tuition-based schools in the city of Charleston.

The oral histories of teachers and students from W. Gresham Meggett provide first-hand accounts of this important period of change, focusing on the rural island community and offering new perspectives on the history of rural education for African Americans between the 1940s and the 1970s. This project preserves the narratives of those who first attended the school, took part in the development of the strong educational environment it offered to the community, and went on to make history in the early years of desegregation.

New South Associates was selected to conduct the project, which is structured by the NPS research framework *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (National Park Service 2008). The project was introduced to the community at two public meetings at the Septima Clark Academy (W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School) in November 2018 and February 2019. This study sought interviews with alumni and/or faculty at W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School between 1953 and 1969 to establish the cultural and educational experience the rural island school offered. The study also included interviews with James Island residents and former students who went on to attend integrated schools such as Fort Johnson High School, later known as James Island Charter High School.

This final report presents a historic context of equalization in Charleston County and specifically James Island and includes mapping showing the locations of extant and historic equalization schools. It provides an overview of the W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School and introduces the oral history interviewees. The interview results are presented thematically following the topics and themes covered in the interviews. Appendix A contains the oral history transcripts that were unrestricted and open for research. Appendix B contains the available graduating class photographs.



Thomas Prioleau, David Richardson, and Ned Roper study a map of James Island schools at a Public Meeting, 2018.

II. Methods

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Alumni and teachers enthusiastically attended the project's public meetings, signing up to be interviewed, or recommending others to be interviewed. Community members also shared historic photographs, slides, or film; annuals (yearbooks) for scanning; and identified artifacts associated with the school and the desegregation era that need to be preserved. A strong alumni network allowed us to reach alumni and teachers that live in Charleston or that have moved away.

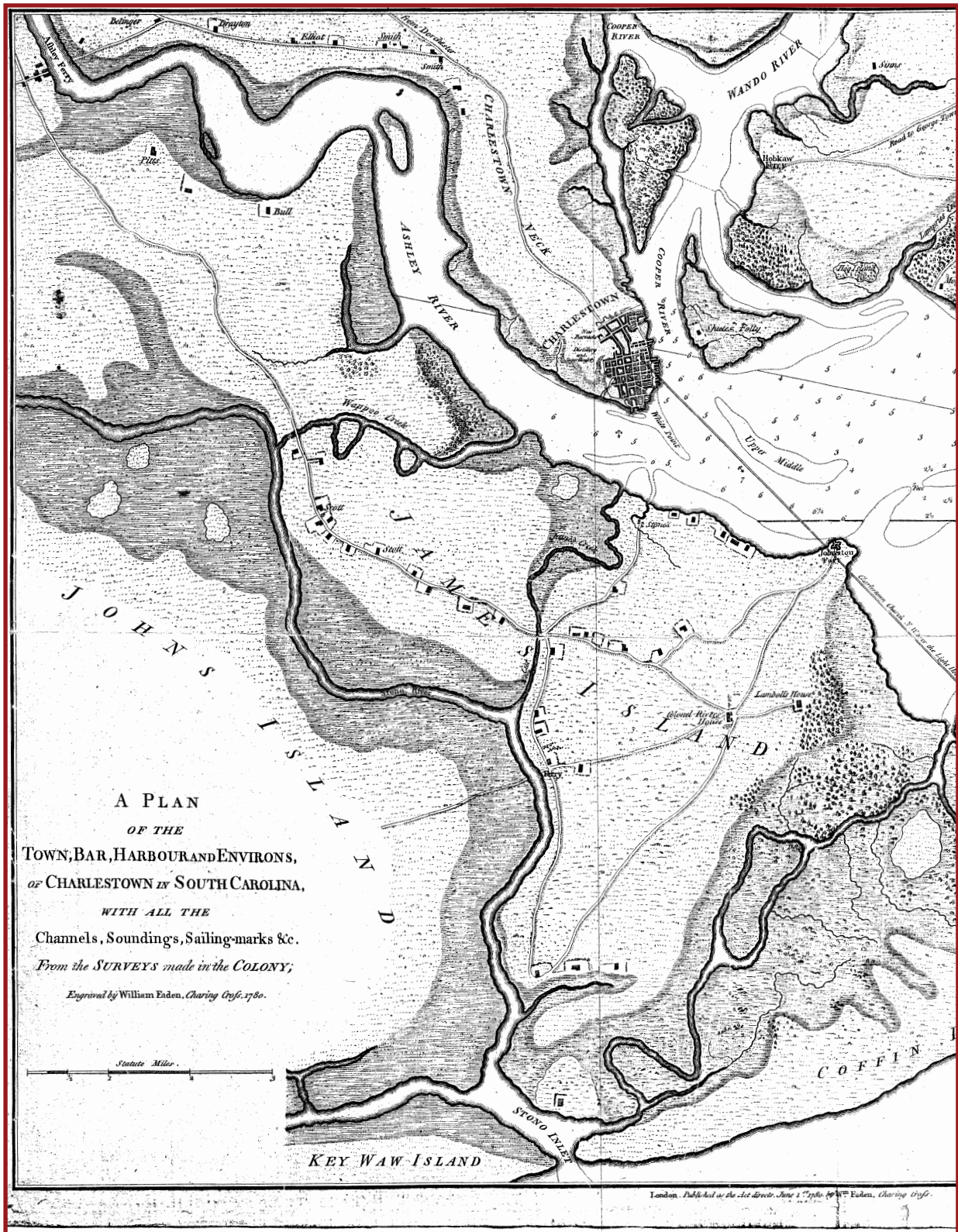
Community member and Councilwoman Anna Johnson recommended adding local, knowledgeable individuals to the team. Mr. David Richardson, a Meggett graduate, signed on to help with interviews and he and other team members received a certificate from Baylor University after completion of an online oral history class in 2019. The project aimed for 15 interviews in the spring/early summer of 2019 at the following locations: W. Gresham Meggett High School now Septima Clark Academy, Grimball Road, James Island; St. James Presbyterian Church, Secessionville Road, James Island; and private residences as needed. A total of 20 interviews were completed.

Interviews were recorded on video, as well as a secondary audio device, then transcribed and edited by the interviewee. Three interviews were only audiotaped. Photographs or scans of memorabilia and documents associated with the school and its history were saved digitally on either DVD or an external hard drive. We recommend that all collected audio/video files, materials, transcripts, and reports be archived at the Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston and at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH) in Columbia with approval from Charleston County and the NPS. Each interviewee received a copy of their interview and transcription.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Historical research was conducted to provide context for the oral history and to identify illustrations and photographs to include in the report. The following repositories were visited: Avery Research Center, Charleston; the South Carolina Historical Society at the College of Charleston; the Charleston County Public Library's South Carolina History Room; and SCDAH, Columbia. Collections consulted at Avery included several biographical and some themed collections, such as personal papers pertaining to prominent African American teachers (Mamie E. Garvin Fields and Albertha Johnston Murray), scholars (Millicent E. Brown and Edmund Lee Drago), builders (Frank Augustus and H. A. DeCosta, Jr.); as well as collections on the Mosquito Beach Community, Charleston County Black School Directories, and various other small collections about education and James Island. The South Carolina Historical Society archive is housed at the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library, which includes a large collection about prominent Charleston architect Augustus Constantine. The South Carolina History Room at the Charleston County Public Library contains numerous maps of the county and James Island. Annual reports to the Superintendent of Charleston County Schools at the SCDAH were also reviewed.

The project benefited from the completion of a National Register nomination for W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School, as well as previous works on African American schools of Charleston County and James Island (Fesak and Pemberton 2017). Other National Register nominations include a multiple property nomination for African American Primary and Secondary Public School Buildings in South Carolina, ca. 1895-1954, and Equalization Schools in South Carolina, 1951-1960 (Dobrasko 2009). Rebekah Dobrasko has contributed several studies on equalization schools in South Carolina including the National Register nomination, Master's thesis, county survey, and thematic survey (Dobrasko et al. 2008; Dobrasko 2005a). Books by scholars who have contributed to the body of research about the history of African American life and education in South Carolina include: R. Scott Baker's *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972*; Douglas W. Bostick's *A Brief History of James Island: Jewel of the Sea Islands*; Charleston's Avery Center: *From Education and Civil Rights to Preserving the African American Experience* by Edmund L. Drago; and the memoir of former teacher Mamie Garvins Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir* (Baker 2006; Bostick 2008; Drago 2006; Fields 1983).



1780 Map of James Island. Source: <http://www.jamesislandsc.us/historical-maps>.

III. Historic Context

JAMES ISLAND AND CHARLESTON COUNTY

While James Island and the surrounding area have a long history of occupation by American Indian tribes, the island was first settled by Europeans in December 1671—the second-oldest settlement in South Carolina after Charleston (Bostick 2008:19). During the early colonial era, James Island and Charleston were intricately linked, with many landowners living in the city and relying on indentured servants and slaves to tend to their land on James Island. In the early 1700s, the number of enslaved Africans outnumbered the white population by more than 11:1 (Bostick 2008:27). A century later, sea-island cotton dominated the economy with James Island producing a majority of the long-staple cotton, which made its fields extremely valuable especially with their proximity to Charleston (Bostick 2008:47).

James Island plantations included: Stono, McLeod, Oyster Point, Seaside, Ocean View, Stiles Point, Marshlands, Wappoo Hall, and White House. The federal census records of 1860 enumerate a population of 1,726 people on James Island—1,533, or 89 percent, were enslaved people working on the cotton plantations. As opposed to the previous century, however, 20 of the 21 plantation owners lived and worked on the island. The sole exception being Solomon Legare (Bostick 2008:49–50). During the Civil War, Confederate Brigadier General Gist issued an order for all inhabitants to evacuate James Island, a key strategic position from which to defend Charleston (Bostick 2008:55–57). This era would produce a number of military maps showing the island and the defenses that were constructed on it.

In 1863, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that allowed lands to be seized from anyone that joined the Confederate cause—suggesting that all of James Island would have been considered abandoned lands. Following Union Major General Sherman’s March to the Sea, Field Order No. 15 was issued which promised each freedmen family the allotment of 40 acres of land from the abandoned and confiscated property on the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina—including James Island. While President Andrew Johnson later reneged

on this promise, the Freedmen's Bureau was already in control of McLeod Plantation and other lands on the island (Bostick 2008:83).

The freedmen returned to James Island before the white landowners and began to stake out plots of land for themselves. The Freedmen's Bureau, headquartered at McLeod Plantation, reviewed cases put forth by the original landowners who were required to pledge an oath of loyalty and provide proof of pardon and ownership before being allowed to have their land back (Bostick 2008:83). By 1867, the majority of the land on James Island had been returned to the plantation owners, however, the Bureau's conditions required that concessions be made for all freedmen that had already laid claim to land by staking it out, inhabiting it, and tending the land (Bostick 2008:88). In the case of E. M. Clark and the White House



Map of James Island, South Carolina, 1863 . Source: Charleston Museum

Plantation, once ownership was restored to him, Clark allotted a half acre of land to each of the freedmen families that had settled there (Bostick 2008:86).

Historian Bostick points out that the impress of the land apportioned for the freedmen remains evident today in current African American land ownership patterns on the island through the mid-twentieth century—"along the present-day Fleming Road, Central Park Road and Riverland Drive; Grimball Road; the area known as Honey Hill bordered by Dill's Bluff Road, Camp Road and Fort Johnson Road; and Sol Legare Island." Additionally, the surnames of the original African American landowners are family names still recognized today: Frazer, Brown, Gaillard, Chisolm, Jenkins, Dawson, Simmons, Rivers, Smalls, Richardson, and Grant (Bostick 2008:88).

Contrary to popular belief or what might be true in other cases throughout the South, the freedmen of James Island did not take the surname of their former holders. Although the origins of these names is unclear, many of them are recorded in the records of the Freedmen's Saving & Trust Company (Bostick 2008:91). These records identify where freedmen were born and where they choose to settle after the war. In the case of James Island, Bostick found 58 individuals who reported being born and raised on the island that chose to stay. Some native James Islanders, however, moved to Charleston after the war, and the majority of freedman living on the island were formerly enslaved elsewhere, but came to James Island to settle and farm (Bostick 2008:92).

With slavery outlawed, the restored plantations could no longer afford to function as they once did, and the majority of acreage sat fallow and idle. James Island planters turned land into pastures or rented and sharecropped with the labor of the African American community. As the island rebuilt its lands and economy, however, the white landowners sought to reestablish dominance over the black laborers by controlling their debt through stores that provided much needed commodities, but increased the dependency of African American laborers. Throughout the late 1800s, the black farmers gradually moved from sharecropping to tenant farming on plot of five to 20 acres of land (Bostick 2008:91). The African American population of James Island decreased slightly from 1865 to 1880, nevertheless, in that year, there were 2,600 people living on the island—only 100 of those were white (Bostick 2008:94). Less than two decades after the war, African Americans owned more than 10 percent, or approximately 1,600 acres, of land on the island—800 acres of cotton, 600 acres of corn, and 200 acres of potatoes (Bostick 2008:96). By 1900, 22.4 percent of the African American



James Island, 1919, USGS Topographic Map. Source: Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina

community in the state of South Carolina owned land; while 42.8 percent—nearly double—owned land in Charleston County (Bostick 2008:97).

The “new” plantation economy continued into the twentieth century. In 1910, 17 antebellum plantations continued to function similarly to what they had a century beforehand (Bostick 2008:102). However, cotton, the staple crop of the island, was devastated by the boll weevil in the 1920s, and the island’s agriculture diversified to include cabbage, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans, cucumbers, and tomatoes; by 1940, cotton was no longer grown on James



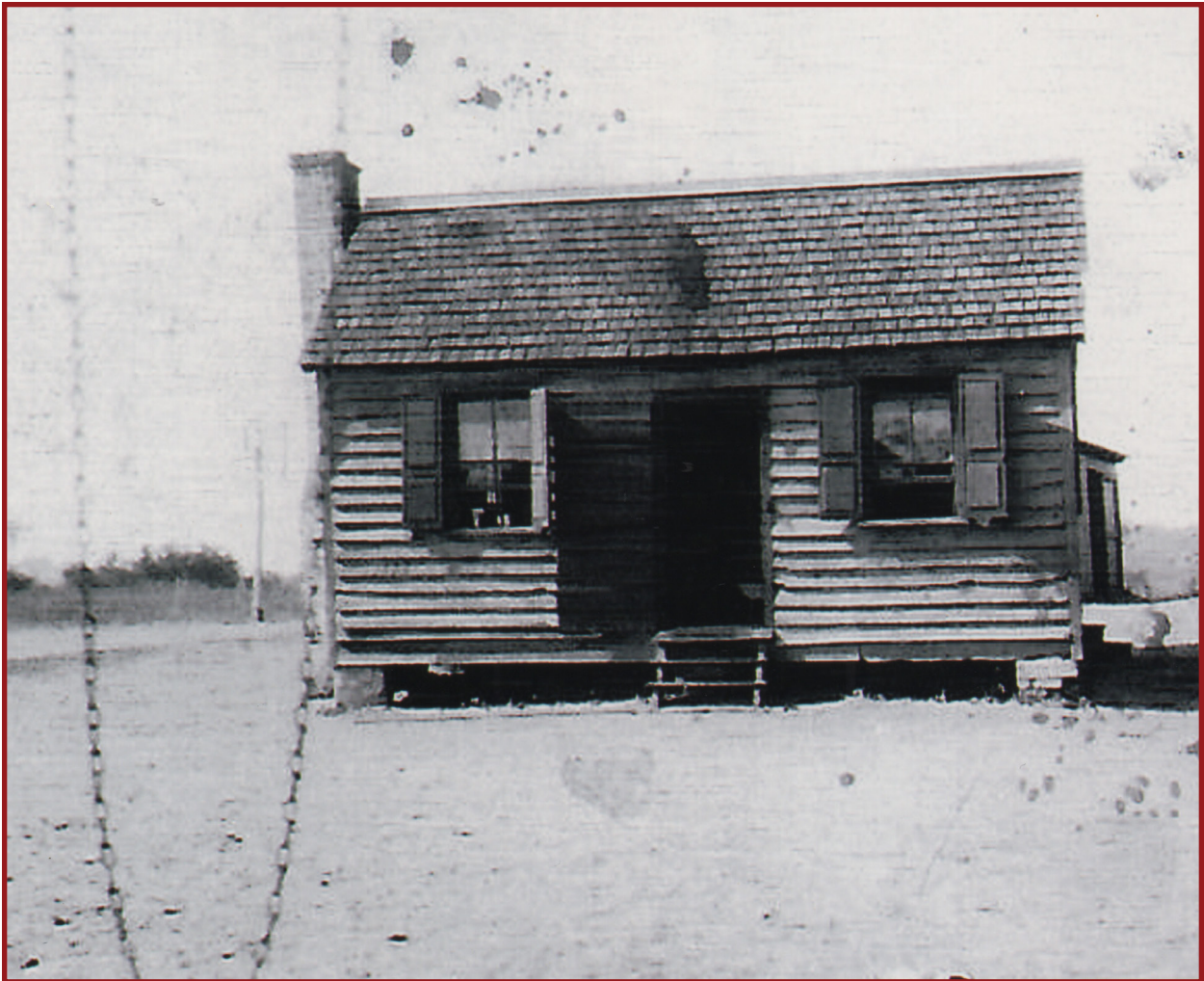
James Island 1937, Charleston County Highway Map Source: Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina



James Island, 1959, USGS Topographic Map. Source: Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina

Island (Bostick 2008:105). After World War II, the island experienced a boom and by 1950, the white population exceeded the African American population for the first time in a population of 6,000 people (Bostick 2008:125). The first subdivision, Riverland Terrace, about 75 acres on the northwest portion of the island, was purchased and laid out by developer C. Bissell Jenkins & Sons in 1925 (Bostick 2008:117). A year later, mail and ice delivery was available to the entire island and electricity was offered to the northern portion (Bostick 2008:121).

Subdivisions continued to develop across James Island. Wappoo Hall, Woodland Shores, and Lawton Bluff, all established by 1940, took the places—and often names—of former plantations (Bostick 2008:125). Post-World War II James Island rapidly turned from farmland to suburban subdivisions, and by 1956, 20 subdivisions were developed between Wappoo Creek and Secessionville alone. Newly constructed homes, school, roads, and other public and private commodities drove up the population of the island as well—13,782 people in 1960; 21,040 people in 1965; and 26,794 people in 1970.



Society Corner Annex Building, undated. Source: Anna Johnson

IV. African American Education in South Carolina

As an early colonial settlement, the history of Charleston's African American education dates to 1745 when the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, an Anglican missionary society from England, established the Charleston Negro School. Students of this school, however, consisted of free people of color only, because five years earlier the state of South Carolina passed legislation outlawing teaching of reading and writing to any enslaved person (Salvatore et al. 2000:3). Most often successful institutions were church-run, such as Charleston's Brown Fellowship Society established in 1790 and the Minor's Moralist Society school for orphans opened in 1810, both of which allowed for free black children to receive a moderate education (Salvatore et al. 2000:4).

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While there were dozens of small schools for free Africans in Charleston between 1803 and 1865, these institutions were usually restricted to the social elite—"the light-skinned free black community," as historian Edmund Drago states it, who distanced themselves from the rest of the community of color, particularly those of the Low Country (Drago 2006:44). It was not until the 1840s that a variety of benevolent societies began to provide moderate educational opportunities for free Africans outside of the elite class (Drago 2006:46). Arguably the longest standing institution was the Avery Normal Institute. Established in 1865 with the necessary funds provided by Charles Avery, a northern abolitionist and philanthropist, the school catered to and was shaped by Charleston's African American urban middle class. This group made up the student body, as well as the teachers and its first principals; all were legacies of free black families before the Civil War (Drago 2006:21, 49).

The Freedmen's Bureau, a Federal Reconstructionist program, as well as independent relief associations, offered funds and facilities to create schools for the masses of freedmen of all ages (Salvatore et al. 2000:11). For higher education, the Morrill Act of 1862 gave funds to

establish agricultural and mechanical colleges throughout the South. Founded in 1869 by Methodist missionaries, Claflin College, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, received a land-grant in 1872 when it was merged with the South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Institute, however, before the century was complete, the schools would split again to form South Carolina State University (Salvatore et al. 2000:15). Also, during the latter half of the 1800s, most of the southern states passed legislation requiring segregated school systems, or else the individual school boards set their own policies to such an affect. An exception was South Carolina, which chose not to pass such a law because the state believed it was unnecessary as the people would remain separate on their own accord (Salvatore et al. 2000:27).

The state of South Carolina's 1895 constitution established segregated public schools for white and African American children. The African American schools were chronically underfunded by the state and counties, leaving teachers, students, and parents to uphold the burden of supplying necessities such as books and furniture as well as upkeep of the buildings, despite the fact that approximately 90 percent of African Americans still lived in poverty as of the late 1930s (Baker 2006:xviii). The community often took it upon themselves, as much as possible, to supplement the deteriorating buildings and program with funds raised from missionary societies and churches (Dobrasko 2005b:7). Neglected by the county school board, African American schools were overcrowded and understaffed by teachers who were underpaid. According to Dobrasko, Buist Elementary enrolled over 1,000 students in 1942 despite its classrooms having been designed for only 420 schoolchildren (2005b:8). In lieu of supplementing the inferior county school system, parents who could afford it opted to send their children to parochial schools, as every religious denomination founded its own schools (Salvatore et al. 2000:28).

The end of Reconstruction lead to a dramatic reduction of funds for education, which in turn lead to discrimination in the appropriation of funds for African American students. In 1898, South Carolina appropriated \$3.11 per white pupil in public schools, but only \$1.05 per African American student (Salvatore et al. 2000:28). Because of discrepancies in funding, the lack of high schools in general, and the ever-present need for labor on family-run farms, in 1890 less than one percent of all African American children attended a high school. If students persisted to the higher grades, two out of three attended private institutions, and less than one percent of African American high school graduates continued on to college in 1900. Despite the struggle to access higher education, approximately 25,000 African American teachers were serving one and one half million students at the turn of the twentieth century (Salvatore et al. 2000:33–34).

Although South Carolina had originally opted to forego legal sanctions for segregation, rather believing in *de facto* racial separation, the national court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) allowed a legal precedent of racially segregated public-school systems (Salvatore et al. 2000:34). Higher education through the mid-twentieth century was limited for African American students. At the time, most grade schools served pupils through grade eight. Only three high schools for African American students existed in the Charleston area—Avery Normal Institute and Immaculate Conception were both private institutions that required tuition payments, though they were accredited by the state, unlike the only public high school, Burke Vocational School (Dobrasko 2005b:7). This discrimination was also detrimental to the teachers as well. While white students accessed publicly funded colleges and professional preparatory programs relatively uninhibited, African American teachers were left to fend for themselves as they created a parallel system of continued education through their own private means (Baker 2006:3).

Once an African American teacher obtained the necessary education, there remained many obstacles to providing that education to others. Before World War I, African Americans were not allowed to teach in Charleston, a rule eventually challenged and changed due to the efforts of the NAACP. After the fact, however, only unmarried women were allowed to teach in the city—forcing those with husbands and perhaps children to look for employment in the surrounding country (Fields 1983:204). This was the fate of Mamie Garvin Fields, who resorted to substitute teaching in Charleston for some time after graduating from Claflin College.

Most of the early twentieth-century African American schools in Charleston County were not built by the county, but the community, perhaps with assistance from the Rosenwald Foundation. A total of 13 schools constructed in Charleston County received Rosenwald funds, however, none were located on James Island (Fisk University 2001). According to Historian Dobrasko, the last African American school built by the City of Charleston, before the 1950s, was Henry P. Archer Elementary School in 1936 (2005b:8).

Post-World War II, an accelerated civil rights movement spurred by the Double V—victory against tyranny abroad and against discrimination at home—and returning African American soldiers pushed for voters' rights, equal teachers' pay, and the desegregation of public transport and higher education, among other things (Dobrasko 2005b:8). A rapid growth in population at that time only amplified the need for better educational facilities as more young students would be entering already crowded schools (Dobrasko 2005b:15).



Teacher Mamie Garvin Fields, Society Corner School circa 1935 Source: Fields 1983

V. James Island's Early Twentieth-Century Education, 1900-1950

W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School was a product of the Equalization era and its success is best understood within the context of James Island's early twentieth-century school system. Most of the individuals interviewed for this project were graduates of the island's elementary public schools, ready to take on higher education. Many already knew that the farm was not their future, and education was the path to a better future.

THE CHILDREN

There are few records that report on elementary education during this period, but the Federal Population Censuses for 1900, 1920 and 1940 provide some insight into patterns of education on James Island (U.S. Census Bureau 1900, 1920, 1940). The 1900 Federal Population Census counted 395 James Island children of color as "at school" at the turn of the century. The majority of them likely attended the public county schools. Of that number, 210 were girls and 185 were boys. The ages of the children ranged between 4 years old to 23 years old, with approximately 80 percent about elementary school age, between 7 and 14 years old. All but two, who were the youngest, were noted as speaking English, suggesting the two children, new to school, may have principally spoke Gullah. Students were likely bilingual as Mamie Garvin Fields, a teacher at Society Corner in her memoir of teaching on James Island, noted that many spoke the Gullah dialect in addition to English. The census also identifies whether a child could read or write. How this was determined is unknown, but in 1900 approximately 205 children could both read and write, 34 could read only, and 151 could do neither according to the census taker.

The majority of children attended school six to nine months of the year and more than half attended school eight to nine months of the year. Browsing the census shows that certain families made education a priority. For example, Joseph and Sarah Simmons, farmers, had

six children, two boys and four girls, between the ages of 6 and 17. Each attended school nine months of the year and each was able to read and write. In addition to individual families noted, some consecutive groupings of households were enumerated where the children of adjacent households all attended nine months of school and were noted as readers and writers, also suggesting a strong commitment toward education. Perhaps proximity to a school may have played a role in who got an education. Finally, the 81 children of high school age may have attended the public elementary schools, St. James Presbyterian, or attended high school in Charleston. It is also possible that some of the seven young adults over 18 years of age may have actually worked as assistants within the school system, rather than attended schools as denoted.

In 1920, there were 817 African American school-age children on James Island (ages 7 and up). Of those, 622 (76.1%) attended school and 94 (11.5%) did not. These numbers suggest that the county schools had to deal with a substantial increase in students since 1900, of about 57 percent. Notably, there were more students in the northern portion of James Island in 1920 than the southern part which reflects a historic settlement pattern. The census underscores that education for many children their education started at about age 7 and continued through age 15, after which fewer and fewer children are noted as attending school.

The 1940 Federal Population Census notes about 916 African American children between the ages of 7 and 20 on James Island with 697 attending school that year. This was slightly more than in 1920. Children between the ages of 7 to 15 were again in the majority. Surprisingly few children between these ages were not in school, again suggesting a common start date of 7 years of age and that many children stopped attending at the age of 15. Only 18 percent of children between the ages of 16 and 18 attended school. A total of 219 children did not attend school at all.

One pattern that emerges from the census is that African American children on James Island tended to start school later, at age 7. Historians Mary Fesak and Katherine Pemberton (2017:13) noted that most children arrived at school on foot and that the lack of school buses forced many to walk long distances to attend school. This adversity appears to have delayed the entry of many children into the school system until they were considered old enough to manage the long walk to and from school.

The 1900 census shows that most of James Island's African American families were engaged in farming. Only three occupations were noted for black heads of households: farmer, farm laborer, or laborer. Given this economy, children were needed to work on the farm daily and seasonally. This certainly led to some not attending school but also explained the short school year for many, which ran between six and nine months.

Both boys and girls attended school; there did not appear to be any significant gender differences in the number of those attending. The largest trend was age related with the majority attending school from age 7 to 15 after which school attendance tapered off. Even in Charleston, African American children usually only attended through eighth grade. Due to the limited number of high schools and the difficulty of transportation, attending school beyond the seventh or eighth grade often meant boarding with a relative or family friend in the city or in another state to gain access to a high school education (Spruill et al. 2012:23). Unfortunately, it was common for children to stop attending school as they got older, either because they needed to work for the family, or they lacked the proper attire to attend, such as shoes (Fields 1983:212–213).

The absence of an African American high school on James Island prior to W. Gresham Meggett is clearly reflected in those numbers. For those who wanted to complete their education and had the financial wherewithal to do so would enroll their children at the Avery Institute, the Immaculate Conception School or the unaccredited vocational school at Burke Industrial in Charleston (Fesak and Pemberton 2017:13). All three censuses show that few families were able to sustain a full education for their children through high school.

TEACHERS

James Island's county schools were stewarded by a number of young men and women who sought to make a difference. Many had strong religious connections. Educator Mamie Garvin Fields, a Claflin College graduate, taught on James Island early in the twentieth century and her memoir *Lemon Swamp and Other Places* speaks to her experience: (Fields 1983; Baker 2006:1–20).

Since we were being taught, above all, how to be a good influence on the children, much of the classroom work was about how to discipline ourselves to be able to make do with whatever we had, wherever we went- what to do with 125 children, by

yourself, in a one-room school, how to divide that crowd into groups and supervise all at one time.

The missionary college had prepared her well. She landed her first teaching job in Charleston County on Johns Island in 1909. It was a tough four years and in retrospect she called it a "place behind God's back" due to its extreme poverty (Fields 1983:138). After marrying and having a family, she sought work once again. While substitute teaching in the City of Charleston, Fields met Alice LaSaine, a Jeanes supervisor, and in 1926, she was hired along with Fannie Greenwood, Albertha Murray, and Anna Patrick to teach at the four rural schools on James Island. The Jeanes Program, funded by philanthropists, was established at the turn of the century to improve the education of African Americans. "Supervisors," such as Alice LaSaine, played an important role in achieving the programs goals (Chirhart 2013).

LaSaine, who oversaw the African American schools of Charleston County, had recently cleared all positions and instated all new principals and teachers. Albertha Johnston Murray, a fellow graduate of Claflin College, took the position of principal of Cut Bridge Elementary on James Island from 1926 to 1958 (*Post and Courier* 2007). Fields reported that they had some big shoes to fill, noting that Joseph Berry and David Hill, two of the first black principals in Charleston, had taught on the island. The condition of the schools on the island, as the new teachers quickly came to understand, however, was challenging (Fields 1983:204). The Presbyterian School at St. James was near the Society Corner School and many children preferred to go there because it was tidy and provided books. The county-run school was not allotted books and had no desks (Fields 1983:205; Baker 2006:1).

Fields recalls the island as a peaceful and quiet place covered in farmland in the mid 1920s. The families did moderately well as they were close to Charleston, but it was clear they wanted for education as many could not read or write. Many spoke mostly Gullah. Some people may have owned farms, but others rented land, and overall the African American community of James Island earned a meager income. Fields was intent on bettering education on James Island, fueled by the philosophy of academic uplift. Influencers such as Charleston's Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune told young educators to use their education to help those less fortunate by going out to communities in need and better them (Baker 2006:3). She was sometimes met with resistance to schooling by the parents who were poor, illiterate, and saw little value in the idealism of "uplifting."

Many, if not all, of James Island early twentieth-century teachers were not island natives. Teachers commuted daily from Charleston as Fields' memoir attests but a small number elected to live on James Island during their tenure. They are identified in the Federal Population Censuses from 1900-1940.

Two African American teachers, both South Carolinians, were enumerated in 1900 as residents: Francis "L. Frank" Baxter, age 25, single; and Etta Paterson, age 20, also single. Research suggests that both had moved to James Island to teach. Francis Baxter was a Methodist minister and the son of Methodist minister, Francis L. Baxter and his wife, Della. The Baxters raised their family in Florence, South Carolina. The census identifies Francis Baxter as a head of household in 1900 but wrote in "School," suggesting that the young minister/teacher may have lived in or by a schoolhouse. It is unknown how long he taught on James Island but his career was short lived as he passed away in 1908 at the age of 33. Little is known about Etta Paterson beyond the fact that she boarded with a local family in the Clarence Martin household.

Three teachers were identified in 1910 as resident teachers. Edna E. Spencer was listed as a 22-year old, single, public-school teacher who boarded with Fred M. and Martha E. Baynard on James Island. She was also enumerated at 143 Queen Street in Charleston at her parent's, James A and Ella Spencer, home, suggesting that her time on James Island was tied to the school year. Edna's father was identified as a writer and clerk at the U.S. Assistant Engineer's office, perhaps working at the lighthouse. Charleston City directories list Edna Spencer as a teacher living at the Queen Street address from 1911-1914. She may have taught on the island those years or taught in Charleston. In 1915, a newly married Edna Spencer moved to New York with her husband Malcolm Johnston and her immediate family moved with them. After her move to New York, she was never listed as a teacher again.

The other two teachers were a couple, David R. Hill and Mattie E [Seabrook] Hill. The former was a Charleston native who moved to Augusta, Georgia where he married his wife about 1887. David was identified as a laborer in 1900 and Mattie a cook. The Hills moved to James Island by 1910 where they were both listed as school teachers. The Hills had two children, Harold and Estella, and two servants, Lucy Burton, a 60-year old cook, and 12-year old Ben Burton. In 1920, the Hills moved to Charleston setting up their household at 74 Smith Street, in the Sixth Ward where they resided with their growing family through 1930. Notably, David

Hill was listed as the principal of a public school in 1930 but would, 10 years later, be working in retail in Lincolnton, South Carolina. The fact that he was a career educator is emphasized on his death certificate issued in 1940. He is also lauded by Mamie Garvin Fields (1983:204) in her memoir as a fine teacher and one of Charleston's earliest black principals.

Two women were noted as James Island teachers in 1920. The first was Julia Elizabeth McFall who, along with her two older sisters, was a public school teacher. The large McFall family lived at No. 7 Palmetto Street in Charleston. The 1920 census shows that Julia McFall also resided at the home of Martha Bennett on James Island likely when she was teaching there. In 1921, the Charleston City Directory lists Julia as working for the "Col Ind School" in Charleston which was renamed Burke Industrial School that year. Subsequent listings indicate that she taught at Burke Industrial School from the 1920s through 1934.

Isabelle R. Carr, a Charlestonian, was Julia McFall's roommate at the Martha Bennett residence on James Island in 1920. Research indicates that Carr's teaching career was short. She taught on James Island and then later the Simonton School. City directories for 1921 and 1922 indicate that she lived with McFall in Charleston after their teaching stint on the island.

Again, only two resident teachers were identified in the 1930 Federal census. James Webb, a James Island native, served as a public-school teacher on the island where, he, his wife Georgianna, and their children lived with her father, Plenty Jackson. By 1940 they moved to Dorchester County and James died shortly after in 1949. His death certificate and other public records indicate that he self-identified as a minister and teacher. The second teacher was Ednar R. Montgomery, the niece of Marion A. Sanders, who likely taught alongside her uncle and aunt at St. James Private School, part of St. James United Presbyterian Church discussed below.

The 1940 Federal census lists Virginia Raper as a 24-year old, public school teacher living with her parents James and Irene Draper. No more information is known about her.

The census and other public records provide much more information on Reverend Marion Andrew Sanders and the private St. James Presbyterian school he headed up with the help of his wife Ona, and other teachers such as Adam Davis, Ednar Montgomery, and Nannie Bethel. Sanders was a pastor in Charleston prior to moving to James Island in the 1930s, where he helped develop the church school, discussed below, associated with "one of the largest Negro Presbyterian churches in the South."

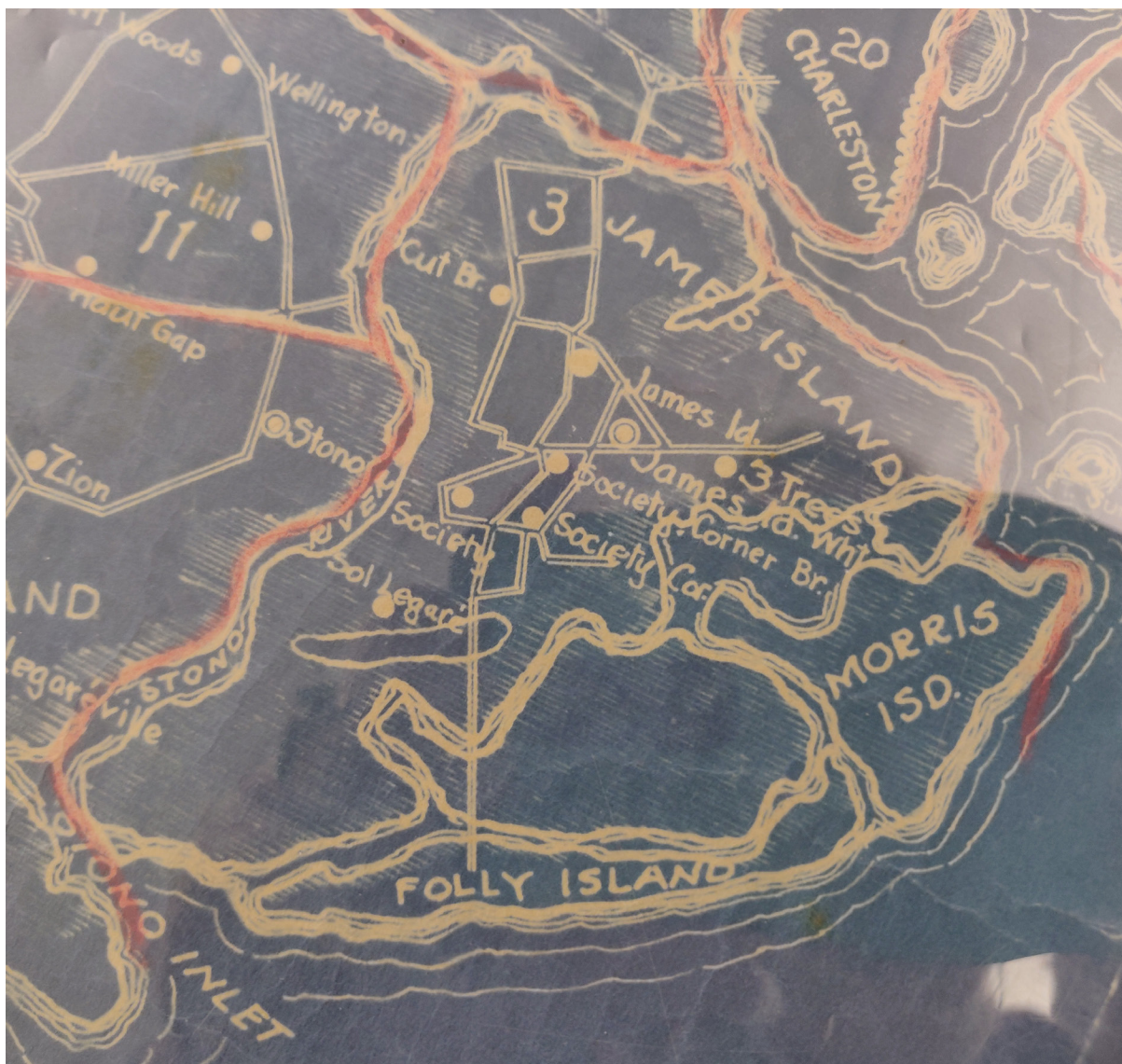
SCHOOLS

Four public county schools primarily served James Island's African American children: Society Corner, Sol Legare, Cut Bridge, and Three Trees. Other schools such as Cherabene which was known as a "lodge" school, may have served as an interim school to help out with the growing number of children pursuing an education (Prioleau 2019). Like most African American schools across the South, these were habitually underfunded and overcrowded. Parents who could afford to part with some of their valuable income sent their children to the private parochial school at St. James Presbyterian Church.

Society Corner

Thanks to the memoir of educator Mamie Garvin Fields, much is known about the Society Corner School (Fields 1983; Baker 2006:1–20). Society Corner School consisted of two dilapidated buildings among overgrown vegetation when Fields arrived (Fields 1983:205). Tackling the building itself was one of her first priorities. Most rural one-room schoolhouses of Charleston County were characterized by poor lighting and ventilation, not conducive to learning (Dobrasko 2005b:22). The roads were unimproved and traveling to the school was difficult for everyone (Fields 1983:205). One building was intended for the schoolhouse and the other for the teacher to reside in. Those buildings were the domain of teacher Reverend Thomas Ball. Fields, who carpooled with Reverend Ball from Charleston, was assigned an adjacent meeting house of a neighborhood society nearby for her school. The one-room meetinghouse turned schoolhouse served 100 students at a time and if there were more students than she could handle, she was told to send the overflow to Reverend Ball's school (Fields 1983:206). Both were county schools, referred to as Society Corner.

While she received no help or money from the county, Fields was determined to make the schoolhouse appear like a place the parents would like to bring their children and where the children would want to go. This was important since school was not yet compulsory and took children—especially the older boys—away from work on the farm. Yet, it was a constant battle to better Society Corner. Fields took it upon herself to get the building painted white and green, a more "cheerful" alternative to the "muddy black" the county provided (Fields 1983:206–207).



Detail of 1927 School District Map Showing James Island Schools in Operation.

The county-run school was not allotted books and had no desks—students kneeled on the floor to write on benches-turned-tables (Fields 1983:205; Baker 2006:1). Fields recalled that the African American schools always came “last of the last” on the county’s list when issuing furniture or books (Fields 1983:207). Thus, the teachers took it upon themselves to get books for their students, whom the white people of the community and county had decided did not need them for they would not use them even if they had (Fields 1983:208). Aubrey Welch, the white school superintendent for Charleston County, declared that the James Island schools did not need books and dictionaries because he assumed the children could

not read (Baker 2006:1). The African American schoolteachers would seek out used books, but they were not always what was needed. Often the books were not suited for children, but consisted of novels and classical Greek, in poor condition, broken with missing pages. When the county did provide books, the parents were expected to pay a fee to rent them long after the initial value had been repaid. Books were further evidence of segregation, Fields remembered, because the white children would be provided new books and the African American children would have those books only when they were used and old (Fields 1983:208). “Even when blacks were first, they were last,” remarked Fields on the “battle of the book.” Despite the first public library of Charleston having been established by an African American woman, Susie Dart Butler, using funds from the Rosenwald and Carnegie foundations, the bookmobile that came to the rural areas was still segregated and left much to be desired by the readers of color (Fields 1983:209).

Society Corner, and presumably the other rural schools of James Island, had seven grades. At first, Fields had to manage all the students herself, but thanks to her education at Claflin, she was prepared to make the best of what she had. Claflin College prepared their future teachers for rural schoolhouse environments the best they could, knowing they would most likely want for funds, materials, and assistance. The teachers were taught what to expect from poor rural schools and how to manage the work as well as the community and local government (Baker 2006:2). Eventually, Society Corner had three teachers, which allowed for grading—dividing the space into thirds and assigning a teacher for grades 1 and 2, 3 through 5, and 6 through 8, which as head teacher/principal, Fields managed herself. As the county did not provide diplomas, Fields printed certificates herself to give to her graduates, who cherished them (Fields 1983:212). Fields retired from teaching in 1943 leaving a wealth of information about Society Corner and African American education between the wars.

Sol Legare School

Sol Legare Island is named for Solomon Legare, owner of over 500 acres of land on the south side of James Island in the 1730s (Bostick 2008:28; Trinkley 1984:9). A member of a family of French Huguenots who settled in Charleston via Boston in 1696, the Solomon Legare (1797-1878) that evidently gave his name to the island was probably a descendant who was listed on the 1830 and 1860 federal censuses. Historical research revealed a plat of the Solomon Legare plantation dated 1879, which “suggests that he owned a variety of tracts for either cultivation, livestock grazing, or speculation,” as well as the presence of about 15 structures

(Trinkley 1984:9). Maps from the 1880s reference “Legare’s Point” and “Sol Legare’s Place;” by 1919, the small island south of James Island was labeled “Sol Legare Island” by the United States Geological Survey (Trinkley 1984:9; United States Geological Survey 1919).

Solomon Legare was the sole plantation owner who did not live on James Island; however, it appears that he must have reclaimed some of his land after the Civil War. Of his extensive land holdings, what became present-day Sol Legare Island was divided into small farms operated by freedmen who mostly purchased their land in the 1870s (Nickless 2007:6; Trinkley 1984:10). As of 1900, the federal census recorded over 42 percent of the African Americans of Charleston County owned their farms (Nickless 2007:6). A plat from 1921 of Sol Legare Island shows a 186.5-acre lot owned by George Brown. The surrounding parcels are each approximately 15 acres of long, linear lots oriented north-northwest by south-southeast, perpendicular to the island’s axis.

The community of Sol Legare remained predominately African American through the present, and most families can trace their landownership to the postbellum period (Trinkley 1984:10). Most of the houses are owned by the descendants of those who constructed them in the 1920s to 1940s (Nickless 2007:6). A property map of Charleston County from the early 1930s simply marks Sol Legare Island with “Negroes.” The community was well established by the early 1900s, focused around subsistence farming and seafood harvesting. The Seashore Farmer’s Lodge, added to the National Register in 2007, was founded and built in 1915 on Old Sol Legare Road. The lodge, affiliated with the International Farmers’ Liberty Union Justice Order, served as the meeting house for a fraternal order that provided burial aid and other services to the community. For decades, the lodge was the heart of the Sol Legare community besides the church and school (Nickless 2007:7). Truck farming continued until the 1960s, when much of James Island began to modernize and rapidly develop. Meanwhile, a seafood industry spanning 80 years attracted people to the small island. From 1923 to 1930, the Oyster Factory was one of the early industrial business on the island. It operated in the vicinity of Mosquito Beach and drew people from outside the community with work, music, and entertainment. In the time of segregation, Mosquito Beach became a place to relax after work and enjoy food sold out of Joe Chavis’s home. In 1953, the Wilder family, who owned much of the land around Mosquito Beach, opened the Harbor Pavilion. The beach once again became a popular spot (Nickless 2007:6; Wilder 2015).

By the 1940s, a general highway map indicates that nearly 40 houses and about 30 supporting structures occupied the island. Among the houses were three businesses, a white church,

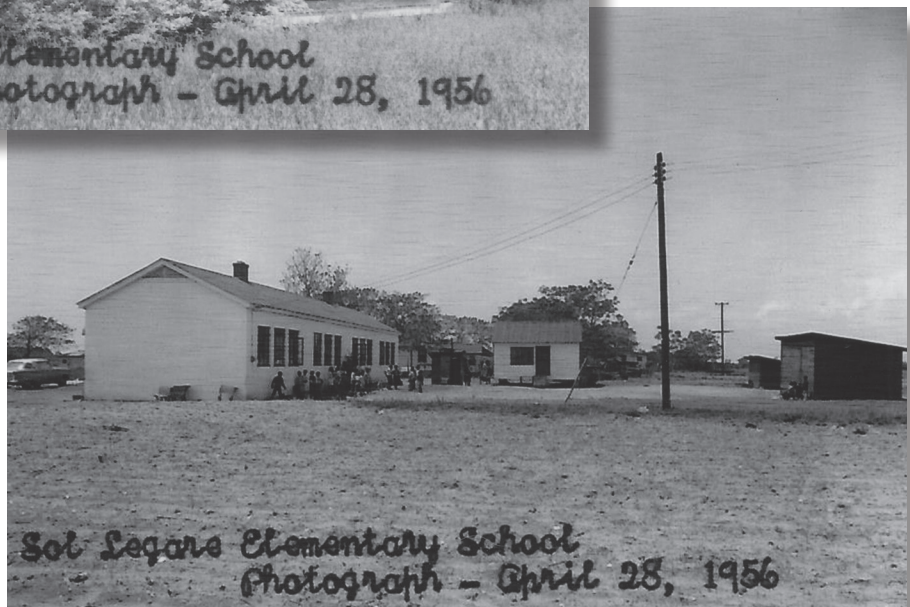
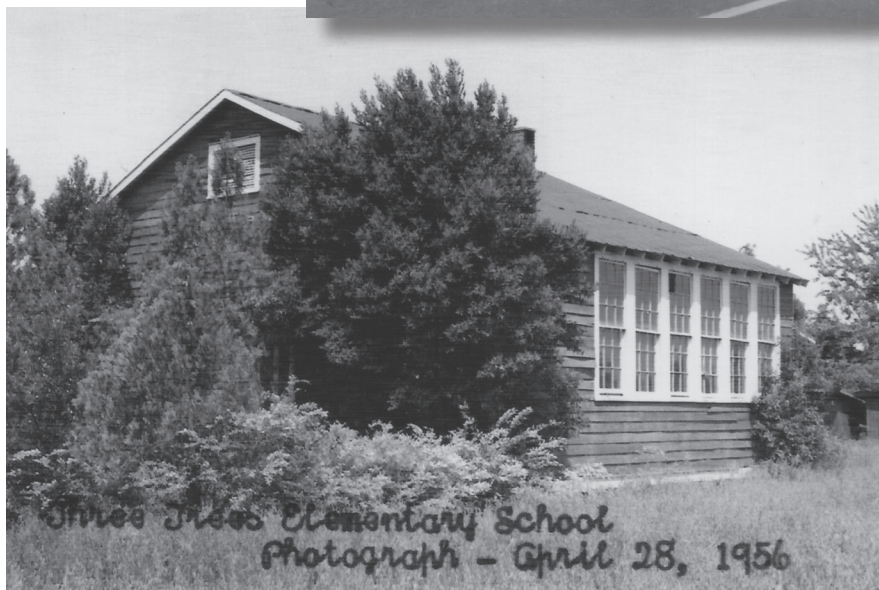
and the Sol Legare School for African Americans (Trinkley 1984:10). The Sol Legare School building that currently houses a community center opened in the 1940s, but the presence of a school dates decades prior (Knich 2015). A smaller, one-room schoolhouse was located on the south side of Sol Legare Road between Richardson and Roberts roads. A 1955 article in the *Charleston News and Courier* notes the school would open that fall (News and Courier 1955).

Three Trees, Cut Bridge, Cherabene and King's Road

Other schools known to have served the African American community of James Island in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries include: Three Trees, Cut Bridge, Cherabene, and King's Road schools. Unfortunately, little documentation of these schools exists. Three Trees School, once located on present-day Fort Johnson Road in the vicinity of the current James Island Charter High School, is named for its location. According to local historian Douglas Bostick, Three Trees was a significant meeting place for the indigenous Stono tribe and other American Indians in the area when the spot was marked by three unusually large oak trees (Bostick 2008:17). A photograph of the school from 1956, shows a simple, one-room frame building resembling a Rosenwald school. The weatherboard building had a bank of large, multi-paned windows to allow maximum natural lighting and a brick chimney in the center of a metal roof.

The original Cut Bridge School was located on Riverland Drive, in the wetlands north of James Island Creek. A photograph of the school from 1956 shows an L-shaped building, probably built in two parts, and a small cottage, most likely to house the teacher. The school has multiple rooms, three brick chimneys and two separate doors are visible on the south side of the building. The school, however, only had one teacher. Regrettably, the school was built in the wetlands of the creek and was often inundated and in need of repair. When the county promised new school buildings in the 1950s, the location of the elementary school in the Cut Bridge community was moved north on Riverland Drive—the currently Murray-LaSaine Elementary School.

Albertha Johnston Murray (1889-1969) graduated from Claflin College in 1909 and proceeded to teach elementary school on Johns Island. She took the position of principal of Cut Bridge Elementary from 1926 to 1958. After years of teaching students not only their basic curriculum, but also about their self-worth and ability during segregation, she was



Cut Bridge (top), Three
 Trees (middle) and
 Sol Legare (bottom)
 schools in 1956.
 Courtesy of Anna
 Johnson

instrumental in fighting the county for a better school building. By 1955, the Cut Bridge School had five rooms, but was inferior to the modern school buildings planned throughout the county (*Post and Courier* 2007). Murray won her battle with Charleston County School Board and a new Cut Bridge School was added to the list of schools to be built anew. The school was later named for her and another influential African American educator and friend, Dr. Alice Mary LaSaine, the former supervisor of the Negro Schools of Charleston County (Dobrasko 2005b:36; Bonstelle and Buxton 2008:79; *Post and Courier* 2007).

King's Highway Elementary School was located on present-day Fort Johnson Road at Dills Bluff Road about where the current Holy City Church is today. In the early twentieth century, the road was called King's Road on maps and leading the school to be incorrectly identified as King's Road School on U.S. Geological maps starting in 1959. Although, the school is much older than that. King's Highway School is noted on a map from 1919, however, it is not labeled. The school began as a building for white children, yet it was used as overflow from Meggett Elementary for a time.

King's Highway Elementary School functioned at the same time as Meggett. Some students, such as Anna Johnson, attended first and second grades at Meggett Elementary before being transferred to third grade at King's Highway. Another student of King's Highway, Deborah Barrett (2019), recalls the school had first through sixth grade and about 180 to 200 students. Barrett remembers "the entire staff was black, including the principal. We had one black teacher that was very fair-skinned and had straight hair, that at the beginning we thought that she was white, but she was a black woman." The teacher was named Ms. McCray and she emphasized her African heritage, so the students understood she was part of their community. The teachers were "a group of proud black people... who taught us a lot about our black heritage that was not in the history books," Barrett recollected.

Cherabene Lodge School may have been the meeting hall building that Mamie Garvin Fields first taught in on James Island. As noted, she refers to two school buildings at Society Corner. She was assigned a one-room meeting house rented by a society where she taught 100 children (Fields 1983:206).

Thomas Prioleau who attended Society Corner, Cherabene and W. Gresham Meggett described the lodge school:

"I attended Society Corner Elementary School from pre-K, kindergarten through the fifth grade. And when we reached the education level of the sixth grade, we had to walk to a lodge hall school called Cherabene Lodge Hall. We had to go there, a one-room school to be taught in the sixth grade. We walked.... my cousin and other neighboring folks. It was a community that consisted majorly of family people. And we walked through the fields. We walked down the dirt roads. We walked through the twists and turns until we arrived at school. Five miles. The community rented it from the lodge for us to go to school there because we didn't have any room at Society Corner School. Okay? And we were the top grade at that point, because the others had graduated and moved on. At the lodge school it was only sixth grade." (Thomas Prioleau 2019)

St. James Presbyterian School

St. James Presbyterian Church on Secessionville Road was once the home of St. James Parochial School. St. James Presbyterian Church began as the Colored Presbyterian Church in 1866, previous to the Civil War, all the Presbyterians of James Island worshiped at a single church. This church was burned during the war and the members thereafter separated with the African American members convening under a large oak at the present-day corner of Fort Johnson and Secessionville roads (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:2). Under a verbal contract by Ephraim Clark, the freedmen were given two-thirds of an acre for the purpose of building a church, which at first was only a modest brush arbor (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:3). St. James was but one of three churches built by the African American community after the war—one for each denomination of Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian (Bostick 2008:101).

St. James' history credits the Reverend Hezekiah Hampleton Hunter of the Northern Presbyterian Church with coming to James Island from New York to help establish the new church. Reverend Hunter also established and taught the First Mission School the following year—the first school for African Americans on James Island (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:3–4). As of 1868, the school managed 89 students. Under Hunter's guidance, the church and school grew to be the largest Presbyterian congregation in the Low Country, and he continued to teach at the mission school until his death in 1894 (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:4). The school may have gone without a constant teacher until 1923 when Ona Belle Sanders was persuaded to come to James Island to "re-open the much needed Mission School and help the young black children with basic education" (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:7). She was joined by her husband the Reverend Marion Anderson Sanders as

a preacher; together their contributions to the church are known as “the Sanders Era,” and throughout the 1920s to the 1940s, the school was known as the “best black Mission School in the South” (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:9).

According to the church’s history published in 2000, Reverend and Mrs. Sanders re-opened the Mission (Parochial) School in 1924. Classes were taught in the sanctuary before a two-room house was purchased and moved to the property. The school then had at least three rooms and later a kitchen, which provided a free lunch (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:8). Two years later, the public schools of James Island would be renewed with all new teachers, such as Mamie Fields, but the educational experience at the private mission school was superior to what the county provided. The parochial school served grades first through eleventh while the public schools only provided schooling through the seventh grade. Classes included home economics—crocheting, sewing, embroidery—as well as basic academia—reading, writing, and arithmetic. These classes were also offered to adults when time provided (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:8).

With the support of the Northern Presbyterian Church, St. James was able to provide a free lunch for students starting in 1926, and later supplied free textbooks. This much needed benefit grew enrollment to 500 (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:9). The present-day classrooms at St. James were constructed in 1951, but that same year the county began to provide transportation to public schools, which impacted the Parochial School’s enrollment numbers (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:9–10). Only 103 students attended St. James in 1960. This decline in combination with new state requirements forced the school to close the following year (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:13). The school building has since then used for a Head Start Program and the church continues a Sunday school and vacation bible school (Saint James Presbyterian Church 2000:10).

With the exception of St. James, most James Island student attended elementary schools in dilapidated, crowded buildings with second hand desks if present, and used books into the immediate post WWII era. The first brush for many with modernity would come about during the Equalization Era where new modern schools would take the place of the older buildings but segregation remained in place. Plans for W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School, James Island’s first high school for African Americans, as well as other new schools were on the horizon.

Alma Mater

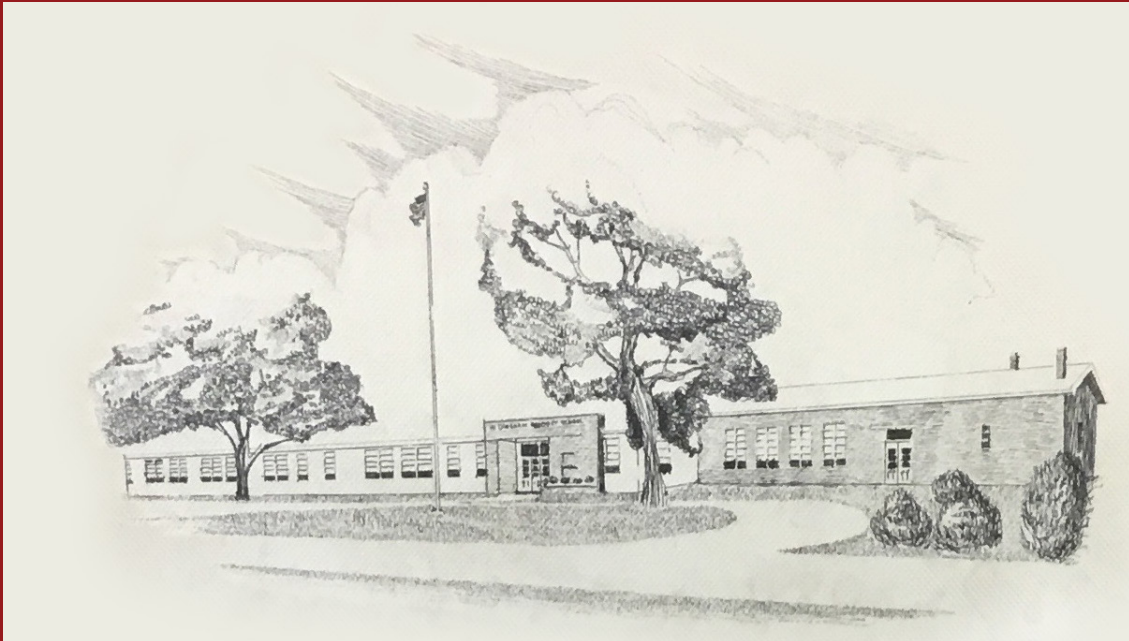
*Dear Gresham Meggett, we love thee so
We'll never from thee part,
We'll keep your honor true and dear
Forever in each heart.*

(Chorus)

*Dear Alma Mater hail to thee
All hail to thee dear one,
We'll 'ere defend thy noble name
'Till all our days are done.*

*Our lessons you have taught so well
In life's main stream we must go,
On making fortunes we must dwell
With steady pace not slow.
(Repeat Chorus)*

*We'll keep our banner flying high
And cherish crimson and gold,
We'll ere remember days gone by
And memories of old.
(Repeat Chorus)*



Meggett Alma Mater and Architectural Rendering of W. Gresham Meggett High School, circa 1965.

VI. Equalization Schools on James Island and W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School

South Carolina's gubernatorial race of 1950 resulted in the election of James F. Byrnes, who stated in his inauguration speech that the rural public schools were lacking and needed more financial aid than could be produced from the district's property taxes. While Byrnes campaigned for education and believed that both school systems—for African American and white children—needed to be improved, he was keen on equalizing the dual system without interference from the federal government (Dobrasko 2005a:6–7). To remedy the problem, Byrnes proposed a three-cent sales tax in order to issue a bond of \$75 million for a statewide school building program.

Although Byrnes attempted to avoid a court-imposed integration like other southern states had issued, there had already been a credible threat in Clarendon County the previous year. Bolstered by the NAACP and a local leader in the Reverend J. A. Dalaine, Summerton's African American parents filed a petition for equal school facilities and equipment with the school district (Dobrasko 2005a:10). The case, *Briggs v. Elliott*, claimed that white officials of Clarendon County were not upholding the law of equal facilities, although ultimately the case was filed based on segregation, not equalization, on the urging of federal district court Judge J. Waites Waring. With segregation threatened in the state courts and Judge Waring, an opponent of segregation, on the three-judge panel, Byrnes and those who supported the dual system needed the new school equalization programs more than ever (Dobrasko 2005a:11).

Overall, the state's white politicians hurried the equalization proposal through legislation in an attempt to strengthen their argument that separate was equal and promised to drastically increase funding for African American schools. Only a month before *Briggs v. Elliott* was set for trial, the bill for equalization was signed into law for the state of South Carolina. The bill created the State Educational Finance Commission (EFC) to administer the funds. The EFC could also approve school construction and consolidation plans, as well as the state transportation program. The Commission was led by a committee including the Governor, State Superintendent of Education, and five members appointed by the governor (Dobrasko 2005a:12).

Under the new equalization program, each school district received \$15 per pupil, per year for the average daily attendance for the next two decades, from 1951 to 1971. The funds could only be used for the construction and maintenance of the public school physical facilities and could be borrowed based on future projections (Dobrasko 2005a:13). The first step of the commission's control was to reorganize and consolidate the existing schools. The commission required that every elementary school be graded and have at least one teacher for each grade. High schools would have more than one teacher as they were required to have at least 83 students per grade. Furthermore, each district was limited to one white high school and one African American high school (Dobrasko 2005a:16).

While school consolidation did limit choice for many, the commission recommended that communities not be divided by county lines, but rather that students should attend the community school regardless of the county. Consolidation reduced administration costs and a survey of existing schools helped to assess the population needs. In Charleston County, the survey was overseen by the county superintendent of education, G. Creighton Frampton (Dobrasko 2005b:16). After consolidation, South Carolina's 1,220 school districts then only numbered 102 (Dobrasko 2005a:15–16). In Charleston County, the previous 23 districts were consolidated into only nine (Dobrasko 2005b:16). Negatively, consolidation meant that many children now needed transportation to get to school and communities were left without a center in some rural locales (Dobrasko 2005a:17). Charleston County provides a prime example of the difficulties of school consolidation with a large, urban center and outlying rural areas. As of 1950, 73 percent of Charleston County's residents lived in the city and over 40 percent of the county's residents were African American. The county had the second highest number of students in public schools and a high degree of inequality. According to Dobrasko, Charleston County public school system had 67 schools for African

Americans with 9,471 students and 234 teachers, compared to 29 schools for 10,410 white students and 379 teachers. In all of the county, there were only three high schools for African Americans, and seven high schools for white children (2005b:15).

During and after World War II, the African American population of Charleston boomed with work at the Navy Yard. This caused overcrowding in the county's schools while white schools were underutilized. While some rural communities built their own school buildings, they were not intended to be permanent (Dobrasko 2005b:16). For the newly constructed schools built for equalization, the commission required each district to hire licensed architects and contractors. The architects, however, had little artistic sway as the commission approved all plans according to their school plant survey. The building program began in February 1952 with African American elementary and high schools (Dobrasko 2005b:14 and 17). In that year, the plans for new white schools totaled \$1,993,560 and for the African American schools, \$1,349,100. While the funding may be nearly equal and physical facilities appeared equal, the funds spent per student remained unequal. With 6,537 African American students to only 4,574 white students, over twice as much was allotted per white student as was a black student. Despite the public push for equal funding and equal physical facilities, the funds spent per student remained unequal (Dobrasko 2005b:18).

By 1955, the EFC considered the dual educational systems equal, as every district in the state had succeeded in constructing or was in the midst of constructing a high school for African Americans. The EFC had approved more than \$214 million for the construction of equalization buildings with 46.1 percent of the funds allotted to African American schools (Dobrasko 2005b:14). But Charleston's African American parents were still unhappy with the proposed equal funding after decades of financially supporting themselves (Dobrasko 2005b:18).

EQUALIZATION SCHOOLS

According to Dobrasko, 44 schools in Charleston County received funds for new construction, additions, renovations, and equipment (2005a:39–41). Of those schools, 20 were for white students and 24 were for African American students. Half of the white schools were new constructions while 20 of the 24 African American schools were new constructions—indicating that the existing white schools were in better condition and greater number than the existing African American schools in the county.

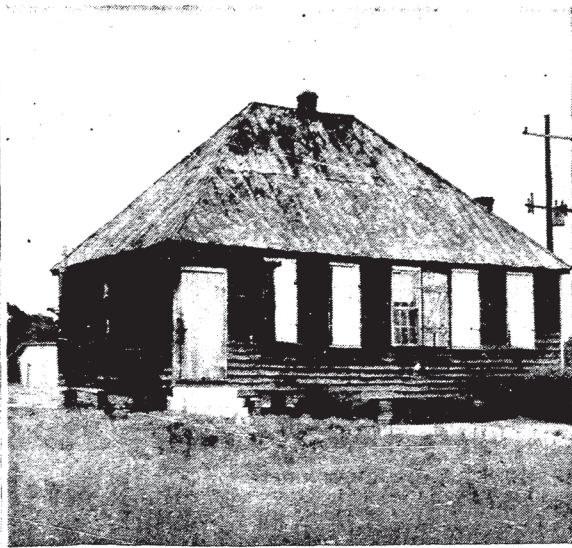
Five schools in District 3, James Island, received equalization funds: James Island Elementary, James Island High, and Riverland Terrace Elementary—for white students. Funds for African American schools went to Cut Bridge (Murray-LaSaine) Elementary and W. Gresham Meggett High and Elementary. Considering that Meggett combined elementary and high schools, there were two elementary schools and one high school for each community. James Island's schools followed the requirement laid out by the EFC that each district only operate one high school per race (Dobrasko 2005b:13). All but the previously extant Riverland Terrace were newly constructed schools.

James Island High School

Constructed for equalization in 1953, James Island High School was originally designed as a two-winged building with eight classrooms, a multipurpose room, library, and offices by A. E. Constantine. The plans, however, changed to the campus-style plan with six separate buildings connected by corridors. Many of the cost figures for James Island High are missing from the ledgers of Constantine and Constantine. While some of the plans may not have come to fruition, the architectural firm were commissioned for the following: “a proposed new building” in 1952 with additions in 1953 and 1955 totaling \$56,524 each; another “new building” and eight-classroom addition in 1957; a \$60,945 classroom addition the following year; a gymnasium and additional classrooms in 1961; additional classrooms in 1963; another gymnasium in 1964 costing \$300,000 (noting that the cost included a gym for Meggett as well); and finally a music building in 1967 (Constantine 1983).

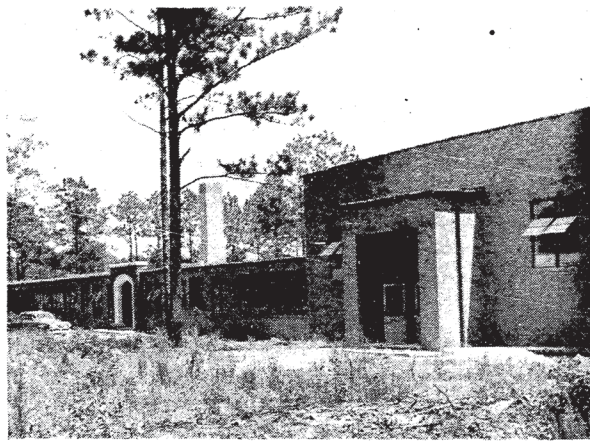
James Island Elementary School

In addition to the high school, James Island Elementary School was also constructed at this time. Allotted funds in 1955, the one-story school originally had 14 classrooms and two wings with long rows of windows (Dobrasko 2005b:37). The Constantine and Constantine ledgers have an entry for James Island Elementary School dated 1955 for a contract worth \$125,000 and a \$50,000-cafeteria the following year. The ledgers also contain an entry of \$10,155 for a two-classroom addition to “James Island Grade School” in 1954—indicating that there was perhaps a school building predating the one on Camp Road (Constantine 1983).



Contrast: A Schoolhouse Saga

The story of the passing of Phillips Negro School (above), whose 58 pupils this fall will transfer to the new Jennie Moore Negro Elementary School (top right) and the new Laing Negro High School (lower right) typifies the strides being made toward model educational standards for Charleston County. Phillips, Cainhoy Road two-teacher school in use some 50 years by Moultrie District, offered eight grades in two thinly-partitioned rooms. Like 25 other "little red schoolhouses" scattered throughout the county, Phillips will be abandoned this fall in the move toward modern school plants, consolidation of facilities and equalization of opportunity between whites and Negroes. The two new schools shown here are among many additions and refinements of the Charleston County school plant which are pictured elsewhere in this Back-to-School supplement. (News and Courier Staff Photos.)



"Contrast: A Schoolhouse Saga," Charleston News and Courier, Charleston, August 16, 1953 accessed on April 17, 2020

Riverland Terrace Elementary School

Funds approved in 1954 and 1957 for additions and renovations to Riverland Terrace completed by architect Constantine and Constantine totaled \$30,299 and \$10,935, respectively (Constantine 1983; Dobrasko 2005b:53). The elementary school was razed prior to 1971, as evidenced in historic aerial photographs.

Murray-LaSaine Elementary School

When Murray-LaSaine Elementary School opened in 1955 it consisted of 16 classrooms (Dobrasko 2005b:36). Constantine and Constantine referred to the school as "Cut Bridge"

in the ledgers since it replaced the original one-room schoolhouse. The school district commissioned the architects for \$192,000 in 1954 for the original school, plus another \$64,185 the following year. A \$32,000-cafeteria was added in 1956, a classroom addition in 1960, and another addition for \$85,000 in 1964 (Constantine 1983). The school is named for Albertha Johnston Murray, former principal of Cut Bridge School, and Dr. M. Alice LaSaine, former supervisor of black schools in Charleston County. According to Dobrasko, Murray was integral in forcing the hand of Charleston County School District into upgrading Cut Bridge School, showing the county's reluctance to satisfy the African American teachers and parents during the equalization program (Dobrasko 2005b:36).

W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School

The fifth school to receive funds from the equalization program was W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School. The county intended to build a modern elementary school with the intention of consolidating several of the older, smaller, one-room schoolhouses – Cut Bridge, Sol Legare, Society Corner, and Three Trees – into Meggett. Later Cut Bridge Elementary was replaced by Murray-LaSaine Elementary instead and the remaining schools were closed and consolidated into Meggett Elementary. While first conceived as an elementary school, plans changed quickly in response to the growing number of prospective students, the proposed consolidation of schools, and the need for a high school that served only African Americans (Fesak and Pemberton 2017:13)(Rp.13). Having a separate but equal school system was the state's goal.

The firm of H. A. DeCosta, described as a Charleston Negro contractor, won the construction bid at \$157,000. Renowned for their preservation and restoration of historic properties, the DeCosta Company was one of the most active Charleston construction companies in the mid-twentieth century (Keller 2011:15). The company had its origins in Benjamin Rhodes DeCosta (1867-1911), a craftsman among a set of skilled African American artisans and builders in the city of Charleston (Keller 2011:3–5, 12). While no records remain of his business, Benjamin DeCosta is anecdotally credited for the former chapel at the St. James Episcopal Church on James Island (Keller 2011:13). The H. A. DeCosta Company came into its own in the mid-twentieth century with the third generation of African American builder Herbert Augustus DeCosta (1923-2008). Education was vital in the DeCosta family and H. A. DeCosta, Jr. attended Avery Institute, from which he graduated in 1940. He then received a degree in architectural engineering from Iowa State University in 1944 before working for the



Gresham Meggett School Appears In Newsweek

Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School on Grimball Road in Charleston County was visited recently by Newsweek contributing editor Raymond Moley. Moley, who wrote a detailed report on the efficiency and good relations prevailing under the Charleston area segregated school

system, visited white schools and talked with Charleston and South Carolina leaders in an effort to get the Southern side of the current controversy over racial integration. For complete details on what he found in Charleston, see Page 9-A.

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"Gresham Meggett School Appears in Newsweek," Charleston News and Courier, October 10, 1957. Accessed on April 17, 2020.

National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, the predecessor to NASA during World War II (Keller 2011:18–20).

The architectural design was the work of local architect Augustus Constantine (Charleston News and Courier 1952). Augustus Edison Constantine (1898-1976) was a prominent Charleston architect whose Neo-classical, Art Deco, Moderne, and International style buildings can still be found throughout the Charleston area. His firm is credited with designing many of Charleston County's schools during this era of expansion including W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School.

The centrally located elementary school, designed as a six-room concrete block construction and built in 1951, was swiftly expanded in 1952 to accommodate the incoming high school students. The high school addition was large, accommodating "nine classrooms, a home economics room, science laboratory, library, multi-purpose room (also a cafeteria), teacher's

lounge, first aid room, reception room, principal's office, kitchen and book storage." Superintendent G. Creighton Frampton declared that the one-story building with its modern lighting and large green "blackboards" was "a radical departure from the old-style rural schools now in use" (Charleston News and Courier 1952).

Equalization school buildings such as W. Gresham Meggett were designed according to popular post-World War II philosophies concerning what constituted a proper and healthy learning environment. Overall, optimal lighting and ventilation were the most important features, as well as a commitment to a one-story design thought to be more psychologically friendly to children as architects believed that "the low-lying, sprawled-out type of building, close to the ground, one story high, straight in its lines, honestly functional, is less awe-inspiring and more friendly in the eyes of the child..." (Dobrasko 2005b:23). This style of design did away with multi-story, classically designed facilities common for educational buildings in the previous century in urban contexts, as well as the need for stairs and fire escapes. New high schools were built as campuses, an emerging national trend. Inside, classrooms were modest 30-foot square rooms, or similar, with nine-foot ceilings and at least one wall of windows for light and ventilation (Dobrasko 2005b:28). The open form of the classroom differed from the typical schoolroom of the early twentieth century in which desks and chairs were often attached to the floor with the seat of one chair attached to the desk behind it—limiting movement and arrangement for teachers and students (Dobrasko 2005b:22). Despite material equality in the building of African American schools, the equalization program failed to fully uphold equality as the state of South Carolina remained reluctant to provide such features as football fields to African American schools, which the state considered "not practical" (Dobrasko 2005b:19).

By the close of the 1950s, only three schools served James Island's African American children: W. Gresham Meggett High School and W. Gresham Meggett Elementary, Murray-LaSaine Elementary and King's Highway Elementary (Charleston News and Courier 1958). One year after construction, Meggett Elementary was considered over-crowded. A 1957 news article in the *Charleston News and Courier* noted an overall leap in enrollment on James Island but specifically cited W. Gresham Meggett Elementary school expanding from 378 students in 1953 to 416. Similarly, Meggett High School's enrollment leaped from 186 to 271 students in 1954 while Sol Legare and Cut Bridge would have more modest gains in student populations (Charleston News and Courier 1954).

To keep up with enrollment, some Meggett Elementary students, such as Anna Johnson, were transferred to King's Highway Elementary. The school, originally used by the white children

of the community, was used by the African American community during consolidation and equalization. Transferring children to Kings Highway allowed more high school space at Gresham Meggett, which was also starting to feel the squeeze. An annex was added in 1956 supplying more classroom space and the construction of a gymnasium in 1967 also designed by architect Augustus Constantine completed the growing school which would bring African American education on James Island into the modern era when it opened in the fall of 1953.

CONCLUSION

Between 1953 and 1969, W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School, named after the revered Chairman of the James Island School Board, provided an education for James Island's African American children. A product of the Equalization era, the modern school was designed by a first-generation American, constructed by an African American builder with strong historic ties to Charleston's master craftsmen, and funded by a segregationist government bent on keeping South Carolina's schools separate but equal. As notable as all that sounds, the next chapter will show that what truly made this school historically important was the community that embraced it, sending their children through its doors ready to learn.



First Row (L to R): Anna Johnson, Ned Roper, Cassandra Roper, Gloria Hamilton

Second Row (L to R): Edward Greene, Deborah Barrett, Willie James, Nathaniel Backman

Third Row (L to R): Charlotte Dunn, Ronald Middleton, Emma Richardson, Wilburn Gilliard

Fourth Row (L to R): Willie ("Cubby") Wilder, David Richardson, Terrie Washington, Thomas Prioleau

VII. Short Biographies of Interviewees

Three teachers and 17 alumni were interviewed during the project. Within the first round of interviews, it became apparent that many of the previous students we were meeting were related to one another. The full transcripts contain descriptions of the extended families and their kin who have dwelled on James Island for decades. Additionally, at least three interviewees were raised by extended family members who became adoptive parents to share child raising responsibilities in the family. This practice further created points of connection within the island families. James Island's African American community was exceptionally close knit, which was an important parameter in the success of W. Gresham Meggett. Finally, two of the teachers that were interviewed, Willie James and Gloria Hamilton, were chosen to teach at Fort Johnson during the first year of desegregation after the closing of W. Gresham Meggett High School.

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There was also a geographic thread through many of the interviews tying James Island to New York City, suggesting that it was selected by many Islanders as a potential home prior and during the Great Migration. Mamie Garvin Fields (1983:13) noted: "To Negroes in Charleston back then, New York was the place to go, and the Clyde Line Ship was the way to get there. The Clyde Line took you on the Iroquois or the Comanche. Those were the ships that plied the seas Charleston to New York." It was a three-day voyage in circa 1900. Later, James Islanders would travel by train or automobile between the port cities, coming and going between the two as life circumstances warranted. Some of the interviewees began their education in integrated schools in New York City and would finish their education in segregated schools such as Meggett. The message here is that some of the children were well traveled and had a larger frame of reference than others for the cultural changes that were occurring.

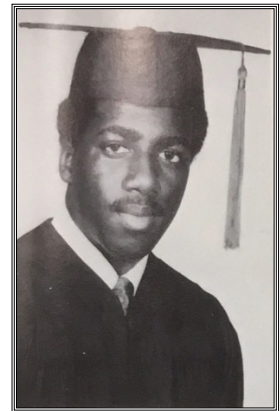
Over half of the alumni interviewed went on to attend college and graduate school; others went to nursing school, served in the Armed Forces and/or had a career in commerce. None of those interviewed became farmers. Many interviewees referred to their parent's ways of

life on the farm as too hard and had a strong self-awareness that farming was not their future. This underscores the huge economic shift that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century as this generation chose different lifeways. W. Gresham Meggett High school played a role in that shift.

BIOGRAPHIES

Nathaniel Backman

Nathaniel Backman was born to Moses and Francina Backman and raised in the Beesfield and Scotthill communities of James Island. After graduating from W. Gresham Meggett in 1969, he attended Savannah State College for a semester, traveled to New York, and then returned to Charleston where he worked for Southern Bell/AT&T for 34 years. He is an ordained Elder of James Island Presbyterian Church and has spent time teaching students at Greg Mathis Charter following his retirement.



Deborah Barrett

Deborah Barrett was born in 1952 to Martha Davis, and was raised by her maternal grandparents in the Honey Hill community of James Island. She attended Kings Highway Elementary School and W. Gresham Meggett before leaving South Carolina in the eighth grade to live in New York with her mother, where she went on to graduate from Grover Cleveland High School. Deborah holds degrees in administration, counseling, and theology, and has worked in the public-school system as a teacher, dean, assistant principal, and principal.



Remus Cromwell

Remus (Harold) Cromwell was born in 1934 to Joseph and Shelby Cromwell. He attended Society Corner School and Cherokee School in his younger years, eventually attending Burke School in Charleston and graduating in 1951. Directly following high school, Remus

worked as a school bus driver and also taught others how to drive buses. Later, he became a carpenter and received his state license in that field in 1969. Remus went on to start his own contracting company, Cromwell Construction, and worked there until he retired the business in 1996.

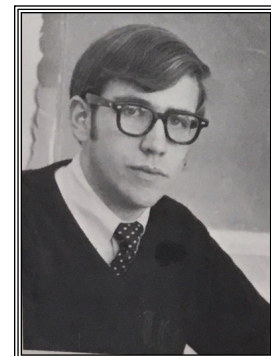
Charlotte Dunn

Charlotte Dunn grew up on the James Island truck farm of her parents, Ned and Katie Roper, with her three other siblings. After graduating from W. Gresham Meggett in 1966, she followed in the footsteps of her grandmother and mother, who were both granny midwives, and pursued a career in health. She worked as a nurse in New York and later as a nurse practitioner in Charleston. Charlotte remembers her teachers at W. Gresham Meggett, particularly the professional black women, as role models.



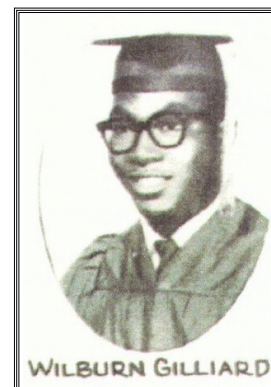
Terry Fox (Teacher)

Terry Fox is the son of Earl Clarence Fox and Dorothy Roberson Fox. He grew up in Hudson, North Carolina and attended the University of North Carolina, where he studied English. He moved to Charleston in 1968 and taught English at W. Gresham Meggett during its final school year. Terry is currently active in the art world of Charleston.



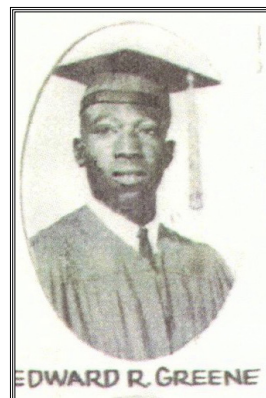
Wilburn Gilliard

Wilburn Gilliard was born in 1946 to Samuel C. Gilliard and Eloise Richardson Gilliard and is a native James Islander, growing up in the Beesfield community. He attended W. Gresham Meggett and was a member of the football team in high school. He graduated in 1964 and went on to attend South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, where he studied engineering. Following his graduation from college, Wilburn joined the Army. After leaving the military, he moved to Rhode Island where he married his wife, and then moved back to Charleston.



Edward Greene

Edward Greene was born in 1945 and grew up on James Island, with his parents, Samuel and Ciel Greene, and his 11 siblings. After graduating from W. Gresham Meggett in 1964, he attended South Carolina State College on a golf scholarship and participated in ROTC. Samuel was drafted into the Army during college, but he eventually returned to school and earned his Associates Degree in electrical engineering. He retired from working as an electrical supervisor at the VA Hospital in 2009 and is still an active golfer.



Diane Hamilton (Teacher)

Diane Hamilton was born in the West Ashley area of Charleston. She graduated from South Carolina State College, where she was trained to teach U.S. History. Her first teaching position was at W. Gresham Meggett, and when the school closed in 1969, she was transferred to Fort Johnson High School along with two other W. Gresham Meggett teachers, Mrs. James and Mr. McCray. She served as the chair of the Fort Johnson/James Island High School Social Studies Department for 17 years. Following her retirement from James Island High School, she taught Global Studies at the School of the Arts in Charleston.



Vivian Ingram

Vivian Ingram was born in Charleston in 1936 and grew up on James Island, with her parents and seven siblings. In 1954, Vivian graduated from Burke School and then enrolled at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. After graduating college, she moved to New York, where she worked in management at NYNEX, a telephone company. Vivian retired after 36 years of service at NYNEX and now lives on James Island.

Willie James (Teacher)

Willie James was born in 1934 in Orangeburg, South Carolina. She attended South Carolina State College to study English and after graduation, taught for six years at Allston High School in Summerville. She moved to Charleston after getting married, and taught at W. Gresham Meggett for seven years, holding the position of Chair of the English department while there. After the closure of W. Gresham Meggett, she transferred to Fort Johnson High School. Since retiring, Willie has been on the school board for District 10 in Charleston and continues to tutor students.



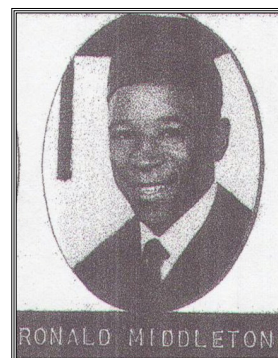
Anna Johnson

Anna Johnson was born in 1948 and grew up on James Island, where she graduated from W. Gresham Meggett in 1966. Following high school, she moved to New York and worked several jobs, including positions at the US Census Bureau and Barclay's Bank on Wall Street. While in New York, she became politically active, and has remained active throughout her life. In 1973, Anna moved to Memphis and became a social worker. She has since returned to Charleston, and is currently on the Charleston County Council.



Ronald Middleton

Ronald Middleton was born in 1945 on James Island to Herbert Middleton Sr. and Elizabeth Chisolm Middleton. He attended Society Corner School through second grade, and then moved to W. Gresham Meggett, where he graduated in 1963. Following graduation, he joined the Army and served as a Sergeant in Vietnam. Ronald has received a Purple Heart and two Bronze Star Medals for his service.



Isaac Moore Jr.

Isaac Moore Jr. was born in 1950 to Isaac Moore Sr. and Mary Moore, and grew up in the Bees Field community of James Island with his three other siblings. He attended W. Gresham Meggett for grades eight through twelve, graduating in 1968. After graduating, Isaac joined the Air Force and served for 22 years, retiring as a captain. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in divinity, with a minor in pastoral care and counseling.



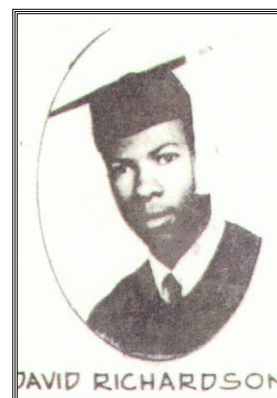
Thomas Prioleau

Thomas Prioleau was born in 1938 in the "Big or Bic House" area of James Island, in a home built by his great grandfather, James Prioleau. He began attending W. Gresham Meggett in the seventh grade and graduated in 1957. While in high school, he participated in talent shows, where he showed off his vocal skills. Following graduation from W. Gresham Meggett, he attended South Carolina State College, where he was a member of a vocal group, the Elrays. Thomas is a poet and has published a collection of his poems.



David Richardson

David Richardson was raised by his adoptive parents, Dave and Harriet Richardson, on James Island. As a teenager, he worked as a shrimper with his family. David graduated from W. Gresham Meggett in 1961 and attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he studied pre-law and history. He then attended Washington College of Law and after graduating, returned to Charleston where he became politically active.

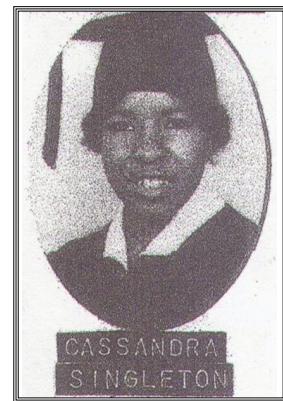


Emma L. Richardson

Emma Richardson was born in 1950 on James Island to Calvin and Mamie Ruth Chavis. In 1956, she transferred to W. Gresham Meggett as a second grader, and studied there through tenth grade. In the eleventh grade, she transferred to James Island High School, as one of the first African American students to begin integration. Following high school, Emma worked for the State Employment Service and SeaLand, a shipping and receiving company. She is a cousin to David Richardson.

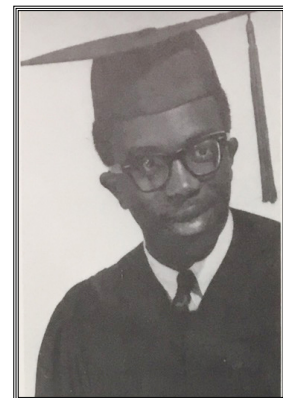
Cassandra Roper

Cassandra Roper was born in 1945 and raised on Sol Legare, by her maternal grandparents. She also spent a portion of her childhood in New York City with her grandaunt, Rosa Leff. Around seventh or eighth grade, Cassandra began attending W. Gresham Meggett and studied there through twelfth grade. When she graduated in 1963, she moved to Washington D.C. for a short period, but returned later that year and began working at the shipyard in Charleston. Cassandra retired after thirty years of employment at the shipyard.



Ned B. Roper

Ned Roper was born on James Island in 1951 to Ned and Katie Elizabeth Simmons Roper. He was raised on his father's farm, where he worked as a teenager. After turning sixteen, he began driving the school bus. Ned graduated from W. Gresham Meggett in 1969 and attended South Carolina State College where he studied biology. He also went on to obtain a master's degree in ecology and joined the Army. He is Charlotte Roper Dunn's brother.



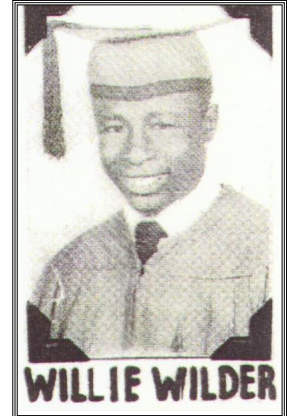
Terrie Washington

Terrie Washington grew up on James Island with her parents, Harry and Florence Urie, and her twelve siblings. She graduated from James Island High School in 1977. Many of her siblings

attended W. Gresham Meggett, so she remembers growing up during the transition from segregated to integrated public schools. Her sister Kate was transferred from W. Gresham Meggett to James Island High School during integration, and Terrie remembers her sister's activism after the closure of the African American schools.

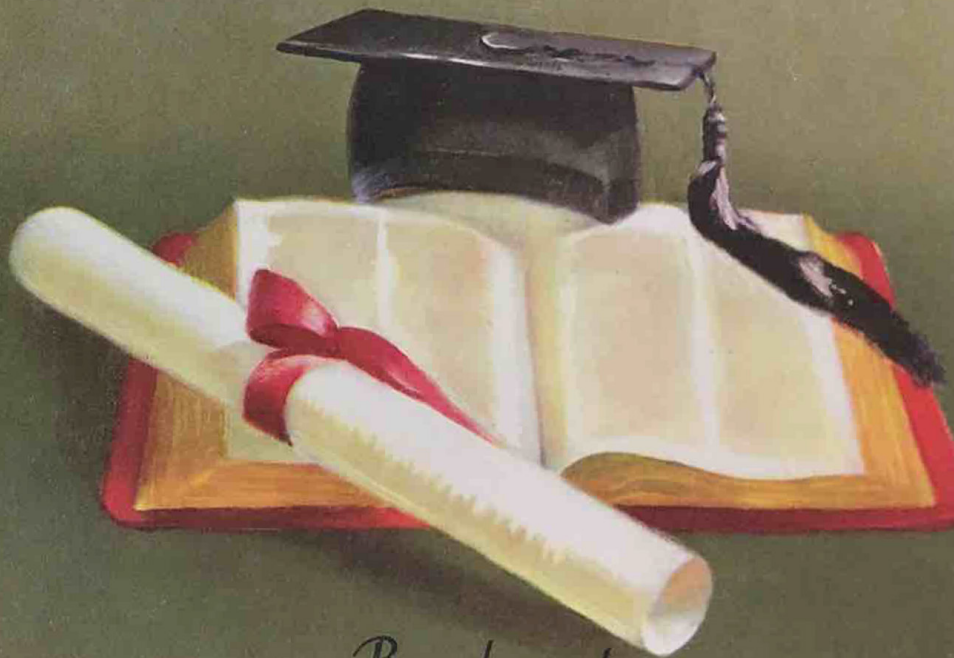
Willie J. Wilder

Willie "Cubby" Wilder spent his early childhood near Folly Beach, living with his parents and seven siblings. At age six he moved to New York City to live with his aunt. When he reached the seventh grade, Willie returned to Charleston and attended W. Gresham Meggett. He was active on campus, participating in football, baseball, and driving the school bus. After graduating from W. Gresham Meggett in 1959, Willie attended Voorhees College and then joined the Air Force, finishing his education at Southern Illinois University. He is currently the chairman of the W. Gresham Meggett Alumni Association.



“Wisdom
is the principal thing;
therefore get wisdom:
and with all thy getting
get understanding.”

PROVERBS 4:7



Baccalaureate

W. GRESHAM MEGGETT HIGH SCHOOL
James Island, South Carolina
Sunday Afternoon, May 30, 1965

“We have reached the shore - the ocean lies before us.”

Class Motto 1965

VIII. “Grassroots School Put in the Heart of the Black Community”

The words on the historical marker that sits in front of the W. Gresham Meggett High school building convey the main storyline about the school telegraphically. Meggett set a precedent as James Island’s first African American high school, completed in 1953. It served as a combined elementary and high school for a decade and then as just a high school until integration forced its closing in 1969. The words of those who lived through this experience are needed to give context to this significant storyline, set within the larger historic context, of the end of segregation and the Civil Rights era. The interviews underscore that there were multiple journeys toward equal education, each representing its own time and place.

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The new and modern W. Gresham Meggett High School was positively embraced by James Island’s rural African American community, who seized the opportunity for their children to finally receive a higher education. That success brought both admiration and unease. The admiration was well deserved as dedicated professional teachers, small class sizes, and, most importantly, children ready to learn with strong parental support came together to form what was a transformational educational environment. Many children now looked beyond the farm for their future careers and a college education was now achievable for some. Well-designed yearbooks show that Meggett’s students quickly learned 1950s American high school culture and participated in it to the extent possible under segregation. Photographs feature young black scholars, bricklayers in vocational programs, proms nights, homecoming weekend, sports events, teams and coaches, choir, clubs, awards, and who got a school letter. From 1953 through 1969, W. Gresham Meggett High School and its community each year turned out a graduating class of young black men and women with expectations and the education and motivation to succeed.

This achievement was viewed through different prisms. Newsweek editor Raymond Moley visited Meggett and other James Island schools to report on segregation “at a close range”

in 1957 (Charleston News and Courier 1957). The transformational education environment at Meggett was perceived in a different light. After visiting W. Gresham Meggett School, the message he carried to the nation was that “voluntary segregation” was working and underscored that separate but equal school systems, not integration, was the gateway to equal education. Ironically Moley recognized the achievement at Meggett, but disregarded its historic context in his reporting.

Regardless of the attempts to equally fund the dual school systems, South Carolina’s elaborate program to maintain segregation ultimately did not prevent court cases pushing for integration. In May 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* — South Carolina’s *Briggs v. Elliott* factored into the landmark decision. Following the federal outlawing of segregation, dozens of Charleston parents tried to enroll their children in all-white Charleston City schools. For the next eight years, the city evaded attempts to integrate until the federal circuit court ruled in the case *Millicent F. Brown et al. v. School Board District No. 20, Charleston County*. In favor of the plaintiffs and all of South Carolina’s African American population, this desegregated Charleston’s schools—the first in the state (Dobrasko 2005b:20). As noted, many black parents in Charleston, understanding that American education would never be equal under segregation, made the difficult decision to send their children to “white” schools. Self-described as “first children,” they were on the front lines of a campaign for equality.

That campaign had different “fronts” each historically important in our understanding of this period of change and the story of W. Gresham Meggett High School is significant to that context. In Cubby Wilder’s words, it was “a grassroots school put in the heart of a black community,” with professional teachers, motivated parents and student contributing to a highly productive “learning atmosphere.” All involved worked with what they had and everyone within the close-knit community was involved. The change that W. Gresham Meggett brought was island-wide.

Four overarching themes were developed in the interviews and these structure this chapter: the value of education to the community; the development of a “learning atmosphere”; the Meggett school experience, and inequalities; and integration and the school closure. A fifth theme, which is more of a subtheme, is the geographic connection between James Islanders and New York. The following quotes are excerpted from the transcripts in Appendix A.

EDUCATION WAS VALUED

Historic Importance of James Island Presbyterian Church

"This church played a significant role in influencing a number of folks who were born and raised on James Island, even though they preceded Gresham Meggett. The school—and if you look at—I saw a picture earlier someplace, we used to call the Sanders School. Because the minister—a Presbyterian minister who was educated, name was Marion Sanders." – David Richardson

"And the young and energetic Reverend and Mrs. Sanders, through the St. James Parochial School, built a very strong educational program for black youths and adults on James Island, and the curriculum covered grades one through 11, while the public schools covered the first seven grades only. So you see the church was very instrumental in the education of the children here on the island." – Cassandra Roper

"I went to college, Johnson C. Smith in Charlotte, but I was a member of St. James. I grew up in St. James. You know, my mom took us by the hand, and we went to church with Mom." – Vivian Ingram

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Education as a Route to a Better Life

"And so we would go and work in the fields and in the afternoon when we'd get home, we knew that if it was picking time or whatever, we would come home, put our books up, and go and walk to the field or do whatever so we, that's why as I've got older and I moved away, I know that as I was growing up that I was not going to do that for the rest of my life. They stressed you had to maintain good grades." – Charlotte Dunn

"Now, you mentioned about the farming, and the reason I laughed, because the last thing I wanted to do was farming. And I always tell folks farming encouraged me – I said there has to be a better way to make a living than this. And so that encouraged me to go to college. That was one of the catalysts. Definitely a catalyst." – Wilburn Gilliard

"But we were always positive. We wanted to succeed. We did not want to remain on that farm all the days of our life, because we saw what our parents went through and other family

members. And we were sick and tired of having to work so hard. You had to work in the fields. You had to help harvest the vegetables, carry it. Oh, gosh. Hard work.” – Thomas Prioleau

“And that is, she [teacher] had... made out of construction paper on bulletin board, a painting of a large treasure chest like pirates have. And it was like crack[ed] open some. And what was visible were things like a house, a car, different things that people basically would want and expect to have in life. And then the lock was partially open and the key in the hands of someone that had reading on it. Reading unlocks the key, treasure chest to life, I always remember that. And so I—from that, you know, probably developed my reading interest, and that same theme really turned out to be true.” – David Richardson

“So, I think that a lot of the black folks that graduated from W. Gresham Meggett and the uniqueness of the school was - we were not taught to hate. Get your education. [Or] You’ll have to stay in this environment or this situation. You’re going to move up out of it. Get your education, and then you will see that you all can come together and be the same, you know. Education is the key. And that’s why that’s what we were taught.” – Willie Wilder

“You’re Going To School”- Parental Support

“Well, my mother most of all. She believed in us having an education. And, it wasn’t something that we were allowed to play around with. Something that she believed in and she wanted us to take it serious and take advantage of any opportunities that we had.” – Nathaniel Backman

“My mother always wanted her children to complete high school. My grandmother and grandfather, whom I grew up with, emphasized education on a daily basis. My grandfather read the Bible every single day. And he would always emphasize vocabulary. So he would always read, and then he would ask us about certain words. So he wanted us to have an extensive vocabulary.” – Deborah Barrett

“I think the highest grade my mother and father had was 5th grade but my mother always stressed that your brain is a computer and once you learn it, no one can give it away, unless you give it away so that they always stressed education.” – Charlotte Dunn

"They [his parents] were involved. They attended PTA meetings. My dad didn't attend a lot of the football games, but some of the chores I was responsible of doing after school..., he had to take over and do some of those things [so I could play football]." – Wilburn Gilliard

"...education was highly emphasized in my home. My parents used to make sure that a lot of time that we studied. They used to attend PTA. That's most of the time when they have PTA meeting after school. And then sometime people have to bring cakes and different stuff at the school and you had PTA meetings. So it was very emphasized on education." – Edward Greene

"Hard working parents ... raised the money themselves to get lights [for football field] and put on different PTA teas and different stuff like that to get the money for the lights." – Edward Greene

"But she [mother] was very supportive of us going to school. And, you know, that was a time when a lot of people would drop out of school to go to work to help the family. And even though my mother was a domestic worker, she didn't, you know, tell us to stay home and go to work." – Anna Johnson

"My mother was very active in things that were going on. Matter of fact, I remember one time she even took us to a march downtown. She was very active in things like that." – Isaac Moore

"And whenever there was a function, for example, they used to hold PTA meetings amongst the school and the teachers and the family. These were sometimes four times per year. Yeah. And they would call it a tea, on a Sunday afternoon. And especially the ladies. Not the men. And they would sit and discuss different things about education." – Thomas Prioleau

[Talking about his adopted father] "But he always supported my interest in school, always supported my interest in school. He was the one that said, 'You going to go to college.'" – David Richardson

[Talking about adoption and adopted parents' support] "... I recognize how beneficial it was for me. I know that if I had not had that experience and exposure, I would not have chosen the route that I did. So I'm always very grateful to all of them." – David Richardson

"[Education] was very much emphasized. We would always be told by my mother and father that you must get an education. You know, you've got to go to school, and it was a must."
– Emma Richardson

"I must say now, whenever there was a PTA meeting, the auditorium or the cafeteria in Gresham Meggett was full. The parents believed in coming out to the PTA meetings to find out what the children were doing, what the teachers had to say compared to today." – Cassandra Roper

"My mother was very strong on education and knowledge. Not to say my dad wasn't, but my mother was the true disciplinarian. You were going to get the books and she would make sure, and she would work with you closely." – Ned Roper

"'You've got to get your education. You've got to finish school. You're not going to quit in this house here. If you do quit, move on. You're not staying here.' And I think most all the parents stressed that in the community." – Willie Wilder

A LEARNING ATMOSPHERE

"[At Meggett] Just understanding, just understanding the world in which we live, and what it really took for us to be able to survive or to compete. And they would discipline, it was like, it was like family." – Nathaniel Backman

[Discussing the family relationship that existed on the island] "That was an important piece as well, because later in my life—you have these sayings that it takes a village to raise a child—I don't know if everybody experienced the village. But this whole island was a village, because all of the adults knew each other. Everybody was family. Everybody's treated as family. The doors were open. Now the doors are locked. But back then, the doors were open. Not only physically open, but open to the community. Everyone looked over everyone's child."
– Deborah Barrett

"But living in South Carolina on James Island, we experienced a lot of things about surviving and growing our own natural fruits, you know, harvesting them, and being able to sit together at the table with family, being able to share with your neighbors, making them family. Everybody was just one big family, one happy family, one happy family." – Deborah Barrett

"...when I got on the campus at Gresham Meggett, being young, I was a little girl, and somebody was bothering me. I don't remember then, but I remember one of my cousins scheme, and they'd chastise them, don't you bother her, and so I never had any more problems and I remember that." – Charlotte Dunn

"But they would know how to make it work within the family system. If a child was underperforming or acting out in class, they would say, "Hm-hmm [affirmative]" and it would all sort of level out after that." – Terry Fox, Teacher

"As a first grader, second grader, we walked to school. The distance, I would assume – well, by automobile it's several miles. We took the back shortcuts. About two miles... You always had older kids to follow along with and learn the way to go." – Wilburn Gilliard

"The teachers were real strict. And being strict, the teachers could have tell our parents what we didn't do... They [the parents] had full confidence in the teacher. The teachers and the neighborhood, they had full confidence. Anything that the neighborhood tell them or the teacher tell them, they are right." – Edward Greene

"Oh, yeah, [the community was] very proud [of Gresham Meggett]. Especially when we have football game and different game, we really get good support. PTA, really good support. So they are proud of the school in the community." – Edward Greene

[Discussing Terry Fox, her student teacher] "We had a play once, and he, and I said okay you're going to help me with this. Yes, ma'am, I'd be glad to help you with it. And I said okay, let's get going. And so, after one night, after the play, I think it was my birthday, and they knew it was my birthday, April 1st. Yeah, that's not hard to remember. And, you know what they did? I, I was home that day, and I was waiting for my husband to come home. And, I had on a housecoat or something, and the doorbell rang. And, I went to the door, I said I have my housecoat on, ...and I opened the door, and it's the students who were in the play and Mr. Fox. Happy Birthday...they started singing, and they had food with them, something to drink, you know, sodas and stuff like that. And they came in and we had a marvelous time. In a robe, I'll never forget that. And he looked at me, and he just fell out laughing, oh, we had, we had a good time." – Willie James, Teacher

(Do you believe the parents and the teachers had a close supportive relationship?) "Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely. I think they were very, very close. Whenever a student got in trouble,

Meggett Students Take Honors In 3 Different Science Fairs



Robert Simmons



Julia Roper



Nathaniel Green

During the first week in May, W. Gresham Meggett sponsored its annual local Science Fair in preparation for the Palmetto State Science Fair which was held on March 18, 19, and 20 at South Carolina State College, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

The First place winner at the local level was **Robert Simmons**, a representative from the 12th grade Physics class. His project was "**Cloud Chamber for Detecting Nuclear Events**".

The second winner at this level was **Elizabeth Robinson**, 10th

grade Biology class, "**Embryonic Chick Development**". The third, fourth and fifth place winners respectively were **Julius Ladson**, 8th grade, "**Space Travel**"; **Julia Roper** and **Nathaniel Green**, 9th grade, "**The Viscose Process**" and **Arthur Wilder**, **James Wallace**, and **Edward Walker**, 11th grade, "**Phototropism**".

At the county level, first place winner in the Senior Division was again **Robert Simmons** and first place winners in the Junior Division were **Julia Roper** and **Nathaniel Green**.

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you could almost guarantee that the teacher would call the parent and let the parent know. Today they send notes and everything, but it was on hand back then most of the time.” – Isaac Moore

“Oh, it was basically a one-on-one type thing with students. The classes weren’t very large. I guess they would average probably no more than about 25. So the teachers had time to get to know the student, and the student know the teacher.” – Isaac Moore

“It was a community that consisted majorly of family people. And we walked through the fields. We walked down the dirt roads. We walked through the twists and turns until we arrived at school.” – Thomas Prioleau

“Needless to say, the teacher was our cousin. Yes. Our agriculture teacher name was Mr. William Richardson. He was the son of one of my mother’s first cousins.” – Thomas Prioleau

[Talking about when she first came to Gresham Meggett] “I could remember the lunch room. The lunch room was very large, you know, and we had parents of, you know, that lived around here who worked in it. And, they were really wonderful parents because, you know, they cared, as well. They knew your parents as well, you know, and they cared for you. They’d look out for you too, you know.” – Emma Richardson

“But in having family time, you ended up hearing the good and the bad stories about school, because everything came into the home, in terms of talking about what was going on. School was an integral part of everybody’s life. So that was just as important as home upbringing, because what went into the school also came into the household, too. And if you got a call from the school, something was definitely wrong, and your parents did not appreciate a call from the school. So, being one of the youngest, I always listened and learned, because I did not want to have some of the issues that my brothers and sisters had coming into the home, from the school.” – Terrie Washington

“Meggett, I remember because, like I said, it was a community type of thing. School was just as important as your home life. So, there was always talk of what went on inside of school; the good and the bad. Anything that happened to anybody, if it came—happened at school, then it came into the house.” – Terrie Washington

"Because you didn't want to get sent home by one of them teachers or ...the teacher would come to your house. They would come to your house. And you don't—You didn't want a teacher to come to your house and stuff when you was bad, because you would get the switch right there." – Willie Wilder

"Well, I think that what made Gresham Meggett so unique is that it was a grass roots school just put in the heart of the black community. And at one time, like I told you, being that we had community schools for the island, it brought everybody together on the island." – Willie Wilder

"So, the uniqueness of Gresham Meggett is that we were a family. And the parents and the teachers treated you like you were one of their, like you were one of their children." – Willie Wilder

"And so, the teachers had patience and they always tell you that you are somebody. You are somebody. And that uniqueness with the teachers and the parents and the discipline, it led to a learning atmosphere." – Willie Wilder

Teachers and Staff as Role Models – "They Wanted To See Us Excel"

"... I remember this one year, and it wasn't everybody, but it was a pretty big group of us. Walked off the campus school... And I think we'd stop at candy store and some of the kids probably bought something from candy store, some of them. And then we went on back to the school, thinking that okay, we showed them, that we'll protest. We're going back to the school, Mr. Evans was the principal. So he called everybody in the auditorium... So we were thinking that boy we're going to get chewed up. But he outdid us. What he said to us is that he understood, but he congratulated us for the effort and the way that it was done, in a non-violent manner." – Nathaniel Backman

[Discussing the faculty of the schools] "They were a group of proud black people. And they emphasized the importance of being a great people. And I could recall one teacher in particular, Miss Sanders. And she taught us a lot about our black heritage that was not in the history books. And as a matter of fact, she told us about the Negro national anthem. And we had to learn not one stanza that everybody learns and recites today and sings. She said we had to learn the entire song." – Deborah Barrett

The Periscope

Vol. II, No. 1

W. GRESHAM MEGGETT SCHOOL

December, 1961

P. T. A. PUTS LIGHTS ON FOOTBALL FIELD MISS W. GRESHAM MEGGETT IS CROWNED

P.T.A. SECURES LIGHTS FOR FOOTBALL FIELD

Putting lights on the football field was the major objective of the P.T.A. this year. On October 20th of this year they realized their goal. The Eagles played their first and only game of the season under lights on October 20th to please a cheering crowd.

Parents have divided themselves into committees, and each committee engaged in separate money raising activities.

The P.T.A. held its annual Calendar Tea on Sunday, November 12, at which time the choir sang. The affair was a great success.

Now that the lights are installed, the P.T.A. members have already begun their next project, raising money to purchase bleachers or seating for the hundreds of Eagles' fans.

W. GRESHAM MEGGETT RECEIVES ONE NEW TEACHER

Mrs. W. S. James is a new addition to our faculty. She is a native of Orangeburg, S. C. She received her high school education at Wilkinson High School in Orangeburg where she was in the top five of her class and an honor student. She graduated from high school in 1951 and went on to continue her education at South Carolina State College, where she received her A.B. degree in English in 1955. She completed her work for her master's degree in the summer of 1961.

When asked what she thought of the students of our school she said, "Most of the students seem to be very nice, intelligent and cooperative." She was asked what she thought of the school, she replied, "Because I am interested in the teaching profession, I find that W. Gresham Meggett, like all other schools, is the most important place one can spend the majority of her time." She continued, "So far I have enjoyed my stay and hope that it will become more joyful as the year passes on."

Mrs. James' hobbies are reading, sewing, and buying hats and shoes. Her special interest is "human nature." She is married and has no children.

The teachers and students of W. Gresham Meggett High are indeed lucky and proud to have Mrs. James as a new addition to our teaching staff.

—Julia Ann Pinckney

MRS. McMILLAN MEGGETT'S ONLY FEMALE BUS DRIVER

Mrs. Arlene McMillan, Meggett's only woman bus driver, says, "I feel proud to have the honor and privilege of being the only adult bus driver, and I find it rather enjoyable. I have met different kinds of personalities as far as students are concerned and I feel that there is nothing more important than obeying the rules and regulations of the school, so I

MISS ANNABELLE WALKER IS CROWNED

As eight o'clock drew near on Friday, December 2, both teachers and students were growing restless wondering who would be crowned Miss W. Gresham Meggett.

Representing the first grades were Miss Corretta Thomas and Miss Argentia Richardson. From the second grade came Miss Claudette Richardson, who was crowned Miss W.G.M. of the Elementary School. Through the doors of the third grades came Patricia Brown and Geraldine Chavis. From the fourth grade came Alfreda Gourdine, from the fifth came Arcade Whaley, and from the sixth grades came Aletha Middleton and Geraldine Prioleau.

The representatives from the junior high level were Elizabeth Robinson and Evangeline Greene from the seventh grades, and Isabelle Brown, Maggie Gilliard and Barbara Goss were representatives from the eighth grades. Through the colorful corner of the ninth grades came Judy Pinckney, Patricia Riley and Virginia Richardson. From the tenth grades came Julia Mae Seabrook and Annabelle Walker, who was crowned Miss W. Gresham Meggett High.

Annabelle is a member of class 10-2. This is the third year that this class, whose advisor is Mrs. G. B. Bennett, has won this coveted title.

Last but not least came the eleventh grades, whose representatives were Doloris Brown and Henrietta Smalls.

Mr. William Richardson, one of the faculty members, and Francis Hopkins, a student in Mr. D. A. Mack's class, sang in honor of our new queens. Mary Robinson danced.

—Naomi Singleton, Special Reporter

SENIORS COMPLETE PROJECT

Seniors attending the masonry class for the second year have constructed a flower box in front of W. Gresham Meggett's work shop on Sol Legare, in one of their second class projects in two years.

Seniors have finished constructing benches for the W. Gresham Meggett campus and front hall and for the Murray-LaSaine Elementary School in their first class project of last year.

When special activities are held, the masonry class along with the Agriculture Dept. participate in the arrangements of such activities as the football field, the senior class play props, the Junior-Senior Prom, and the Miss W. Gresham Meggett Contests.

—Thomas Chavis, Reporter

try my best in carrying them out."

It was difficult at first for both driver and students. The students had to get accustomed to obeying the rules of bus riding and Mrs. McMillan had to get used to students breaking a few of them, much to her annoyance. Now that they understand each other, all the children feel that she is one of the most likeable persons anyone could ever meet.

—Christopher Pinckney

HOMECOMING CROWD ENJOYS SPECIAL TREAT

Halftime activities at the Homecoming game were impressive and exciting. Besides the beautifully dressed grade-level queens, the fast stepping Bonds-Wilson band performed, and letters were formed by the seventh and eighth grade girls who were dressed in white sweaters and skirts.

Miss W. Gresham Meggett High, Miss Mildred Washington, was dressed very queenly. Mildred wore a two-piece suit of gold featuring the stylish fitted short jacket and a full pleated skirt. She wore black accessories. All the queens paraded down the center of the field, faced the team and came back to their places of honor. Grade-level and organization queens were as follows:

Margaret Counts, Little Miss W. Gresham Meggett; Melvina Whaley, Miss Senior; Rosemary Coleman, Miss Periscope; Mable Chisolm, Miss Future Teacher; Emily Pinckney, Miss Eighth Grade; Elizabeth Matthews, Miss Freshman; Deloris Brown, Miss Junior; Cassandra Lee Singleton, H. Y. Sweetheart; Kathy Richardson, Miss Dramatic Club, and Elizabeth Robinson, Miss Senior Class.

Miss Sylvia Garrett, Lincoln's queen, appeared in the parade of queens. She faced her team from the center of the gridiron while the Bonds-Wilson band played her Alma Mater. At the end of the presentation of queens, Meggett's Alma Mater was sung by her fans and student body.

Meggett's first and only game under lights was an impressive affair.

MEGGETT ALUMNUS REPORTS FOR ACTIVE DUTY

"On Monday, I shall report for active duty to the U. S. Army Chemical School at Fort McClellan, Alabama, for the purpose of studying a chemical orientation course," says William Prioleau, a graduate of W. Gresham Meggett High School and a 1961 graduate of South Carolina State College.

Mr. Prioleau further stated that after initial training at Fort McClellan he would then serve as a platoon leader at the United States Chemical Arsenal, Rocky Mountains, Denver, Colorado. Later, he will train as a Paratrooper, perhaps at Fort Benning, Georgia. He would like to continue his education if possible if he resumes civilian life after October, 1963.

Being a reserve officer, the prospective lieutenant further elaborated, his objective is now to become a regular army officer. Should he become a regular army officer, he will make the army his career. "If I don't like the life of an officer, I shall serve my required years and resign. I shall then return to graduate school to study for my master's degree in my field of interest, chemistry later to obtain a Ph.D., if possible, in the field of bio-chemistry."

Mr. Prioleau left shortly after our talk to assume his army duties. He joins the swelling group of graduates of W. Gresham Meggett in the armed service.

"On James Island, they demanded perfection and high standards of learning. And they felt that every child should be equipped to attain those high levels of education. So, in terms of writing, our penmanship had to be perfect. We learned how to print and we learned cursive. And that was the practice, because it was a reflection of the person. And I can remember the teachers stressing to make the curves absolutely perfect." – Deborah Barrett

"I loved Gresham Meggett, because the teachers that I had, if you were studious and wanted to learn, they would make sure you got everything that they had..." – Charlotte Dunn

"Based on seeing the professional black women, I was like whoa, you get the education, and you carry yourself well, articulate. From Gresham Meggett I learned there were times when in my nursing career when I would have to come before a group, having watched those teachers. I always considered myself to have two languages, standard English and if I was in a group where they were talking Geechee or Gullah, I could move right along, and I saw that in the teachers. They were professional women. They'd trust. They would learn. Okay, it is possible. It is possible." – Charlotte Dunn

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"And so when they talk about it now, and lifting up women, I say well, I always saw that. They were black women but that's who I am..." – Charlotte Dunn

"And the instructors, many of them had master's degrees. Almost, as you would imagine, almost all their undergraduate degrees were from all-black schools. And many of their advanced degrees were from all-black schools." –Terry Fox, Teacher

"Well, there was a great deal of cohesion in the faculty, and I think everyone who was there really wanted to do the right thing and do the best things for the students." – Terry Fox, Teacher

"Gwendolyn Manigault. She was also my homeroom teacher. Very good math teacher. I had two very good math teachers here. She was one of them and before her was Ms. Nema Bennett. ... those two ladies – no one after that taught me math like they did. I minored in math." – Wilburn Gilliard

"...I talked to the guidance counselor. She was telling me about you need to consider going to school. And the question was how? How can I go? So she started to tell me about there

are things like student loans, work scholarships and some other things. God, I had no idea what was involved. So she laid it all out. And I really appreciate what she did, because she was a big help in that area for me. Encouraged me to go.... And like I said, that was her first year here. First year we had a guidance counselor. And when you sit and think back on some things, you're very grateful to some people that had some effect on your life early on that you didn't really realize early on what roles they played." – Wilburn Gilliard

"Gresham Meggett mean a lot to me because right now, all the rest of schools that blacks used to go to, they either tore it down or it's not there anymore. And to have Gresham Meggett still standing there, it means a lot. We cherish that. We have some good times at Gresham Meggett. The teachers there mean a lot. The teachers see that we grow up in the right direction.... Back that time, the teachers really cared about you. Because either you going to do the work, and if you don't do the work, they going to keep you after school and make you do it." – Edward Greene

"Oh, yes, they all would tell us that you got a responsibility to get our work, and if we don't get our work, how do we expect to achieve and get ahead. You say that education is one thing that when you get an education, nobody can take that away. And they described to us to do better. And especially in the future if you want to go to college, you need to study, you need to get your work." – Edward Greene

"And we used to walk from down there at Ocean View and Fort Johnson Road, had to walk to school. And when we missed the bus, we used to have to catch Big Rich [Mrs. Richardson, English Teacher]. She had a '55 Chevy. All of us used to miss the bus, so we have to get on Big Rich and we have to sit on Tubby [indistinct 00:43:23] lap. And he drive that car be all the way down and back and he bring us to school...When we miss it, then we have to walk to school." – Edward Greene

"Oh yes. I was well prepared.... So, when I was getting ready to select my college, I wanted to go to the closest college, but the toughest college in the state. I didn't want to go to just any school. And, so, at that time, South Carolina State was the top school in this state. And it was the closest." – Diane Hamilton, Teacher

"My students will tell you right now, if you could talk with them or some of them, they would tell you that I would not allow them to say well I can't do this, that or the other—that's, that wasn't, I wasn't—my mother told us no, we are not going to say, I can't. And I do the same

thing with me along the way, I told my students we can't, no we are not going to say it. I can't do that, I can't—yes, you can." – Willie James, Teacher

"Oh, and then nurturing, let me just tell you also that besides that, we had teachers like Mrs. James who, even though she taught English, that's what I went, you know, to her class for. She was a person that always practiced trying to teach the girls, you know, how to act and how to be a lady, and how to dress. You know? So, a lot of times we would look at her and try to model, you know, the way she dressed. And she was just a wonderful role model, I thank, for the girls. And was very friendly with the guys as well, you know? Everybody could relate to her." – Anna Johnson

[Talking about Mr. Anderson, the principal] "But I think that, in my heart, I saw this big tall man. And I wanted to do what is right. And to be like him and some of the teachers." – Ronald Middleton

"The teachers back then, they took care. They took—They were interested, or they wanted you to succeed ... The way they tried to instill this motivation inside of you. And the thing about it, it prepared me for my life when I went out." – Ronald Middleton

"Well, I had I guess that eagerness you would call it to want to achieve more than – our teachers encouraged us, to coin a phrase, to be more than you can be or as one of the Military say it. So we were always encouraged to do more. Not less. We were never discouraged saying that we couldn't do anything or we couldn't be anybody. I don't ever remember any teacher ever saying that we would be not successful." – Isaac Moore

"But there were positive and strict teachers. Very influential. They'd make you learn. If you didn't learn, then they'll take whatever action necessary to help you to learn. But we had the drive and the eagerness to want to learn, want to succeed. And our parents were behind us. Key factor. Parents. Parental concern, interest, influence." – Thomas Prioleau

"Now, I observed the teachers. The way they dressed, the way they taught us, the way that they expect us to learn, the way they motivate us to learn to do better so that not only that they could feel good about it, they wanted to see us excel because then their job would have been completed. – Thomas Prioleau

[Talking about support of Gullah heritage and language by teachers at Gresham Meggett] “I loved my teachers because. At the time, I was not aware of it, but after I went away to school, then learning the distinction in the speech—For example, at Fisk I didn’t talk much my first year because of my sensitivity of not speaking probably instantaneously correct English.” – David Richardson

“Now, the reason why I went to Fisk was because of Leroy Anderson the Principal. He was a graduate, and it were his recommendation that got me into Fisk. Not only because of my grades, but I learned later on, he says, ‘Fisk may not need David, but David needs Fisk.’ And that was one of the key factors that got me admitted.” – David Richardson

“When they would brainstorm in the faculty meetings... The Principal encouraged that and they developed—they had sort of a friendship among them, so it was like—among the teachers it was like a family. And their dedication towards the children, they went the extra way and distance to be able to find information to teach them that would supplement what was deficient in the books.” – David Richardson

[Talking about teachers at St. James Parochial School] “And the amazing thing is too that when the public school was open, they used to send their used books over here to the St. James Parochial School, and the books were torn. They were written in. I mean, pages were torn out. But the books were written and scribbled all over, but, you know, the teachers had to work with whatever they were given. They made the best out of it, and they taught the students well.” – Cassandra Roper

“It didn’t make a difference who you were, you know. And as long as you gave the impression that you wanted to learn, they were willing to sacrifice. And they used to sacrifice because sometimes they would stay after school to ensure that you had an understanding of this particular thing that maybe you didn’t get in class, you know. So, yes, they did nurture us.” – Cassandra Roper

“Back during the time that I went to school, it was all African American teachers. They pushed us to learn because I think they realized that it was not going to be easy. They realized where they came from, that it was not going to be easy for us African American students moving forward. So they were persistent. They were committed, and they were—they loved us as children.” – Cassandra Roper

(Would you say that the teachers helped to nurture you?) “Oh, my god.” (How would you describe that? What do you mean when you said that? They nurtured you?) “Expectations. Encouragement and empowerment that you have the power to do anything you put your mind in. But you’ve got to put your mind into it. Don’t let distracters, including your friends, not even me as your teacher, though I’m going to push you to do better. I love you, but you’re not going to sit here idly by and waste my time, your time, and most definitely your parents’ time, because they want you here to be educated. And so the empowerment was there. And you got it at home in a loving way. Here in the schoolhouse, it was no different as to we have expectations. If you’ve got a question, ask it. But you will learn. You can learn, so therefore do.” – Ned Roper

“And one story I can tell you about Lawrence is, he wasn’t a good student. He didn’t care for school. Mother and Daddy were constantly at the school behind him; black principal, black assistant principal. And so, he started carrying this briefcase. And my mother was like, woohoo, finally he’s focused on his education. All right. So, come to find out, when they got the call from the school to come in because there, there needed to be a meeting, he had converted a briefcase to a carriable bar. Yes. Oh, my goodness. How he didn’t get expelled? I do not know. Maybe by the grace of God through my parents, and the churches, and such like. But when stuff like that happened, you know, the schools in those days, they, they worked with you.” – Terrie Washington

“Yeah, our coaches were our heroes, Mr. Green and Mr. Mack. We had them in very high esteem—and Mr. Richardson. You know, kids like me, the teachers, we give them nicknames. Mr. Richardson, we used to call—started calling him “Topper”.... And Mr. Green, we used to call Mr. Green “Lover Boy,” because he used to be clean and sharp.” – Willie Wilder

“And so, and the teachers had patience and they always tell you that you are somebody. You are somebody. And that uniqueness with the teachers and the parents and the discipline, it led to a learning atmosphere.” – Willie Wilder

Resourcefulness

“...if you didn’t have the resource for anything else, it didn’t stop me from learning what that book had. It qualified as a book. It may have been old but you learned that you can put, when you get to something new, add that on top of that.” – Charlotte Dunn

"But I was always one to use additional materials to supplement the textbook. Plus, at that time, I had some of my college books which were, had information that—So, I could supplement from my college textbooks. And, then, I knew where the library was. I would go to the library and I would do research." – Diane Hamilton, Teacher

"Key word being moving forward with the little that you had and what you did. So we talked about what strength they had to offer. The courses and the books, and the courses and the books here clearly, I shared that again with Dr. Salters, because some of our books were used, batter[ed], some parts were not there. So you go to what you've got." – Ned Roper

MEGGETT SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Impressions

"...the students were positive images, you know. The players on the—on the football team, they went out like—I mean, Fighting Eagles. And the girls would—we would be cheering. And we couldn't wait for the pep rally. All of these things—I don't even know if the children today know what a pep rally is. And—and we would be all fired up, you know, academically and socially, with all the different activities. They had the choir. And we supported each other. When something was going on—there was a play—everybody was there. The parents were there with the PTA, and they were doing a lot of things." – Deborah Barrett

"So we worked very hard, and they recognized that and they reinforced that. And that carried on throughout all of my elementary days. And, even when I got to high school, which is the place that I was looking forward to going to after I left King's Highway, then going to W. Gresham Meggett, and I felt like there was a wealth of education there. And all of the smart, big students were there. And I wanted to be among them." – Deborah Barrett

"We were in the first building. It [W. Gresham Meggett] was marvelous. Because we used to have to cut wood at times [at other schools]. The older guys would have to cut wood at times to bring into the school and replenish the wood that had already burnt to keep us warm in these one-room buildings. We always had these potbelly stoves. The one that's shaped like this. And to come here, it was the greatest treat in the world. The distance of walking was shorter." Thomas Prioleau

"So we had the school, brand new school, brand new desks and all that stuff. Lighting. You know? It was a treat. We were the big dogs. Okay? Second in line, because as I said, the eighth graders were first. Yeah. Oh, yes. New smell, new." - Thomas Prioleau

"If I recall correctly, we watched that school [high school addition] being built from the front vestibule, the principal office in the front. We watched the entire development of that school. Cafeteria, all of it. All the way along and the other leg. We used to sit in English class back in the elementary section and watch those workers work as we were learning. We watched them work. H.A. DeCosta, who was the contractor, built I think the entire school. I think he built the first part. My brother wound up working for him. ...And to show you how much of a small world it was, I learned about that after I went to college". - Thomas Prioleau

"When you talk about W. Gresham Meggett, it has very strong, deep meaning to most of us, because this was it. We didn't know anything else. It's just like home. Your home. Where you grew up. Just the same as Meggett. It helped shape our lives. The teachers, students, other staff members we had, they helped us to become who we are today." - Wilburn Gilliard

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"We used to look forward to come to school daily. Look forward to come, go to classes, especially when we were changing classes. We couldn't wait to get to our French class, which was based upon what was being discussed and what people were learning. We couldn't wait until we could go to our math class and see what were we going to do today? And we were eager, most of us were eager and ready to participate, because we wanted to be top of the class." - Thomas Prioleau

"And then, we played some schools up country [in football]. And I just always wonder why the schools always had the same shape as W. Gresham Meggett. And I never figured that out until I started reading on the history that they built 150 of these schools all over South Carolina for integration to keep the black kids and white kids from coming together. And they were calling them segregated schools." - Willie Wilder

School Discipline

"But I can tell you back in the day, if you misbehaved, the teachers had no problem disciplining you. ...when you got home, you know, you got more of what the teacher gave you. But the

thing, the thing about it they come, we finally became to realize was that they did it, but they love us. They love us, they cared about us.” – Nathaniel Backman

“But we had a no-nonsense football team. Strict rules, we abide by.... And I learned that the discipline that they taught us, that’s what I borrowed in life from them. Those are things that has followed me.” – Wilburn Gilliard

“Mr. Anderson was a tough cookie ... he used to go around carrying a [whip]... And we used to go to the store. Just before you get to Gresham Meggett School, there was a store near, about 200 feet away from the school... Patsy’s Store. And we used to go in there. And the bell used to ring. Mr. Anderson come in there with that whip [laughs] and he cleaned the house [laughter], cleaned the house with that whip coming out there. Yeah, send you to class [laughter]. And he used to walk down the hallway. Anybody be walking down in the hall he used to use that whip. He cared about them [the students]. But he wanted them to be in class when the bell ring.” – Edward Greene

“My behavior and my ability to adjust [to] the discipline [of the military] owes a lot to Gresham Meggett and it owes a lot to just the neighborhood, the community that made sure that we, as the children of the community, did well and wasn’t disobedient and got in trouble.” – Isaac Moore

“I think even that a lot of them weren’t related, we still had the same values. The values were basically the same. The community raising the child values were the same, whether related or not. It didn’t make a difference whether you were related to somebody. Discipline was accorded to any child, whether they were your relative or not.” – Isaac Moore

“We were guided that in order for you to succeed, you must go to school and learn. That was support. If you got a whipping in school or you were detained in school because someone in the class misbehaved, once in a while we got out of line. But not often, because of the fact that you didn’t want to be whipped twice, see.” – Thomas Prioleau

“[Mr. Anderson] was very strict, and he would take you to the office if you did anything wrong. He would give you a whooping, you know. He would school you, and he would, you know, really be a parent.” – Emma Richardson

"Mr. Anderson was our Principal up until I left. We used to call him "Lash LaRue, "because he used to walk [laughs] with a little rawhide hook about that long. And if he'd catch you in the hallway, 'Hey! Everybody get out of Mr. Anderson's way,' you know, so we used to call him "Lash LaRue," because if he catch you, he isn't playing with you." – Willie Wilder

The New York Connection

"And when I went to New York, where people felt that New Yorkers were more knowledgeable, I was the only one that knew more about blackness than they did in the North." – Deborah Barrett

"After I completed the seventh grade, my mother took me to New York. And I went to school in New York." – Deborah Barrett

"I can compete with any New Yorker. As a matter of fact, I was on the honor roll. So I never at any point felt that I was not prepared or I could not compete. Even though it was always said that New Yorkers were smart, I thought that I was smart when I got there." – Deborah Barrett

(After you graduated from college, what did you do?) "I went to New York." – Vivian Ingram

"See, there was still an impression that, the north was better, which it was, because we were more geared toward not getting the income and the type of jobs we were entitled to as everybody else. So, there we go again. My mother and father made the decision to send them up north." – Terrie Washington

"I had an aunt that lived in New York. But at that time, the unemployment office would have jobs for the students that went to college, you know, at some resort. They could find a job at a resort during the summertime. And so, I was told about this business in New York that had one of those jobs. So, I said, well, oh, well, that was a job. I couldn't get something here. Let me go, let me get out of here." – Anna Johnson

"So my sister and her husband lived in New York, I went to stay with them for awhile." (Which one of your sisters?) "Carol Jean. Got a job as soon as I got there working at a bank. Chase Manhattan Bank I think it was. In the check processing, working at night. So, that went okay for a while. Kind of found some friends and family members out there in New York, and

would, you know, see them, we would hang out. You know, just— after about six months, took a vacation, came home for Thanksgiving.” – Nathaniel Backman

“...I did not want to be a nanny, keep children in the house. Some of my classmates, that’s what they did, and so I cried so much at breakfast, at the table, that my mother put me on a train and I went to New York where I had family and then I stayed with one of my cousins and she took me to all the nursing schools there in New York.” – Charlotte Dunn

“I came home and spent a week here in Charleston, and I moved to New York.” – Wilburn Gilliard

“I graduated from Gresham Meggett in 1963. But before I graduated from Gresham Meggett, I came here in—I came here from New York in the 7th grade.” – Cassandra Roper

“You know, when one couldn’t take care of the child, the other one [helped out]—so as a result of her rearing me, she had children who were in New York City. So every summer, the children would send for her to come to New York, so that’s how my early years started going back and forth every summer to New York. And I attended school on—after a number of years. Then, I started public school on Sol Legare up to the third grade, or the second grade. And then she went to New York City and she stayed with one of her daughters, Florence Walker. During that time, I attended PS15—PS57 in Brooklyn, New York, which was an integrated school.” – Cassandra Roper

“So, at the age of about six, my aunt—my grandmother died. She died in 1947. And my aunt came down. And at the time, the older folks didn’t mind. They had so many kids, they didn’t mind giving up the kids. So, my aunt wanted me, so she took me to New York. And so, I raised up in Harlem. I lived on 127th Street between Greenwich Avenue and 5th Avenue in New York.” – Willie Wilder

INEQUALITIES, INTEGRATION, AND CLOSURE

“Well, yeah, because see, I grew up on Folly. I knew that at 6:00 in the afternoon, if you were not a maid or a butler with a family that was vacationing, you need to get the hell off of there [Folly Beach], because the last bus at 6:00, yeah, you got to get out of there, okay.” - David Richardson

"I didn't know about segregated [school] until I came out here and... went on Folly Beach with my cousin. Because when I left here at [age] six, I didn't know anything about color. I was color blind. And when I came back, then I got the rude awakening about color and the different races. Because you have to stay in your place when I came back" – Willie Wilder

"And then, we wanted to play at James Island High School and football, W. Gresham Meggett. But they said, "No, we're not going to play. It wouldn't mix." They wouldn't play, but they kept us apart." – Willie Wilder

"Like, we would see there was white students guys driving their school bus. We would wave at each other, and they would go with the white kids and it was a black bus and we would go. We would wave at the bus drivers, because, you know, they were young guys like us. And we know we got our license. You had to go to special school to get your bus license and all that stuff. And we was always curious. I don't know how the white kids felt about integration." – Willie Wilder

Knowledge of Inequalities in Education

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"I was aware, because the black children were in one school, and it was all black, and the white children were in another school. The black children rode one bus, and the white children rode their bus. And we would see them in passing." – Deborah Barrett

"I knew Rivers was white, and, and Burke [in Charleston] was—Rivers was, was a vocational school, vocational school for, for if you were white, and Burke was a vocational course, shop course for blacks. So, we had Rivers, and we had Burke, black and white vocational training schools. Because, the white students were at the Rivers and took training. Blacks, we were at the Burke, brick mason. We had painting, tilling, carpentry, and home EC and painting." – Remus Cromwell

"We weren't even aware of the other schools. There weren't any in this area.... It was an adventure just to be in school, and we left out of an older building to come into a new building. So that was interesting in itself just doing that. So a lot of things community-wise or country-wise, statewide, we weren't aware of. We were kids." – Wilburn Gilliard

"And I mean, this was it. That's all we knew. I mean, nothing else. Nothing to compare it to. Only thing we knew of the white school that we received used books from the white schools. And that's all we knew about them." – Wilburn Gilliard

"Well, for one thing, we always get the old books. And I knew at the time that when we pay for books, we pay for new books. And we was told that some of the books you could see had 'James Allen High' in the book. So we knew the book come from them to us." – Edward Greene

"When time for our lights [for football], the James Allen people had their lights way before us. It took a long time for we to get our lights. And that's why we know we wasn't... (So how did you get your lights?) "Hard working parents ... raised the money themselves to get lights and put on different PTA teas and different stuff like that to get the money for the lights." – Edward Greene (Page 12)

"Segregated. It wasn't integrated, no. It was segregated. All blacks when I went to school. That's why we had to go from James Island to the city because they didn't have a black high school on James Island for us, for the blacks." – Vivian Ingram

"And we had a distance, you know, that you walked to the bus stop. So, the bus really made just probably like, about two stops on the road instead of, you know, just stopping at everybody's house. Now, ... I noticed that with the white kids they did differently. They stopped at the people's house. But we didn't have that." – Anna Johnson

"Well, right now, the whites had better educational tools than we had. When I say that— There is, the majority of our books, even though we had to pay for it, was used like hand me downs." – Ronald Middleton

"We didn't think about the fact that we were going to one day possibly come together. You know? We wanted to excel. Okay? And move on. We were given the older textbooks. Some textbooks were torn, ragged, pages missing, dirty. But we were given the leftovers. There were times when we didn't have the appropriate writing materials." – Thomas Prioleau

"What [Ned] Roper shared with me was that they only had one Bunsen burner in his chemistry class, and it was obvious that we knew that the white school had all the supplies that they

The NEW PERISCOPE

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Capacity Crowd Enrolls In Physical Education Class

With the construction of the new gymnasium showing promise of occupancy in the very near future, the physical education classes are eagerly awaiting the day when their classes will be transferred to the new gym with all of the essential facilities for the course.

Physical Education was placed in the curriculum of W. Gresham Meggett for the first time this year as an official one unit course. Instrumental in setting up the syllabus were Mr. J. M. Wilford and Mrs. W. E. Brown, physical education instructors for the boys and girls respectively. During an exclusive interview with a Periscope reporter the instructors explained the following general objectives:

1. To develop through physical education, an awareness of, a desire for, and growth in a healthy, happy expression of democratic ideals.
2. To develop those ideals which we have come to identify as representative of democracy in the highest sense. The central factor in this ideology is health. By health we mean not only physical well being, but mental, emotional and social balance.
3. To develop an awareness of the rights of others, a willingness to assume responsibility for the welfare of oneself and of others, and an ability to arrive at reasonable decisions through independent thinking by means of game situations and class participation.
4. To help the student to understand his own problems, to set goals for himself, and to take the (Continued on Page 4)

Basketball Added To Athletic Dept. At Meggett

Another outgrowth of physical education in our curriculum is the formation of basketball teams for girls and boys to be coached by Mrs. W. E. Brown and Mr. J. M. Wilford.

The necessary steps have already been taken to affiliate the teams with the AA conference when the necessary preparations are completed. Tryouts have been conducted, and the coaches feel that the two teams show great potentials.

Intra-mural games have been held within the P. E. classes as a means of motivation. However, it is to be clearly understood that a tremendous amount of preparation and experience will be necessary before the school teams will undertake conference and district games on a competitive basis. The tentative schedule of games for the 1966-67 school term will be non-conference.



Mr. Garvin (right) discusses wood-wind sounds with the superintendent, Mr. E. A. O'Sheasy (center) and Mr. A. J. Evans, principal, (left).

President Encourages Aids

Students Embrace Summer Federal Positions In City

By Emily Pinckney

Once again students from W. Gresham Meggett are applying for summer positions at the Charleston Naval and Air Force Bases. These jobs as aids were made available through the passage of the Job Opportunity Program, which enables high school students to work as federal aids on government jobs, in an effort to further their education.

Last year, Josephine Washington, Daniel Smalls, James Blake, Joseph Brown, Emily Pinckney, and Elvira Gilliard (a graduate of 1965) were employed at the Charleston Naval Base.

In a personal letter which President Johnson sent to each of the student employees, he wrote, "In this troubled world in which we live it is essential to the welfare and future of our nation that we maintain strong defenses. Our armed forces today are the most powerful in the history of the world. To maintain this defense organization in a state of readiness requires skills of every type, military and civilian."

He further pointed out, "You

are now a part of the military-civilian team which provides the strength upon which the whole society of free men depends. Your job, whether it involves relatively simple or complex tasks, is important to the armed forces."

The letter was concluded with these dynamic words, "We are all working for the defense of the free world and for the cause of peace, and no task can be more rewarding. I know that you will do all in your power to further this cause."

This year, Benjamin Wigfall, Isaac Hamilton, Ronald Brown, Richard Walker and James Roper have already secured jobs at the Charleston Air Force Base.

85 Members In Marching Band

Long Desired School Band Is Finally Organized At Meggett

The biggest item of interest on the campus today is the newly formed marching band consisting of 85 members under the direction of Mr. Syke Garvin. Six majorettes, four twirlers, and a drum major are also being groomed to perform with the group.

The band marks another FIRST in the history of W. Gresham Meggett High School. It is the realization of a dream of the members of this community.

1965-1966

Big Year

At Meggett



A tuba was donated by Chicora High School and a bass drum and set of cymbals were donated by the Parent Teachers Association of W. Gresham Meggett High. With the exception of these, all of the other instruments have been purchased by the parents of the students who are participating.

Having only been organized since the outset of the 1965-66 school year, the group has already made several appearances on programs and at games. "A more formal debut, however, will be staged at a later date after more preparation and more experience," explained Mr. Garvin.

He further expressed his desire not only to work with a marching band, but to also organize a brass choir, a wood-wind choir, a percussion group, a concert group and a stage band in the very near future after the basic training has been mastered.

Installation Ceremonies Are Conducted

Mr. F. D. McCrex installed the members of the Honor Society during a special assembly program which was held at the school on February 23.

The main highlight of the program was the presentation of four "Keys of Virtue", Character, which was explained by Lucretia Ann Whaley; Scholarship, by Nathaniel Green; Leadership, by Marlene Richardson; and Service, by Delores Green.

Other participants on the program included Ethelia Richardson, Audrey Chisholm, Melvena Washington, Angela Brown, Mrs. G. G. Spears, the advisor, the band under the direction of Mr. Syke Garvin and the principal, Mr. A. J. Evans who made remarks.



The members of the band engage in a routine rehearsal.

Mr. Garvin gives instructions to Jacquelyn Whaley (left) and Mildred Richardson (right).

New Band Highlights Gala Homecoming Festivities

By Annie L. Drayton

Hundreds of enthusiastic fans thronged to the Meggett Stadium for one of the most spectacular Homecoming games ever to be held the school.

Enthusiasm was high for several reasons. First and foremost among them was probably the new attraction of a "BAND", which was scheduled to perform during the half time festivities. Perhaps the average football fan, the performance of a band during half time activities has no significance. But somehow on the Island, things were just a little different. THIS WAS OUR BAND. This was the first big school band in the history of W. Gresham Meggett High School. The were our students who marched out on the field under the direction of their band master, Mr. Syke Garvin. Oh, there have been guest bands used on other occasions, but this one belonged to us. And we were proud of them. It was astounding to hear the variety of songs that they had mastered since the opening of school.

Another reason for the excitement was the motorcade of beautifully and artistically decorated cars that participated in the festivities. Heading the group was the "Miss Homecoming Queen", Evangeline Smalls. Her attendants were Ethelia Richardson and Shirley Deleston. Others included "Miss Gresham Meggett", Peggy Richardson and her attendants, Carrie Bell Gilliard and Rosa Mae Seymour; "Miss Periscope", Beatrice Moultrie and her attendants, Penelope Richardson and Marsha Green; "Miss Patrol", Marie Evans and her attendants, Arcade Whaley and Bernetha Smith; "Miss English", Imel Roper; "Miss Hi-Y", Martha Richardson; "Mr. Tri-Hi-Y", Reginald Green; "Miss N.H.A.", Iona Wilder, with Ruth Wilder and Jacqueline Frazier; "Miss Library Club", Richardine Cromwell with Edith Gadsden and Edith Richardson; "Miss Dramatic Club", Bonita Grant with Pecola Hopkins

and Elizabeth Moore as attendants; "Miss Booster Club", Car Backman with Juanita Smalls as Thimassina Murray as attendant "Miss Music", Viola Drayton with Linda Heseck and Jeanet Wilder as attendants; "Miss Student Council", Kathleen Washington with Mary Alice Moore as Iola Cromwell as attendant "Miss Senior", Lena Seabrook with Ruby Seabrook and Charlot Roper as attendants; "Miss Junior", Brenda Middleton with Louise Robinson and Cher Wallace as attendants; "Miss Sophomore", Theresa Prioles with Verna Lee Richardson as Hazel Moore as attendants; "Miss Freshman", Helen Watson with Louise White and Marlene Richardson as attendants; and finally "Miss Sub-Freshman", He mena Grant, with Juanita Frazier, Vivian Drayton and Jestin Miller as attendants.

needed. He said that deficiency, [had an] impact on him not being able to study chemistry when he went to State. He had to choose something else. I know that my biology course here was not strong enough. I took biology at Fisk. I had no calculus or—I had a course in geometry, but that was the extent of it. If I had some of the additional courses, I probably would have studied medicine. I just did not have my science—What they call it now? STEM? STEM courses.” – David Richardson

“You know? I really didn’t think that much about it at that time, but, when I was transferred to James Island High School, I could see there was a big difference.” – Emma Richardson

[Talking about how she responded to her sister’s rebellion against integration] “So, that gave me a good feeling, like, oh, somebody’s got my back. They’re trying to, you know, keep Meggett alive, and make a decision that’s going to impact me later on.” – Terrie Washington

Integration

“I personally know students that I had gone to school with, at Gresham Meggett, who made the attempt, who went to James Island, and maybe stayed there a year, some of them, in most cases, the few, couldn’t stay a year, and they came back to Gresham Meggett. They couldn’t focus on getting an education because of the harassment and... and all the other stuff that was going on.” – Nathaniel Backman

“So there was racial tension but that didn’t stop my parents. My daddy would say to her, Katie [her sister], you go down there [James Island High School] because I will fight and so she went.” – Charlotte Dunn

“Yeah, I had my baby sister went there and then I had three of my sister went there. Three of my sister went to James Island High School.” (DR: “Did y’all ever talk about the difference in the experience?”) “Only thing I know they say is they didn’t like the idea. They would have liked to finish Gresham Meggett because at that time it seemed like they wasn’t being treated equal. And they always talk about it. “We really want to [finish] Gresham Meggett.” – Edward Greene

“...I think that was a difference in Fort Johnson and Gresham Meggett. Our, the students at Gresham Meggett, were students who respected teachers, they wanted an education,

they spent the time, they didn't spend time on other things, but just on education." – Willie James, Teacher

"I would, you know, when we first went over to Fort Johnson, we were accustomed to walking in the office, good morning, and they, over at, over at Gresham Meggett, everybody, good morning, how are you Miss James, what did you do this weekend, we would just be talking, you know, things like that. But when I went, when I first went to Fort Johnson, we walked in there, and they'd say, good morning, and people looking as though, looking at us as though we were crazy. They said nothing. So we said wait a minute, what's wrong here? We are accustomed to talking and conversation, and people saying hello. And no one, oh for the longest, a good while, over that entire year, people did not say, but do you think we got all upset and started cussing and carrying on, because they didn't do it? No. I went on down to my classroom and smiled to myself. You know, because that, that was good, that was what you were supposed to do, but it wasn't anything that made you, you know, where you work, or made you happy or sad, well it didn't do it for me. So that was some, one thing that we talked about a lot, but we just laughed about it." – Willie James, Teacher

[On whether integration was successful] "You know I think that it was good in some ways, but not too good in others simply because, and it, and this is going to be the case now, because people are different... I think that it was a help to some, and you know what I think? I think that it is getting even better now. I think the situation is getting better now. At first, it wasn't that good. But I think it's getting a little better now." – Willie James

[Talking about transferring to James Island High School before closure of Gresham Meggett] "You were the only one in that class, you know, and that, in my case, I was the only one in my class. I had no other blacks in my class. (How did it feel being isolated like that?) "Well, I wish that somebody would come up and talk with me, you know, or show me some kind of levels, but they didn't." – Emma Richardson

[At James Island High School] "The teachers, you know, they did what they had to do. I mean, they did not go out of their way, you know, any specialties, to help or to communicate. If you needed help, they were there to help you because they know they needed to do that, you know, but they were just like the kids, you know." – Emma Richardson

"Most of my siblings were through W. Gresham Meggett, and with her [referring to sister] being the one—I don't think she was anticipating desegregation, so she was always the

rabble-rouser. I think she resented it at that point, but she adapted. But there were a lot of riots, you know, and disagreements by the time she got to James Island High School. So, they were always tugging and pulling with the teachers and the administrators over at James Island High School. We didn't have a true identity when she came through, and so I think that was difficult for her to adapt to." – Terrie Washington

[On finding out about the integration of James Island High School] "In terms of learning about it, it was all over the media. The schools made you aware of it. And the churches definitely were an integral role player; Reverend Cornelius Campbell was here. He was very much an advocate for us being calm, and rational, and being responsible about our responsibility, and what a good thing it was going to be. But that's a major change, so a lot of people didn't really want it. They felt we could succeed and do better on our own, but my parents didn't have that attitude. I think with us being white and black, we knew that we could not stay within that black world, like a lot of people wanted us to be. And he says, no, our children need to be structured like everybody else, and have the same benefits of everybody else." – Terrie Washington

[On Riots at James Island High School after Integration] "Yes. James Island had quite a few. As a matter of fact, when I spoke about Reverend Campbell, even as a part of worship, or they would have community meetings, he would remind everybody: be respectful, don't take any weapons, don't take any hammers or clubs, or you know, be respectful of the other students that are at the school, don't do anything that's going to make the community look bad, your parents look bad, and such like. But like I said, they really didn't care too much for the idea of having to give up all that they were connected to and start all over with another school." – Terrie Washington

[Talking about the transition to James Island High School] "Now, from my understanding, I heard that they got a lot of name calling was done. And I heard that they wanted to—I heard this, but I was not there, but I heard that all our football trophies or all the trophies that we won for football and home economics, agriculture and stuff like that, that they didn't want our trophies in their trophy case, so they wanted to throw our trophies out." – Willie Wilder

"And I remember a math teacher, Mrs. Jansen [at Fort Johnson]. Her classroom was on a hallway that was perpendicular to mine. But in order to get to the faculty restroom, she had to pass my door. And we had to stand in front of our door. And she would pass. And when

she get [turns away and puts her nose in the air]—But by the time she retired, ... All that had changed, of course.” – Diane Hamilton, Teacher

Closure

“I think for us who had, tend to be those who had graduated and then for us who were still there at the time when the word came down that school was going to, and it wasn’t something that we’d gotten notice about a year or two, or you know maybe two years, I mean it was like, it was like, sudden, suddenly happening, you know. And some of us were, well we were heart broken, it was devastating, because the school, you know we had, I mean it was such an integral part of the community, you know.” – Nathaniel Backman

“Now, I had no warning and no earthly idea—Maybe I should have known, but I didn’t know that they were going to close Gresham Meggett and, you know, integration was going to come.” – Diane Hamilton

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“...when I came home that one weekend [from New London, Connecticut], I saw that I had mail. And the mail was a letter from the superintendent’s office saying that I must report to the superintendent at such and such a date, such and such a time. And that—And I went to that appointment. That’s when I found out Meggett had closed. They did no preparation, nothing. That’s how we found out.” – Diane Hamilton

“I was very upset, myself, and I’m sure other teachers were as well, were upset, because the relationship that we had with our students, certainly if we knew that we were going to another school, we would have gotten them together and would have tried to encourage them to do the best that you can in this new setting. You know that you can do it, and ...we would have encouraged them to no end to continue what they were doing and do even better. But you know what? They really ...had enough of that within them that, and I guess we had helped them with, and their parents, that we didn’t have that to worry about, but we, we did as teachers.” – Willie James



Graduates of W. Gresham Meggett High School attend a National Register of Historic Places Review Board meeting, Columbia, South Carolina, 2017.



W. Gresham Meggett Class Ring. Source: Thomas Prioleau

IX. Conclusion

The project focused specifically on oral histories collected from alumni and faculty members from the W. Gresham Meggett Elementary and High School. This historically significant school, a product of South Carolina's equalization program, provided education for James Island's African American children from 1953 to 1969. It still stands. After its closing, it became home to the Septima P. Clark Corporate Academy vocational school in 1994 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017, with the strong support of its alumni, many of whom traveled to Columbia for the triumphant occasion.

These oral histories provide witness to the school's cultural meaning to the close-knit island community. When asked about its legacy, Wilburn Gilliard (page 22) replied:

"When you talk about W. Gresham Meggett, it has very strong, deep meaning to most of us, because this was it. We didn't know anything else. It's just like home. Your home. Where you grew up. Just the same as Meggett. It helped shape our lives. The teachers, students, other staff members we had, they helped us to become who we are today."

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Knowledge of the historic context of early twentieth-century education for African American children on James Island brings Mr. Gilliard's statement into relief. Given an avenue to achieve and despite having to work within the parameters of segregation, this community created an extraordinary educational experience, transforming the lives of all involved: students, parents, and teachers. In 1900, the occupations of the majority of the heads of black households on James Island were one of three: farmer, farm laborer, or laborer. By mid century, young men and women looked beyond farming as college, military service, and vocational training opened up new possibilities.

Many factors were involved in this success story – dedicated and professional teachers, small class sizes, a student body ready to learn and a chance with a new school. These all counted but the oral histories indicate that the foundational driver in this success was the value the community placed on education and that this value was shared by all. It truly was a "grassroots school". The W. Gresham Meggett High School story speaks to a specific chapter in our nation's journey toward equal education tied to a place and time where a whole community lifted itself and its sons and daughters to a new age.

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Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

Appendix A: Edited Interview Transcripts

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Nathaniel Backman

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 21, 2019 at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. David Richardson was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

David Richardson: Good afternoon, good morning. My name is David Richardson and I'm at the St. James Presbyterian Church Educational Building, sitting here with Mr. Backman. Let me ask you, sir, would you please give me your full name, and address please?

Nathaniel Backman: My name is Nathaniel Backman. I live at 1441 Fort Johnson Road here on James Island.

DR: And how old are you, sir?

NB: I am 67.

DR: And do I understand that you spent most of your time on James Island?

NB: Absolutely.

DR: So you, your childhood was also—

NB: Yes.

DR: And what area were you raised in?

NB: Initially I was raised in the community called Beefield [phonetic]. And at an early age, maybe around somewhere between 5 and 7, we moved from that community to another community called Scotthill [phonetic]. And I stayed there pretty much for the rest of my time on the Island, until I got older, married, and moved a short distance away. But I never really left the Island.

DR: So Beefield is in close proximity to Scotthill?

NB: Yes.

DR: Okay. And also where you live now?

NB: Yes.

DR: Tell me, what was your father's name please?

NB: My father's name was Moses Backman.

DR: And your mother's?

NB: Francina Backman.

DR: What was your father's occupation?

NB: Carpenter.

DR: Okay, and your mother?

NB: Housekeeping earlier, then she went into nursing.

DR: Do you have other siblings?

NB: Oh absolutely.

DR: How many are there?

NB: Oh, wow. I've got eleven, there are eleven of us. My mother had eight, three boys, five girls. And my father, in addition to that, has two more sons and another daughter.

DR: Was education emphasized in your household?

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: In what way would you say?

NB: Well, my mother most of all. She believed in us having an education. And, it wasn't something that we were allowed to play around with. Something that she believed in and she wanted us to take it serious, and take advantage of any opportunities that we had.

DR: Where did your parents attend school, do you know?

NB: My father, from what I understood, maybe just a few years of any kind of formal education. My mother, she, I think she attended the Immaculate Conception School.

DR: Where was that located?

NB: That's, Coming Street in Charlestown.

DR: And was that Catholic school?

NB: Yes. Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Catholic school for African-Americans?

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: And where do you think your father attended school?

NB: I couldn't even tell you. It was, like I said, it was just for maybe a couple of years.

DR: Did any of your siblings also went on to finish and went to get other trades?

NB: Well all of us graduated from high school. I've got a, I mean a sister who went into nursing and she's an R.N. All of us had skill, nobody really went onto college [indistinct] we all had skills in different fields.

DR: Did you say that your parents actively participated in your education?

NB: Again, my mother did. My father, because he was not a formally educated person, but he encouraged us to, again, pursue an education to the best that we could.

DR: And you said he was a carpenter?

NB: Yes, he was.

DR: And, in your opinion, he was a skilled carpenter?

NB: He was a Master Carpenter.

DR: So, but he did not have much of an education?

NB: Did not have I would say he, hardly any education. But it was a Master Carpenter.

DR: Where do you think he acquired his skills from?

NB: Dave, the only thing I can say is it had to have been a blessing from the Lord. It had to have been. He was able to, he was able to do things, particularly woodwork, that I mean trained professional folk didn't have the skill to do.

DR: You ever heard the term he had the bee in him?

NB: Well, yeah, I think we say the same thing in different ways.

DR: So tell me, you attended Gresham Meggett?

NB: Yeah, I did. I did. From the 8th grade until the 12th, I graduated, from Gresham Meggett —

DR: So where did—

NB: ...in 1969—

DR: From the 8th, below the 8th grade, from the 1st to the 8th, where did you go to school?

NB: I first started school way back and I think, I'm going to say, Gresham Meggett at one time was first through twelve, maybe, maybe, I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But my elementary education, I went to Kings Highway Elementary School, which is located at Fort Johnson and Camper.

DR: So from first grade, that's where you—

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: ...that's where you, was that a segregated school or was it integrated?

NB: No, no. It was segregated, definitely segregated.

DR: Who was your principal there?

NB: There was a lady, Miss [indistinct] was her name, and then after that, a gentleman by the name of Mister, I think, Davis, if I remember right.

DR: Hm-hmm. Davis—

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: ...you're correct.

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: So, that was from first grade to eighth grade.

NB: First to seventh.

DR: Seventh.

NB: Yeah.

DR: And after seventh grade, where did you go?

NB: After seventh grade, the eighth grade, I went to Gresham Meggett from eight to twelve.

DR: Now what, the first seven grades, did you have another class in the same room that your teacher was teaching?

NB: I remember, I particularly remember one year and I think I was in the fifth grade at the time, and her name was, Miss Penn [phonetic] was her name. And she had two grade levels. She had the fourth and the fifth.

DR: Fourth and the fifth grade?

NB: Fourth and the fifth in the same room, hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Now, do you remember approximately what year that might have been?

NB: Well, again, I think I was in, I think I was a fifth grader, yeah because there were some, okay the fourth grader, they were younger than me. So, I think I went to Gresham Meggett in '65 so then if you go back maybe two years—

DR: So that might have been '64—

NB: Might have been—

DR: ...'63, '64—

NB: ...'63, '64, hm-hmm. Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Do you remember some of your teachers at Gresham Meggett?

NB: Oh yeah. Yes I do.

DR: How did you feel the school prepared you for life?

NB: I think they did a good job. Just understanding, just understanding the world in which we live, and what it really took for us to be able to survive or to compete. And they were, discipline, it was like, it was like family. You know what they call it, they may call it abuse now. But I can tell you back in the day, if you misbehaved, the teachers had no problem disciplining you. Not only that—

DR: And that was with the blessing of the parents?

NB: Oh, it, I was about to say, not only that, when you got home, you know, you got more of what the teacher gave you. But the thing, the thing about it they come, we finally became to realize was that they did it, but they love us. They love us, they cared about us.

DR: So you think that they made a special effort to make up for the difference in the quality of the materials that you was provided by the state?

NB: Oh, absolutely.

DR: How do you see that they did that?

NB: Well oftentimes we would get, okay say just going from grade to grade, and then every year, you know, the books, you would have different study books. Oftentimes, the books that the school received, they were used books from somewhere else—

DR: So you're saying the teachers overcame that?

NB: Absolutely.

DR: So what, what do you remember they did to make up for the gap in the old books, second-hand books versus—

NB: Well, the, just the classroom, the teaching, the homework—

DR: Think teachers were more willing to assist students that might have been struggling a little bit?

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: So, you also believe that the teachers had the full support of the parents?

NB: Absolutely.

DR: How do you, how would you say that Gresham Meggett adequately prepared you for your life career?

NB: I would say with the skills and the knowledge and the teaching ability of the teachers, I believe that they did the very best that they could do. Look, here's the thing. Some things you don't realize until you have something to compare it with. And what I mean is at Gresham Meggett, we had some good students, and I consider myself as having benefitted, you know, good report card every year from elementary on. But after I left high school and I was around students that was from other areas, other states, then I was able to see that there were things that I was [indistinct] and I don't believe it's because, you know, I know it wasn't because the teachers just failed to teach, but if they didn't have the exposure to those things, then they couldn't pass them to their students. So, again, I would say at Gresham Meggett, the teachers did the best that they could.

DR: So you think that they were sufficiently prepared for the task of teaching African-American students?

NB: I would say so. I would say so.

DR: I understand that you live in the community, and well we are at St. James Presbyterian Church. Are you involved with this organization?

NB: Oh yes. Absolutely.

DR: How's that?

NB: Well, excuse me. Not only am I a member of the church, I'm a part of the governing body of the church. In fact, I'm an ordained Elder. And I've served on the governing board for over 12 years.

DR: So you're intricately a part of, is that a continuation of your ancestry?

NB: Absolutely.

DR: In what way does [indistinct]

NB: Well, that's, it's interesting that you ask that. The founders of this congregation, which derived from the James Island Presbyterian Church, which is the white church down the corner. One of the seven men that started this congregation was a Backman, so it's in my DNA.

DR: So how is that, is he related to you?

NB: Absolutely.

DR: In what way? What was his name by the way?

NB: Richard. Richard Backman.

DR: Okay. And how is Richard Backman related to you sir?

NB: I'm not exactly sure how the—

DR: Do you know who the father of Moses Backman was?

NB: Was Rich—

DR: It's Richard Backman?

NB: Richard Backman. Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: So that's possibly your grandfather that was the one who started organizing this church?

NB: I would say so.

DR: Let me re-direct your attention to Gresham Meggett.

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Do you feel the school was equal to the white school at James Island?

NB: I would say that the school was—No. No. Not in the ability to provide a student, the student with the type of educational opportunities that they needed so when someone—no.

DR: So you think Gresham Meggett was constructed for the purpose of preventing Blacks from going to James Island High School?

NB: I don't really, I don't really know. It was in the probably '67, '68 timeframe that I particularly remember that there were efforts to integrate, and have some of the Black students attend the White school. Some of them did.

DR: Did you have an opportunity to go?

NB: I did.

DR: But you chose not—

NB: I chose not to—

DR: Why?

NB: ...because of the challenges. The Black student, it's just being frank, was not welcomed there. They were deterred, they were discouraged, they were harassed—

DR: Where'd you get that information from?

NB: I personally know students that I had gone to school with, at Gresham Meggett, who made the attempt, who went to James Island, and maybe stayed there a year, some of them, in most cases, the few, couldn't stay a year, and they came back to Gresham Meggett. They couldn't focus on getting an education because of the, the harassment and—

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

NB: ...and all the other stuff that was going on.

DR: So the environment was definitely a hostile one?

NB: Absolutely.

DR: You think if you, knowing what you just said, had gone to James Island High, you would have gotten a better education?

NB: No I can't say that. I would not say that. Because they, the environment, the environment for our people was not conducive to getting an education.

DR: There are some students who stayed there.

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: They started treating them differently you think?

NB: There was one young man that I know that graduated from James Island. Sometimes who you are, and your position in the community, sometimes makes a difference as to how you're received by other folk, how you're treated, and how your children are treated. This one particular man, the young man that I'm thinking about, and he was, he was an excellent student, no question about that. His mother was a teacher. They, his mother, he would be treated differently because of his mother being an educator versus me. My parents had no influence with really nobody in the community. So it makes a difference, it made a difference of who you were as to how you were treated.

DR: So are you suggesting that the word got passed around the other kids that this guy is different from the others, in that case?

NB: I would, I would say so. I would say so. Oh yeah, yeah.

DR: So you're saying the system basically knew his parents, huh?

NB: Oh, 100 percent. 100 percent.

DR: That's the way it is in [indistinct]

NB: Exactly.

DR: When you were in school, were the civil rights matters still very prominent?

NB: Oh yes.

DR: What do you remember?

NB: Well, one of the things that I particularly remember I was probably in the tenth or eleventh grade if I remember right. I knew students, personally knew students who had graduated from Gresham Meggett that were students at South Carolina State University when those [indistinct] 0:28:40 occurred. Okay. There was one young man, and I can't remember what the occasion was, but it seems like and I don't know whether this took place at Gresham Meggett but it seems like he came back, he came to Gresham Meggett, and there may have been some sort of probing, some sort of form or something he went on, and he was describing what had happened there at South Carolina State. So, yeah. Yeah.

DR: Were you involved in any demonstrations here?

NB: Not really. Well, let me take that back. Either as a junior or senior, there were a few things that we did, and it wasn't, that didn't have a racial component to it. It was warning particular things, oh warning privileges. I think that's what it was. Warning privileges at the school. And, I remember this one year, and it wasn't everybody, but it was a pretty big group of us. Walked off the campus school, said [indistinct] and we walked Grimball Road, toward Farley Road, you can go all the way to Farley Road—

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

NB: And I think we went as far as, there used to be a little store, Grimball Candy Store is what they called it. And I think we'd stop at candy store and some of the kids probably bought something from candy store, some of them. And then we went on back to the school, thinking that okay we showed them, that we'll protest. We're going back to the school, Mr. Evans was the principal. So he called everybody in the auditorium.

DR: The whole school now?

NB: Everybody.

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

NB: So we were thinking that boy we're going to get chewed up. But he outrid us. What he said to us is that he understood, but he congratulated us for the effort and the way that it was done, in a non-violent manner. So what can we do after that? Going back to—

DR: Why were you protesting, what was the issue?

NB: It was, I can't really remember, but it was some privileges that we wanted, and again it wasn't the entire school, maybe it was just one grade level or something, I can't remember. But that's, just some kind of privilege that we wanted to have there at the school that, I mean that's all it was.

DR: Did the parents get that information reported to them?

NB: Oh I'm sure they did. But again, the way Mr. Evans handled it—

DR: He diffused it.

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: So you were never really encouraged to want to attend James Island High?

NB: I was. But I chose not to.

DR: So, are you saying the [indistinct] was too hard for you?

NB: Well, you know, the, I see other folk get burned at [indistinct], so—

DR: So what year did you graduate?

NB: In 1969.

DR: And what did you do after you graduated?

NB: After graduation—after graduation, actually, and a lot of folks don't know this, after graduation, I went to, I went to Savannah State for a semester. And I've come to learn and I, and I, don't, don't mean to other, to other folk who go to college. First of all, well there are a couple of things, you know. You've got to be financially able to go,

or your parents have to be. And the bills can get low on the rents and those kinds of things. It was not equal across the board. And that's, and that's a fact.

And when you see that your parents just don't have the resources, you know it's really tough. It's really tough to see your mother and father, I mean, almost in tears, just trying to do the very best they can until they can't do it any more. Again, you know, I mentioned to you earlier, in school, I was, I mean I was a good student. But anyhow, after the Savannah State thing, and then I came back to Charleston, trying to decide exactly what I wanted to do. So my sister and her husband lived in New York, I went to stay with them for awhile.

DR: Which one of your sisters?

NB: Carol Jean. Got a job as soon as I got there working at a bank. Chase Manhattan Bank I think it was. In the check processing, working at night. So, that went okay for awhile. Kind of found some friends and family members out there in New York, and would, you know, see them, we would hang out. You know, just— after about six months, took a vacation, came home for Thanksgiving.

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

NB: Flew home, first time on a plane. Then, took the train after about a week, stayed home for a week, went back to New York, stayed there for, again for maybe three, maybe three months. Then I realized that that was not where I wanted to be, that was not the place for me. So, I came on back to Charleston. Still not knowing exactly what I wanted to do. And one day, two of my friends, my best friends and I, and it wasn't my idea, one of them says man let's go, let's go and apply for a job at the telephone company. Said okay, well let's do that. Three of us went, right. We went, did the application, took the test. Out of the three, I was the only one that had passed the test. Now again, it wasn't my idea, even going down there. Worked out a couple issues, and after about a month or so, I was called to come to work. Did that. And, different job title, different responsibility. And I stayed there for about 34 years.

DR: That was your niche.

NB: Then retired, 34 years.

DR: I heard you say earlier that your dad was a Master Carpenter.

NB: Hm-hmm. Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Did you study any carpentry under him?

NB: Now that's interesting because I always loved doing things. Woodwork, working with my, I always, always, always loved it. And I remember as a little kid, daddy realizing

that. He would, at the end of the work day, he would bring those scrap pieces of lumber and wood for my brother and I just to kind of piddle around with, and then he would allow us to use a, you know maybe a hammer, he would show us how to, maybe use a hand saw, how to carefully use it. So we would, you know, piddle around and make things. And I just developed a love, a passion for doing that kind of stuff. And to be honest with you, and I say, I say my daddy was blessed. I think the Lord, the Lord gave me a part of his gift. Not as much as, not as much as my dad, because you know the Lord giveth to whoever he want, and gives as much as he want. But he gave me a part of that and let me tell you—

DR: Where do you think you developed your skills from?

NB: Dave, I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

DR: Are you aware of who some of his brothers are?

NB: Well, I mean, absolutely, absolutely. Oh yeah, oh yeah. And all of them, I would say master craftsmen, all of them. Yeah, yeah. One of his, one of his older, well I guess his oldest brother, your namesake, was a good one. And I remember one summer I needed a job, and I think, I don't know if it was daddy or someone had spoken to him there, and I actually worked with him for a couple of weeks, yeah—

DR: I heard a number of young men who later became genuine carpenters—

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: ...started off working under his instruction—

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: That's good.

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Anything else that you remember that you might want to share with us? Especially during this period when school was about to integrate.

NB: That was, that was— I think for us who had, tend to be those who had graduated and then for us who were still there at the time when the word came down that school was going to, and it wasn't something that we'd gotten notice about a year or two, or you know maybe two years, I mean it was like, it was like, sudden, suddenly happening, you know. And some of us were, well we were heart broken, it was devastating, because the school, you know we had, I mean it was such an integral part of the

community, you know. Of the school, you know, the teachers, you develop friendship, always the girls, dated, and went on and got married and had a family that started. They had, Gresham Meggett, it was, you know, and even though the school closed, you know, Gresham Meggett will always, has always been in our hearts. My class, the class of '69, so let me tell you this. So, we started, and I can't remember the exact year, we started having an annual class reunion celebration, for lack of a better word. And it would take place in the month of December, around Christmas time, and it worked out that a lot of the students who had graduated from Gresham Meggett would come to town—

DR: For that—

NB: ...for that event. And it, we did it for several, several years. We used to hold it at the Armory on Haygood Avenue, near the Citadel. But yeah, I mean, and that, doing that kind of, it kept the spirit, it kept the life of Gresham Meggett really really alive for a lot of us.

DR: What was the size of your class?

NB: Oh, it was like 70 some odd, there were two homerooms, I think it totaled like 75, 76.

DR: Who was the homeroom teacher your senior year?

NB: My homeroom teacher that year was Saunders, Loretta Saunders. Loretta Saunders. And actually she is one of the daughters of a civil rights leader from Johns Island.

DR: Esau Jenkins?

NB: Esau Jenkins. Absolutely.

DR: One of Esau's daughters.

NB: One of the Esau, Esau's daughters. In fact, he had two daughters teaching at Gresham Meggett at the same time. But she was, she was my homeroom teacher.

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] So you think the teachers really had a personal interest in the students?

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: There was another question I wanted to ask you—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ... How did you get back and forth to school?

NB: School bus.

DR: You rode a bus or you drove a bus?

NB: I rode. Hm-hmm. But I'll say this. I don't think that they, that there was any school around that had the kind of school spirit that existed at Gresham Meggett.

DR: So you had a class of about 70...students?

NB: Yeah.

DR: About how many of those students you think were your cousins?

NB: Wow, I mean quite a few. You know, some of them I didn't really realize at the time, but you know as we grew older and really come to know our background, oh, a lot. A lot.

DR: Do you think that's one of the contributing reasons why there was such a great spirit at the school?

NB: Oh, I'm sure. Absolutely

DR: Because if you're, if a number of students in your class—were family members—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ...then that principle, or that philosophy might, should apply to all of the rest of the students in other classes too.

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, okay so all of, all of my siblings went to Gresham Meggett. And by the time I got to Gresham Meggett, okay, there were some things that I knew before getting there because, you know again, my mom particularly, she believed in studying and homework and those kinds of things. And so it, particularly in every grade level, that there were certain speeches that you had to learn, and I remember my sisters and brothers and as they would practice those things, right, in their grade level, I would hear them, and I would learn them. So by the time I got to Gresham Meggett, you know, most of that stuff I knew already. Okay. Teachers knew me because oh you're Carol Jean's brother, Janet's brother, you're Moses' brother, you're Vernon's brother? Absolutely.

DR: So you couldn't do wrong either.

NB: Hm-hmm. [negative] No, no. No, no, no. They—

DR: Look, let me ask you this. You just pointed out something that's [indistinct] It's the way people become known.

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: Someone passes the name of, and word—good or bad—with the next person that they come in contact with—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ...well, if that was a positive and a benefit for you in Gresham Meggett—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ...how do you think that works in an integrated school, when you don't have the same teaching population or interest any more?

NB: If—

DR: If a child is not liked by one teacher—

NB: Oh, oh, that, well, if the word goes out, you know, that child is going to suffer, is going to suffer. A person can say something that's not true about you, but if the hearer believes it, that's the way they're going to deal with you.

DR: That's right.

NB: That's the way they're going to deal with you.

DR: You're absolutely correct.

NB: Absolutely.

DR: So, you've done some substitute teaching.

NB: I've done some, yeah. Yeah.

DR: The teacher that you meet into the system were so-called tell you that they're looking out for you.

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: And will at the same time tell you what to expect out of certain students.

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: If they don't have a good impression of their student, they sure aint going to allow you to go have one and develop—

NB: They—No. There you go.

DR: So, now, given that assumption, since integration occurred—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ...you've seen a correlation with the number of African-American males in jail?

NB: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: So when we had, in the segregated system—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ...teachers, principal, people who cared for us—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: ...wanted to see us improve—...Now you're in another system where there's no real community, I mean no knowledge of the family—

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR: Or any, maybe perceived attempt to want to know—

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: So that student who may need special attention don't get it.

NB: No.

DR: And they suffer unjustly for a wrong impression.

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: After you retired, you also worked at a school at one point.

NB: Hm-hmm. That, well it turned out, eventually it became Greg Mathis Charter. But initially, initially the employment was with [indistinct] .

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

NB: And it's interesting the way that that came about. There were some occurrences, and the school was in transition, for lack of a better word. And they needed temporary classroom space to house the students, to do their teaching and, so connection was made at the church, here at St. James. And at that time, the particular ministry that I worked on, that I worked under, would have been the ministry that would have coordinated that effort with the school, provide them the space and those kinds of things. So, you know from that standpoint, I was involved in helping them getting the space and the things that they needed to conduct their classes here. And then the point in time came when the school had the ability to acquire their own space.

And one day the principal, I guess, of the school asked me to, if I would meet with her and one of the teachers. And lo and behold, and I, I just didn't see this coming, I didn't see it coming, lo and behold, she asked me if I would be interested in coming to work at the school. I wasn't looking for a job, again I said, I was, to be honest with you, happily retired. I wasn't looking for a job. But, for two reasons I guess, and I'll be honest with you, money was neither of the reason. Okay. Just a desire to help the students, because most cases they were students who had challenges, okay, so my concern for the students. And then it gave me an opportunity to do something that I absolutely love doing. Working with my hands and teaching—

DR: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

NB: ...teaching that. So I couldn't, I couldn't turn that down. I couldn't turn that down, you know. I just, I just, you know. I saw that as a blessing.

DR: How was that experience?

NB: It was a valuable experience for me. Again, I was able to do something that I enjoyed doing. But even greater than that, it's working around the students, and some of the students came from different backgrounds, okay. So they have to be dealt with a little bit, a little bit differently. But I found that if you, first of all, you've got to, you've got to tell the truth. You got to tell it like it is. And then you've got to do it in the way that students trust you, and most of all that they respect you. Okay. If you can achieve those things, you create the atmosphere where the students would trust putting, letting down that guard and they're willing to receive what you can offer.

DR: That's a special skill. Because I suspect that some of those students have been abused in many different ways.

NB: Absolutely. Absolutely.

DR: I notice the last thing that you stated as a qualifier—

NB: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

DR:is honesty and trust.

NB: Hm-hmm.

DR: So they've had repeated incidents where they lost trust and confidence—I'm guessing to people that they should—...be able to expect that from.

NB: Hm-hmm, hm-hmm. That's something that I learned and I practiced, even all through my own, all through my working career. And we're talking about, you know we're taught the Black way.

DR: Okay.

NB: So, I worked at, started out Southern Bell, became Bell South, and then went back to AT&T. In an industry where to be honest with you, it was predominantly white folk. There were some blacks, but very very few, you know. I was able to go to work, work with other folk, work around mostly, just being honest, mostly white folk. People first of all, they, and I always carried myself in a certain way, okay, that you have no reason to disrespect me, okay. That people trust me, people, if I say something, they believed it. If I say I'm going to do something for you, I'm going to do it. Okay. And you don't have to worry about that. Now this is the gospel. There were times I had blacks and whites on the crew, but Dave I can tell you for a fact, and they were mostly guys, sometimes girls, I can tell you for a fact that I had people that I supervised, right, that would do anything I needed them to do, anything I wanted them to do. Mind you now, these folks got paid, paid good, but these folks would go beyond what they already had to do for the paycheck.

DR: Why you think that? Because of what they saw in you?

NB: I think because, like I said, folks know that I'm honest, and also they know I cared about them. Okay. I got to know, not prying into their affairs, but I came to know who the spouse was, I came to know who the children were, you know, and it was a common thing for me to ask, hey how, how's so and so doing, how Michele doing, how that's doing, and we would have those kind of conversations, like family, you know—

DR: Amen, amen.

NB: Yeah, and so, even now, there are a couple of the guys, and I've been retired since '05, there are a couple of the guys who if they get the opportunity to work on James Island, they come by the house to see how I'm doing.

DR: [indistinct] relationships [indistinct]

NB: Absolutely. Folks will trust you and respect you. One of the guys on the Island I grew up with, I saw him, he said to me, he said, man, and he does phoning, he said man, I did a phoning job for [indistinct] and we started talking, and she said she knew me. No he said, she said she knew you, and said you all work together. And, so, man, she said so much good stuff about you. But, man, it all comes down to just being a decent human being and treating people the right way.

DR: See, when I listen to you describing your affinity and respect for other folks, and you need to treat them like human beings, it sounds like you're talking about your daddy too.

NB: Absolutely.

Jenna Tran: Thank you so much.

Deborah Barrett

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted in September 2019 in Charleston, South Carolina by David Richardson.

David Richardson: Good morning. I am David Richardson, the interviewer. I'm sitting here with...

Deborah Davis Barrett: Deborah Barrett.

DR: Would you please spell that, please?

DDB: D-E-B-O-R-A-H, Davis, D-A-V-I-S, Barrett, B-A-R-R-E-T-T.

DR: And your date of birth?

DDB: 2/22/52.

DR: Location of your birth?

DDB: Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: Where did you spend your childhood?

DDB: On James Island.

DR: Now, when you say James Island...

DDB: Honey Hill. A little section that's called Honey Hill.

DR: Tell me about your family, please.

DDB: I was raised by my grandmother and my grandfather. I was born to a single mother. And her parents raised me on a section called Honey Hill that's on James Island here in South Carolina.

DR: Tell me the—your mother's name.

DDB: My mother's name is Martha Davis.

DR: And where was she born?

DDB: She was born here in Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: Was that also on James Island, do you speculate?

DDB: She lived on James Island at the time.

DR: What was her occupation?

DDB: She was a domestic worker.

DR: Okay. And your father's name?

DDB: My father's name is Herbert Jones.

DR: And his occupation? Or what was his occupation? Do you know?

DDB: He worked as a bellman at the Francis Marion, as I recall.

DR: The hotel?

DDB: The hotel.

DR: Okay. And how many siblings did you have?

DDB: My mother had five children. My father had ten.

DR: Do you remember the names of your siblings?

DDB: Yes, I do.

DR: Share that with us, please.

DDB: My mother's children are Leroy [phonetic 00:02:27] Davis—I was the second-born, Deborah Davis—Frederick [phonetic 00:02:36] Davis, Felicia Blackman [phonetic 00:02:44], and Joshua Davis.

DR: Where did your parents go to school?

DDB: My mother went to school on James Island. And, as I remember, it was a little school. I think they called it Three Trees on James Island. When she left James Island, I think in 1957, she went to New York, and she continued her education at the girls' high school in Brooklyn, because she wanted to obtain her high school diploma. My father went to school in the city of Charleston. I don't believe he completed high school. And I don't know exactly what grade—what was the last grade he completed.

DR: Did your parents emphasize education?

DDB: Yes, they did. My mother always wanted her children to complete high school. My grandmother and grandfather, whom I grew up with, emphasized education on a daily basis. My grandfather read the Bible every single day. And he would always emphasize vocabulary. So he would always read, and then he would ask us about certain words. So he wanted us to have an extensive vocabulary.

My grandmother, on the other hand, was more of a storyteller, and she would often ask us to read to her. So he was the reader. She was the storyteller, and we would read to her. And then we would have conversations about what we read. She was the one that always said that we needed to have an education; that was very important in our lives if we wanted a better life. So she talked about not only high school but beyond high school and getting a profession.

DR: Where did your siblings go to school?

DDB: All of my siblings went to school here in Charleston on James Island. [Note: with the except of Felicia and Joshua]

DR: What elementary school did you attend?

DDB: I attended King's Highway Elementary School. And at the time I recall the—the road was called King's Highway. I think now they call it Fort Johnson Road. But at that time it was King's Highway. And it was located on at the time King's Highway, and I believe it's still Bluff Road, right on the corner.

DR: Describe the school faculty.

DDB: The entire staff was black, including the principal. We had one black teacher that was very fair-skinned and had straight hair, that at the beginning we thought that she was white. But she was a black woman. And when you're accustomed to everybody being dark-skinned, you assume that they're all black. But we did not understand that black came in many shades, as white as light white. So she made it clear to all of us that she was very light-skinned, but she was black.

DR: So she emphasized her African heritage then?

DDB: She definitely did, because she didn't want any mistakes made that she was a white woman.

DR: What was her name?

DDB: Her name was Miss McCray

DR: What was the number of students, do you think, at the school?

DDB: The school went to sixth grade, and if I can think back, if there were at least one class on each grade—six grades, 30 kids. I'd probably say 180, 200, or something like that. I'm just approximating.

DR: So, can you describe what the faculty was like at the school?

DDB: They were a group of proud black people. And they emphasized the importance of being a great people. And I could recall one teacher in particular, Miss Sanders. And she taught us a lot about our black heritage that was not in the history books. And as a matter of fact, she told us about the Negro national anthem. And we had to learn not one stanza that everybody learns and recites today and sings. She said we had to learn the entire song.

And when I went to New York, where people felt that New Yorkers were more knowledgeable, I was the only one that knew more about blackness than they did in the North. And they didn't even know about the Negro national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." And they didn't know about all the different stanzas. So I was very proud that I could just say the entire thing. And they said, "Wow, she came from the South, and she knew that." So I—I had a lot of respect for Miss Sanders, because she taught us so much about ourselves that wasn't in the history books.

DR: Can you remember about how many teachers were at that school?

DDB: Well, there was one for each grade, so that was six teachers. And so I would say, if there was more than one class in a grade—let's say ten.

DR: Who was the principal?

DDB: The principal at the time was—the first principal I recall was Miss Quarles [phonetic 00:10:43]. And the second principal was Mr. Davis.

DR: Louis Davis [phonetic 00:10:49].

DDB: Leroy Davis.

DR: Louis Davis.

DDB: His name was Louis Davis?

DR: Hm-hmm. Did you go to school the full year, school year?

DR: You already stated that your parents or grandparents were actively involved in your education?

DDB: Yes, very much.

DR: Were you aware of the difference in—in the race of the school, the school systems, the difference between the two?

DDB: Yes. Yes.

DR: How so?

DDB: I was aware, because the black children were in one school, and it was all black, and the white children were in another school. The black children rode one bus, and the white children rode their bus. And we would see them in passing. The white children would be on their bus, and the black children would be on our bus. So we had a black driver, and he would pick the children up. And if you missed the bus, then you had to walk. So it was important that we got up early every morning and get that bus.

DR: So you said King's Highway was an elementary school?

DDB: Elementary school.

DR: And where did you attend high school?

DDB: Well, I was excited when I graduated from King's Highway Elementary School, because I could not wait to go to high school at W. Gresham Meggett, because the elementary school children were picked up first, and then the high school kids were picked up

second. And, once we were dropped off, we can see the bus with the high school kids on it.

And I said, "I want to be on that bus going to the next school," because this was the small school, and the high school was the big school. And I wanted to be on that bus. So I could not wait until I graduated from elementary to get on that high school bus with all of the big children.

DR: What year was this?

DDB: I would say that was about—let's see, '57. I guess that was about '63 or something like that.

DR: So, '63 you started attending Gresham Meggett High school? At what grade, approximately?

DDB: I started in the seventh grade, because when I left the King's Highway in the sixth grade, I graduated and went to W. Gresham Meggett in the seventh grade.

DR: Did you graduate from Gresham Meggett?

DDB: No, I did not graduate from W. Gresham Meggett.

DR: Where did you graduate from?

DDB: I graduated in New York City at Grover Cleveland High School in Queens, New York.

DR: So there was some point in time when you left Gresham Meggett?

DDB: I attended Gresham Meggett my first year after graduating from King's Highway in the seventh grade. After I completed the seventh grade, my mother took me to New York. And I went to school in New York. I came back to Gresham Meggett one year in the midyear, because my grandmother was very sick. And then I attended—I came down during the summer one year, and I attended summer school, because they had a summer school session. And I just wanted to be a part of it.

So I attended the summer school session. And then I think in the 11th grade is when my grandmother passed, and I came about midyear. Well, she was very sick at that time, and I came about midyear, because my mother kept coming back and forth because of her sickness. And then I completed that year, and then I went back to New York and completed high school.

DR: So you spent almost a year at Gresham Meggett in the 11th grade?

DDB: I—or in total I would say I spent two years, my first year and parts, I would say, in total back and forth, coming half midyear, probably two years at Meggett.

DR: So, what year did you go back to New York to reenter school there?

DDB: I was—I attended the 11th and 12th grade in New York, so it was probably somewhere in the mid-tenth grade or the beginning of the 11th grade. No, I had already started school in New York, so it was probably midyear of the 11th grade when I came back.

DR: How did your experience in—on James Island and the school system prepare you to perform in the school system in New York?

DDB: First of all, the teachers demanded perfection.

DR: Where?

DDB: Beginning at the elementary level.

DR: In—on James Island?

DDB: On James Island. They demanded perfection and high standards of learning. And they felt that every child should be equipped to attain those high levels of education. So, in terms of writing, our penmanship had to be perfect. We learned how to print and we learned cursive. And that was the practice, because it was a reflection of the person. And I can remember the teachers stressing to make the curves absolutely perfect.

And the way the work was written on the chalkboard was as if it was written in the books. And that's the way the teachers taught it. And they made us write on the chalkboard, and we had to practice and practice. And the saying was practice makes perfect, and so we practiced and practiced. And when you came to school with your homework, there better not be any grease on that paper. That paper had to be clean, and the work had to be perfect. And you had to show all of your work. There were no shortcuts. They did not allow shortcuts.

So it was a rigorous thing. And it was reinforced at home, because every single day, once we got home from school, we ate, because food was already—already prepared. And the next thing was to do whatever chores we had to do. And then we had to get the books. Every day you had to sit down at the table, and you had to clear the table. And it was no excuse that the dog got the homework or whatever happened, or something spilled on it.

You did not eat while you were doing the homework, because it had to be perfect. It had to be with perfection. And that's the way the teachers wanted it. And, if anyone came to school and the papers were wrinkled or there was food spilled on the papers, you had to do it over. And you did it over until you got it right.

So that was a very important skill that I had learned from elementary school. Reading was an important skill that was emphasized. So I was a reader. And I knew how to write. And they stressed how to write, not only penmanship-wise, but how to write perfect English sentences. So those things I was equipped with when I went to New York.

DR: So that adequately prepared you to perform without feeling that you were—

DDB: I can compete with any New Yorker. As a matter of fact, I was on the honor roll. So I never at any point felt that I was not prepared or I could not compete. Even though it was always said that New Yorkers were smart, I thought that I was smart when I got there.

DR: So Miss Barrett, tell me, how did you feel in terms of getting adjusted into that school system, compared to Gresham Meggett?

DDB: Meaning adjusted to the school system in New York?

DR: Hm-hmm.

DDB: Well, it was the first time that I had gone to an integrated school, because I was accustomed to being in a school where there were all blacks. And, for the first time, I saw children of all different ethnic backgrounds. And, as I sat in the classroom the very first day, I just kept looking around and saying, "Wow." But they were all children. They were all children. I never experienced any prejudice from any of them.

And, as we looked at the academics, they were not more equipped than I was, coming from South Carolina. So I was very competitive. I was competitive in South Carolina, because we all wanted to be on the honor roll. We all really strived to be the best that we could be, so I was ready to compete with anybody from anywhere.

DR: So what was the high school you graduated from there?

DDB: I graduated from Grover Cleveland High School in Queens.

DR: And where did you go after that?

DDB: I went to college.

DR: Where?

DDB: I went to New York City College for the first term. And then I transferred to Brooklyn College where I completed my BA and went on to get my master's at Brooklyn College. Then I went on and got my certificate in Administration and Supervision. And in the interim, I did attend Medgar Evers College for one year. And I did some courses in Business at Medgar Evers College.

DR: Did you work in any period of time after you got your—for a BA? Or you went on and directly to get your next-level master's?

DDB: After I got my—my bachelor's degree, I got a job immediately. And I decided I was going to take a break from school before I got my master's. I started teaching kindergarten. And then I got a call—

DR: Did this mean that you were certified by the State of New York to teach kindergarten?

DDB: Yes. So, after I started teaching kindergarten, I got a call from a friend of mine that was in college, because she continued to go on for her master's. And she said, "Debbie, tuition just went up." So, when she said that, I said, "I'll be back next term." Because I knew, once tuition started going up, it doesn't go back down.

And I wanted to get my degree, so I went back to school immediately. I took one-term break, and I went back. And so I completed my master's within a year, and I began to teach. I left from kindergarten. I started teaching math in junior high school, grades eight and nine. After that, I became dean of students. And after—

DR: What school was this?

DDB: This was Junior High School 35 and Junior High School 324. In New York, the schools had numbers in different boroughs. They had names, but they were always recognized by the numbers in the different boroughs.

DR: Was that because there were so many different schools?

DDB: There are many. However, numbers are infinite, but you may find PS61 in Brooklyn, and they'll have PS61 in the Bronx or in Queens. Why, I don't know. But they were always referred to by numbers, but the Q would indicate Queens and the K would indicate Brooklyn. So they were—

DR: So the PS means public schools?

DDB: Public school. And of course the high schools had names. They didn't have numbers.

DR: Let's back up a minute, and tell me, how did you pay for your education?

DDB: When I was in high school, I knew that my mother could not pay for my education. So I was working from the time I entered high school. I took classes from 7:30 until 12:00, and my lunch hour would be on the bus going downtown Brooklyn to work. And I'd often work from 1:00 to 6:00 after school. So I was saving up all the monies. And at the time, I was selling Avon. I was selling jewelry, handmade jewelry. A friend of mine was making silver bracelets, necklace, earrings. I was selling that. I was doing—

DR: Where—where did you market these products?

DDB: I knew everybody. I knew everybody. I made friends with everybody. I talked to everybody. I had a knack of getting to know people in the community, at school. Wherever I was, I would talk to people.

DR: So you had an outgoing personality?

DDB: Yes. I would talk to people. So I could market the products. And then when there was a fair, I would take my jewelry out to the fairs, and I would sell them there. So I did do a lot of selling. I sold Amway, Avon. You name it, I was selling it.

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DR: And then much of this occurred while you were also involved in your education?

DDB: Absolutely. Absolutely. And, fortunately, after my first year, I received—there were grant monies for minorities, and I applied. And that took care of my college expenses for my bachelor's degree.

DR: What's your highest education achievement?

DDB: My master's degree that I received. In addition to that, the one that I'm most proud of is the degrees I received in theology from North Carolina College of Theology. I have a bachelor's and a master's and a master's in Counseling.

DR: Before you—you're retired now, right?

DDB: Yes.

DR: Before you retired, what were the different employment that you practiced over in [indiscernible 00:29:19] after you received your education?

DDB: After I received my education, I worked in the school system as a teacher of mathematics, as a dean of students, as an assistant principal, and as a principal for 13 years. So, altogether, 33 years in the school system.

DR: How do you view the educational system now, considering the needs of students?

DDB: Right now, I don't think that the needs of students seems to be the priority. Even though we say children first and that children's education is very important, there are so many things that I think children need in addition to the academics. When I was growing up, we had future teachers clubs. We had all kinds of extracurricular sports. We had vocational training in the school.

I could remember from James Island where we had the 4-H Club. There were the boys I could remember in high school having training in—I believe they were doing the agriculture. They were doing woodworking, welding. They were engaged in training that, if they did not go to college, they could make a living, and a good one. And all of those skills are missing today. And I think it's so important—

DR: [Indiscernible 00:31:36]?

DDB: —because everybody is not—everybody is not—I wouldn't say—I'm trying to think of the word, but not everybody has a desire to go to college. And so they need to be self-sufficient in some kind of skill that they can offer in this world and make monies independently. And that is missing in the school system.

DR: So you're suggesting that most of the curriculum is—pretty much emphasize college education versus that group of people who would probably do best in acquiring certain crafts and skills?

DDB: I think it's—college is emphasized for certain groups. I don't think that college is emphasized a lot for blacks, because today it just isn't. I think it's—I remember reading somewhere that an eighth-grade education is all that the government —should give an individual. Or I think that's the requirement, is an eighth-grade education. I don't think that it's emphasized enough, particularly for blacks, to go beyond high school. And in today's world, you need to be beyond high school.

DR: So you—so, are you implying that the dropout rate in African America is higher than in other groups?

DDB: I believe that.

DR: Do you think that's a correlation between the population in prison?

DDB: Absolutely.

DR: And the race?

DDB: Prisons are built today based on third-grade skills and achievement overall performance of blacks. They start testing at grade three. What should happen is that children are taught how to read from pre-K, K, to three. And after that, after learning how to read, then they read to learn. They are not given a solid basis for reading in those crucial grades. And whatever is needed that they are lacking, the emphasis is not placed on giving them that extra assistance to go that extra mile. So they are labeled at a very early age. And that's a major cause for failure.

DR: Yes. Now let me ask you another question about that. Do you think most children upon entering school has—have a real deep desire to learn?

DDB: Oh, children have a burning desire to learn when they enter school. Children are so enthusiastic. They are prepared. They want their book bags. They want their pencils. They want their paper. They want all the equipment to start learning, that learning process.

DR: At what stage did that begin to change then?

DDB: And when they come in with that burning desire and they get a teacher in grade one or grade two or even grade three that puts their fire out, how do you expect them to go to grade 12? If they come in as burning fires to learn, eager, very enthusiastic, and you get a teacher that just puts their fire out and say, "You can't, you can't," children are like sponges, and they absorb everything. So, when you put that negative word in their heads and you repeat that to them, they think immediately that they can't.

DR: So, as an administrator—

DDB: So, when you say, "You can," they produce. When you provide the resources and the reinforcement, they produce. When they're at home and you say they can do it, they do it. You reinforce that.

DR: Expectation plays a role.

DDB: Expectations play a great role. They get to school, and they look up to the teachers. Because I could remember my first-grade teacher, and she was everything to me. I'd come home every day and say Miss Chisolm [phonetic 00:37:44] said, Miss Chisolm said. And Miss Chisolm taught me this and Miss Chisolm taught...

The teacher was like a god. The teacher was like God. Everything the teacher said, the teacher was correct. And I would come home, and I'd say to my mom, "The teacher said, the teacher said..." And then my mother stopped me in my tracks one day.

And she said, "The teacher may say this, but I am telling you this. And this..." So she said—

DR: Regained control.

DDB: She took control to say what is truth, because when you grow up in a world and you figure that this one person has all the answers—and even today, I hear people say, "She's a teacher. She should know the answer." So the person would go to that person that they feel has all of the answers and all of the knowledge, particularly the title teacher. But the very first teachers we have are in the home. And, as a teacher, I used to tell my students, "Your very first teacher that you should always respect is your teacher at home."

DR: Usually the mother.

DDB: That's the mother.

DR: So, as an administrator, in your years of being a principal and observation of the stage where a child desire to learn began to fade, the teacher plays a role in that?

DDB: A major role. A major role. And it's sad—when that failing attitude or that road to failure begins in the early grades, before they can actually be a good reader. And — that [good] reading starts—in third grade they are—they're reading. They are reading. They should be reading.

And—and if they're not a reader, and then reading is encouraged at that point, it's very difficult, unless they begin to get some one-on-one—parents often cannot afford one-on-one tutors—and the other thing is that, in the homes—and we practiced this in my home when I was growing up—the person that was the best reader helped the person who had difficulties reading.

So if my sibling had difficulty and I was a good reader, I had to help my sibling. I helped my cousins. So whoever was a little slow in picking up the skills, we were taught in the home that you had to help the other. So it was reinforced in the home. If one person didn't know and you knew, you had to teach that other person.

But I would state this. Where the system fails is that, if a child falls behind, enough emphasis is not placed on making certain that the child goals are met academically for certain intervals within the grade. They say "failure" and they place that label on them. And that stigma is attached, it seems, for the rest of their lives, unless someone steps in and make a change in that child's life that's very positive.

DR: Can you, before we close, state your address, your current address, please?

DDB: My current address is 431 Birch Bark Lane.

DR: That's all of it?

DDB: It's Lyman.

DR: Anything else you'd like to contribute before we close this out? Let me—let me be more specific. You seem to have an emphasis and a great appreciation for your early years on James Island at the school system here, where your foundation was set. Why?

DDB: The foundation is very important. A firm foundation is very important, socially, academically, spiritually. All of those things are important. I think about the scripture that's saying, you know, do you build your house on sand or on a solid rock? And my foundation was built on a solid rock here on James Island. My grandparents were solid rocks. My grandfather was a very independent man. He didn't work for anybody. And he instilled in us the importance of having your own. My grandmother never worked in her life—how do we always say [overtalk 00:44:10]?

DR: Outside the house, you mean?

DDB: Outside of the house. She never worked outside of the house. My grandfather always provided. And they stressed the importance of being independent, knowing, and learning, and never shutting the doors on education. The teachers that I had in elementary school, I think that they're—were the best in the world. They always encouraged us to be the green leaf on top of the tree and not the brown leaf on the ground.

And, as a matter of fact, I can vividly remember one of my teachers having a tree drawn in the classroom and putting all of the green leaves on top of the tree. We were all green leaves. All of the students were green leaves. And she would say, "You don't want your leaf to fall to the ground." And so we all worked very hard in learning—at that time we called it the three Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—and so that we can stay on top of the tree. We wanted our leaves to stay green.

So we worked very hard, and they recognized that and they reinforced that. And that carried on throughout all of my elementary days. And, even when I got to high school, which is the place that I was looking forward to going to after I left King's Highway, then going to W. Gresham Meggett, and I felt like there was a wealth of education there. And all of the smart, big students were there. And I wanted to be among them.

And when I got there my very first year, the thing that I wanted to do—and it was disappointing, but we don't know what the future holds or what may happen in our

family that would steer us in different directions—but they used to have—the seniors had privileges. And so the freshmen aspired to get to those privileges. You know, it's like you want that golden apple that they had.

And they were allowed to be on the front lawn and sit on the benches and have conversations and have lunches. And the freshmen were in the back. So it was a journey. You wanted to go from the back of the building to the front of the building. So there were a lot of physical images that gave you that thrust to say, "You know what? I'm going to get there." You know, "The distance is not far, and I want to get there."

So I always wanted to get to that front lawn and say, "I'm a senior and I've made it." And, unfortunately, my senior year I ended up in New York City. But that was my goal. But the time that I spent there, I admired those seniors that walked those halls so proudly and tall. Nobody was slumped over. Nobody looked like they had a burden. We ate good in the cafeteria.

DR: Who prepared the food when you were there?

DDB: And there was homemade food, I mean, home-cooked food. Miss Addy and all those folks were in the kitchen, and they fed us good. We had fresh vegetables, and we had fish on Friday. Nobody missed getting on the line on Friday. You might miss one of the other days, but Friday—you definitely would not miss a fish day on Friday.

DR: Who was the principal then?

DDB: When I got to that school, Mr. Evans [phonetic 00:48:28] was the principal.

DR: Anderson [phonetic 00:48:29] had left then?

DDB: He had already left. Mr. Evans was the principal. And he walked that school proudly and—and in the morning, there was always an inspirational message. And there was a club they called the English Club. And a lot of seniors were in that club. So you had to really climb to get into those clubs. There were certain clubs that you had to wait until you got to that level in school to be on.

And I wanted to be in the English Club, because I wanted to make the morning announcements. And I remember hearing Latonia and Roper and Loretta Palmer and those girls and other people getting on that PA system. So there were a lot of things that—a lot of positive images that—that gave you the energy, and you said, "You know what? I want to do that."

So there were a lot—the students were positive images, you know. The players on the—on the football team, they went out like—I mean, Fighting Eagles. And the girls would—we would be cheering. And we couldn't wait for the pep rally. All of these

things—I don't even know if the children today know what a pep rally is. And—and we would be all fired up, you know, academically and socially, with all the different activities.

They had the choir. And we supported each other. When something was going on—there was a play—everybody was there. The parents were there with the PTA, and they were doing a lot of things. And I'll tell you, they were giving us the best. I remember the PTAs when they used to have the tea. And while—though globally they'd probably say we were poor, we never thought poor a day in our lives, because we had fresh food to eat.

We had food every day. And whatever clothes you had, you cleaned it and you ironed it, and it looked brand new. And, when they had the tea, they had the best linen on the tables. And they had the china and the silverware. And you had a table set for a queen or a king. And I think those images last forever, particularly when you are a youngster.

DR: So I hear you describing that environment. That is very vivid to me also in [indiscernible 00:51:06]. But the piece that has not been mentioned by you or emphasized is the family relationship that existed on the island.

DDB: That was an important piece as well, because later in my life—you have these sayings that it takes a village to raise a child—I don't know if everybody experienced the village. But this whole island was a village, because all of the adults knew each other. Everybody was family. Everybody's treated as family. The doors were open. Now the doors are locked. But back then, the doors were open. Not only physically open, but open to the community. Everyone looked over everyone's child.

When one person hurt, everybody hurt. Everybody felt it. If somebody got sick, if somebody died, the entire community was silenced in prayer and together, unlike when I went to New York. People die and everybody keeps rolling. Nobody stops. All the action is continuous. Here on the island, whatever happened affected everybody, and everybody worked together.

In the schools, as I was talking about the PTA, how everybody came together, and in the community. And if you went from Sol Legare to Bee Field— I forgot, it was a different name for the Grimboll section—Peas Hills down the island or Honey Hill, Green Hill, whatever, and if—a child came in the yard and an older person was there. And the first thing they would say to you, "Who are your parents? Who are your parents?"

And before they even ask you your name, I believe they'll say, "Whose child are you?" And they communicated with your parents, so you couldn't say things that were—

untrue. But, of course, you would say, "My parent is so and so." And, immediately, there was a connection there. And they'll let you know, "I know your momma and I know your daddy." Or, "I know your ma and I know your pa." You know, that was the way they—they spoke.

If they had oranges in the house, apples in the house, candy, they shared. So it was a sharing of everything. And they will sit down and they will tell you a story. Or they'll tell you a little history, or they'll tell you about your parents and how they know them. And so it was a sharing of knowledge. And they cared for you. If you fell in their yard, they took care of you.

DR: Let me ask you this question. Did you have to lock your doors when you lived here?

DDB: No. And that's—that's when I—

DR: When you [indiscernible 00:55:23] when you went to New York, did that change?

DDB: Very big difference. When we went to New York, we had three or four locks on the door. And the—the windows, the first time I've seen they had gates on the windows, you know. And—but here, the doors were open. Everything was open. You lived free as a bird. It was like in the Garden of Eden, so to speak. Nothing was locked up. People were trusting, unlike today.

A lot of those traits from, I would say, the northern states, somehow trickled into the country, because northerners were experiencing drugs and all these things. People here were very naïve about that. So it—these negative things were brought into the island. You didn't—we didn't have those kinds of problems. And I think all that stems from the fact that we went from open doors to locked, bolted doors now, security systems, and everything else. And we as a people never lived that way.

DR: That's true.

DDB: We never had any fears of anything. And, today, all of that has changed, you know. But living in South Carolina on James Island, we experienced a lot of things about surviving and growing our own natural fruits, you know, harvesting them, and being able to sit together at the table with family, being able to share with your neighbors, making them family. Everybody was just one big family, one happy family, one happy family.

DR: Miss Barrett, you sound like you might be a dinosaur.

DDB: [Laughs.]

DR: We will conclude this. Thanks a lot.

DDB: Okay.

DR: Bye.

Remus Cromwell

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on September 26, 2019 at the residence of interviewee, Remus "Harold" Cromwell in Charleston, South Carolina by interviewer David Richardson.

David Richardson: Today is September—

Remus Cromwell: 26th.

DR: ...26th, 2019, and I am at the residence of Mr. Harold Cromwell.

RC: Remus Cromwell.

DR: I'm sorry. Remus, that's right, but everybody calls you Harold.

RC: Harold is my nickname.

DR: Okay. And what's the address here?

RC: 1819, 1819 [indiscernible] [00:00:25] Road.

DR: What is your date of birth, Mr. Cromwell?

RC: February 23, 1934.

DR: And where were you born?

RC: Charleston.

DR: Okay.

RC: [indiscernible] [00:00:37].

DR: Tell me about your family. How many siblings did you have, how many brothers and sisters?

RC: I've got one sister. I had one sister and three brothers.

DR: And what are their names?

RC: Full brothers, anyway. One is adopted. Fred, Julius, Josiah, and Larry. Julius and Julius, Julius, Sr. and Julius Jr. My mother adopted [indiscernible] [00:01:13]. So, he had two Juliuses.

DR: Which was your—They was who?

RC: It was Julius.

DR: Okay.

RC: Senior.

DR: Okay.

RC: And, they had a son, Julius, Julius [indiscernible] [00:01:25], which is a custom of, of African-Americans to raise—It's a custom of African-Americans to raise family children.

DR: Now, what was the name of your father?

RC: Joseph Cromwell.

DR: And where was he born?

RC: James Island, Charleston.

DR: And your mother?

RC: Shelby.

DR: And her name was?

RC: [indiscernible] [00:01:45] Shields.

DR: Cromwell?

RC: Cromwell.

DR: What was your father's occupation?

RC: Well, he was a farmer and a handyman.

DR: And, your mother, did she work outside the house?

RC: Yeah. She did a little domestic work, but mostly [indiscernible] [00:02:04].

DR: Okay. You've already given me the names of your siblings. Was there much emphasis on education in your family?

RC: Yeah.

DR: Go ahead.

RC: My mother was determined that we should go to school and determined that we would have books, to see [indiscernible] [00:02:25]. She was going to get me books, and that was her mission. We had to [indiscernible] [00:02:29] to get us books for school.

DR: So, how far did your mother go in school?

RC: I really don't know.

DR: Any speculation?

RC: I just—

DR: Approximately?

RC: I guess probably fourth, fourth grade, something like that?

DR: Fourth grade? And your father?

RC: My father too, something like that.

DR: But they stressed the importance of education?

RC: Education, yeah.

DR: What did you, you, where did you go to school?

RC: Society Elementary School, Society Corner on James Island.

DR: And that was located on James Island?

RC: On James Island.

DR: And your siblings, your brothers and sisters?

RC: They went to Society school too.

DR: Who was the principal at that time?

RC: The principal when I went was Nancy Baxter.

DR: Nancy Baxter, Nan Baxter?

RC: Yeah.

DR: And can you remember some of your teachers?

RC: Yeah. Ms. Richardson, Ms. Coldwell. Ms. Coldwell had become [indiscernible] [00:03:36] and Richardson, Coldwell. And who else? Just a couple of them—

DR: Ms. Gaunt [phonetic] [00:03:44] taught you?

RC: Yeah.

DR: Oh yeah?

RC: Yeah. Ms. Gaunt taught us.

DR: Okay. And now, you said Richardson. Was that a Richardson of the—

RC: She wasn't from the town. She was from the city, I think.

DR: Okay. Okay. Because, later on, there was a Richardson.

RC: Yeah. She become—Yeah. She become a Ms. Sanders at that.

DR: Okay.

RC: Yeah.

DR: I see. How did you get to school?

RC: Walk.

DR: Did you? And about how long did it took y'all to get to school by walking?

RC: Well, let's see. Well, it took us a while. I guess it took us, I guess, I think around 45 minutes to walk from here to there.

DR: Forty-five minutes?

RC: Yeah. That's my best estimate.

DR: Okay. Now, at that time, this whole area here was people who made a living by farming.

RC: Farming. Very few people, very few people worked with [indiscernible] [00:04:42] or [indiscernible] [00:04:42]. You had some people at the metal and some people at the shipyard.

DR: Now, does that mean that you went to school full-time the whole entire year or part, part of the year?

RC: We went full-time, full-time.

DR: Okay.

RC: See, at that time, it seemed like the black school used to close earlier than the white school because some were farming.

DR: How about you? How about Society Corner?

RC: Huh?

DR: Did you think Society Corner students stayed that entire nine months, or was it shorter?

RC: It was a total of nine months. Yeah.

DR: Nine months? Okay. So, that was, like, after they started to change to go to school the full nine months then when you were in school?

RC: No. We, we was going to school for nine months.

DR: For nine months?

RC: Yeah.

DR: Because, you made reference a while ago there was a period of time when, when students—

RC: Our school used to start a month earlier to give us a chance to get to work on the farm, I think it was. I think it was earlier. We went to school earlier.

DR: Okay. Why did you go to Burke?

RC: I went to Burke because that was the only high school available to us.

DR: Were there any white high schools on the island at the time, you think?

RC: No.

DR: How far did you have to travel to go to Burke?

RC: From here, I guess around, approximately around five miles from here to the city, five.

DR: How did you get there?

RC: Okay. My first year at Burke, we had, the state had a private transportation, my freshman year.

DR: Okay. Did that mean a private individual—

RC: Yeah.

DR: ...had a bus?

RC: A guy from, from, I think he was from something. Willoughby, we used to call him Willoughby.

DR: Willoughby Ballenger?

RC: Yeah. They had him transferring us, and then, well, he did it after Moultrie went to school, Burke school. And after Moultrie, he used to drive his bus.

DR: Okay. So, at first, it started off with Mr. Willoughby Ballenger.

RC: Right.

DR: And then, Moultrie?

RC: Moultrie used to drive the bus with Ballenger.

DR: Was he a student, or—

RC: Yeah. He was a student.

DR: And he, and he lived here?

RC: Yeah. He lived here.

DR: Okay. So, that's the Moultrie that—

RC: Of course, [indiscernible] [00:07:16].

DR: Okay.

RC: And, the next year in 1951, I got, I got out and started training students to drive the bus.

DR: In '51, it was?

RC: 1951.

DR: Okay.

RC: And, I got my bus license, and I drove from '51 to '54.

DR: All right. How much, how much did they pay the bus drivers a month?

RC: \$25.00 a month if you were a student driver.

DR: When I drove, they gave us a \$10.00 raise.

RC: Yeah. You got a raise. When we were driving, we got \$25.00.

DR: When you were at Society Corner, how many teachers that were there? Do you remember? I know you named Ms. Baxter and Richardson.

RC: Okay. We had Mr. [indiscernible] [00:08:02]. We had Trish [indiscernible] [00:08:04] as a teacher. I think it was Trish [indiscernible] [00:08:09]. It was Trish something for third grade. I think it was four teachers there.

DR: Four teachers?

RC: No.

DR: Each teacher had one class or—

RC: No. Some teachers, some teachers had two classes.

DR: Had two classes? Okay.

RC: Then, when we went to sixth, it was the only class that transferred from Society Corner from going to school to Cherokee [indiscernible] [00:08:39].

DR: You went to Cherokee?

RC: Yes, sir. That one, one teacher was there.

DR: Who, who taught at Cherokee?

RC: Richardson taught, taught it. Her name was—

DR: I imagine that was—She later became a [indiscernible] [00:08:50].

RC: Yeah.

DR: Okay.

RC: Ms. Richardson. [indiscernible] [00:08:53].

DR: See, when I went there, Ms. Chisholm taught at Cherokee.

RC: Yeah, but Ms. Richardson was there when we were there.

DR: And, and there were two classes at the time or just the sixth grade?

RC: Just the sixth grade when I remember.

DR: Okay.

RC: I remember.

DR: Now, were the student body, the students were very active in, in, in wanting to learn as you remember?

RC: Well, it's average. We had some hard-headed in there, so it was average.

DR: Now, there's one question here that says did Burke High School have a philosophy of guiding educational principles, and how were these included? How did Burke influence to teach the students to, to—Were they strict in wanting to teach y'all how to learn?

RC: Well, the teacher that I went to was strict because that was, I had, me and my brother, we had, I ended up in the carpentry shop because they know my parents couldn't afford to send me to college. So, I took a vocational course. So, I was in the shop, the carpentry shop.

DR: Okay. All right.

RC: Yeah.

DR: And you later on became a contractor?

RC: A contractor, hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: How, how much was your parents involved in your education, you would say?

RC: Well, my parents, we had to sit down and we had to do our homework. That was a must.

DR: That was a must?

RC: That was a must.

DR: Okay. Now, when you graduated from Burke, was it a segregated school, only black, or was it integrated?

RC: Burke?

DR: Yes.

RC: It was segregated. It was a segregated school.

DR: Okay. No white students at the time?

RC: Never. Not when I was there.

DR: Were you aware of the difference in the schools at the time, in terms of difference between the black and white schools?

RC: Yes. I knew Rivers was white, and, and Burke was—Rivers was, was a vocational school, vocational school for, for if you were white, and Burke was a vocational course, shop course for blacks. So, we had Rivers, and we had Burke, black and white vocational training schools. Because, the white students were at the Rivers and took training. Blacks, we were at the Burke, brick mason. We had painting, tilling, carpentry, and home ec and painting.

DR: Yeah.

RC: They had us for lower training things. And, we had some good teachers at Burke school.

DR: Yeah?

RC: We had some really good teachers for learning.

DR: Tell me about books, the books that you all had at Society Corner and Burke. Were they new books?

RC: No. Some Burke School though, when I went to Burke, some of them were new because we had to buy all of them.

DR: Okay. And how about—

RC: The Society Corner schoolbook was [indiscernible] [00:12:03] from, but I think they came from the white school to us.

DR: Okay. How you conclude that? What caused you to conclude that?

RC: Because it was on the book, and someone had written in it.

DR: Okay. All right. Okay. Now, do you remember whether the Civil Rights movement had started at the time?

RC: To my town? No. Not, not my town.

DR: Okay. Who provided guidance, in terms of recommending what kind of courses that you should take?

RC: Well, we had a homeroom teacher. We had a homeroom teacher.

DR: And what was her name?

RC: My homeroom teacher was Mrs. P.T. Holmes.

DR: And she took an interest in the students?

RC: Yeah.

DR: Did y'all ever have an opportunity to talk about the difference in, between the blacks and whites and the issues there?

RC: No. We, we had nothing. It was the one issue we never talked about considering how everything was. We know it was segregated schools. We know that this, during that time, yeah—[indiscernible] [00:13:19] there are black and white water fountain. You know, then, you had black and then certain places you could go. [indiscernible] [00:13:30] had, had the foods you couldn't, food [indiscernible] [00:13:35] or you could buy food [indiscernible] [00:13:38], but you couldn't sit down and eat. But, it was just like a natural thing to us. You know, black people was—

DR: That's the way it was.

RC: ...adjusting to things, you know. They knew [indiscernible] [00:13:49].

DR: Now, over the years, you became a contractor. Was it difficult to find work?

RC: No. I didn't have no problem finding no work.

DR: How come?

RC: I guess on the cause of the people who you are dealing with, you know, because they, when I got out of high school, I started working for the Tuckers. And, it was [indiscernible] [00:14:19]—

DR: The Tuckers, what's that? Was that a white person?

RC: Yeah. He was a white contractor.

DR: Okay.

RC: And, I had, I started working with the Tuckers.

DR: So, that was like an apprenticeship with him?

RC: Yeah. And, he, he just, well, I remember my brother used to work with them. I never got to work with him. He said, "Well, [indiscernible] [00:14:36]." And, I learned a lot from him.

DR: Did you?

RC: I learned a lot from him.

DR: Was he on this island?

RC: Yeah. He lived on this island. He lived, he lived [indiscernible] [00:14:39]. Yeah. Because, after I leave him, I went to work with [indiscernible] [00:15:02]. I took up carpentry, and when I went back to him, I was head carpenter. I started off as [indiscernible] [00:15:11] to Richardson and [indiscernible] [00:15:16].

DR: They were working for the same guy?

RC: Yeah. I was the helper, and then, he ended up being divorced.

DR: Go ahead.

RC: The reason why he ended up being divorced, he was limited in education. He couldn't read [indiscernible] [00:15:32], and I went, I learned how to read [indiscernible] [00:15:37].

DR: Where'd you learn to read [indiscernible] [00:15:40]?

RC: I learned from working with, with different contractors.

DR: Okay.

RC: And, I learned how to read [indiscernible] [00:15:50] and sketching and all that. I got the basic [indiscernible] [00:15:55].

DR: Right.

RC: But, when I came back in the working field, you understand it's a little different. So, when I went to work with Tucker, I was the helper, and, after I learned all they could teach me, I left them.

DR: Okay.

RC: And, I started working with me and my brother [indiscernible] [00:16:17]. We went to work for another guy. He was the head carpenter—

DR: So, you used to work together then?

RC: Yeah. He was the head carpenter, and, after he got killed, I'd become the head carpenter.

DR: Now, did Bill go to Burke too?

RC: Yeah. Bill went to Burke [indiscernible] [00:16:33].

DR: He was older or younger than you?

RC: He was older than me.

DR: Okay.

RC: Yeah.

DR: Now, you mentioned Moses, Moses Backman.

RC: Do you know Moses?

DR: What kind of carpenter was he?

RC: Moses was a good carpenter. Dan Brown was a good carpenter.

DR: Dan Brown from [indiscernible] [00:16:50]?

RC: From [indiscernible] [00:16:51], and this guy Harry Le Sand. He was a good carpenter.

DR: Harry Le Sand, huh?

RC: Yes.

DR: That's the same Le Sand that was the brother [indiscernible] [00:17:02]?

RC: Yeah.

DR: Okay. So, that's the Le Sand that was married to one of the Judge girls then?

RC: His brother was married to one of the Judge girls.

DR: Okay. And you said you worked with Joe Richardson too?

RC: Joe Richardson.

DR: What kind of carpenter was he?

RC: Joe was a good carpenter, but he was limited. See, when I went, after I came back, I could do, I could do everything. I [indiscernible] [00:17:27] material, and, and in 19, 1968, I [indiscernible] [00:17:41] something from [indiscernible] [00:17:42]. In 1969, I got my state license. I was the first black carpenter on James Island who had a state license.

DR: And this was '69?

RC: 1969.

DR: Okay.

RC: I got my state license.

DR: Did you ever work with David Richardson?

RC: No. I never worked with David. David was a good carpenter too. I never worked with Dave. I worked with George, Moses Blackman, Harry Le Sand, [indiscernible] [00:18:11].

DR: Remus Cromwell, Sr., about the contractor. Remus Cromwell, Sr. operates out of Charleston, South Carolina and holds a homebuilder's license, according to Contractors License Board. Remus Cromwell, Sr. has a building, zoom—

RC: Two.

DR: ...school of night and is rated in the top 30 percent of 79,084 contractors in the state of South Carolina. Their license, South Carolina 3662, was verified as active when he last checked.

RC: Yeah.

DR: Now—

RC: You see that last number?

DR: Yes.

RC: You see how little that last number is?

DR: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, let me, let me ask you something. You said something that Richardson, you knew Dave Richardson. I happened to know that he, because he's much older than you—

RC: Oh, yeah. Dave's much older than me.

DR: ...was the first black contractor that knew how to figure lumber.

RC: Yeah.

DR: And, there were times when I'd see him take the full drawer, the full panel, and a piece of paper back and figure how much lumber he'd need for the job.

RC: Yeah.

DR: And, and, I used to see a lot of the contractors come to his house on Senate and ask him how to figure lumber.

RC: Yeah. That same thing used to happened to me.

DR: Yeah. Yeah.

RC: They used to come and ask, come and ask how to figure this. But see, when they started subbing, I used to work for one, two, three, four different contractors, and they would give me the plan. I had to figure, sit down at, at night, figure how much two by four, two by six, two eight, you know, how, what they, make—I had to make them a material list—

DR: Right.

RC: ...to turn into them, and they'd come back with it. Sometimes, I'd be up until 2:00 or 3:00 at night. You know I didn't have no calculator, so I'd have to turn inches into foot you had to buy, you know.

DR: Yes.

RC: Yeah.

DR: The old way.

RC: The old way. When came the calculator, it was easier to me because you could say six inches is 1.3 feet, you know.

DR: Now, before that, well, after that is the, the [indiscernible] [00:02:41], the [indiscernible] [00:02:43] was the, that's the new computer version of being able to prepare plans.

RC: Yeah.

DR: Now, were you able to work with a [indiscernible] [00:02:53]? Did you then develop that skill?

RC: No. I didn't develop that skill. My skill was I used to, after I quick figured the modification, I used the calculator. The calculator came up.

DR: Okay. Okay. All right.

RC: Yeah.

DR: Now, did you make any money?

RC: At that time, I made enough money to put five kids through college, build a house, you know, didn't, didn't have to borrow, didn't have to borrow no money. You know, so [indiscernible] [00:03:23], cause [indiscernible] [00:03:25] had sub-framing. He was getting \$0.75 a foot, and all these guys get from \$4.00 or \$5.00 on for all the things on the house. So, during that time, the time was different. The money was different. Yeah.

DR: So, when you started, a lot of the subcontractors were still black then?

RC: No. A lot of the contractors, a lot of, a lot of the contractors when I started—

DR: I'm talking about, like, maybe the plumber, maybe the painter, and the roofer.

RC: Well, maybe. No. We had some roofers because I had—And then, we had the [indiscernible] [00:04:05]. They had Fred Chisholm for the brick mason.

DR: Okay.

RC: They had Colonel Bulls was the plumber.

DR: Okay.

RC: Joseph Richardson, Joseph—

DR: June?

RC: ...Telessa [phonetic] [00:04:21] was an electrician.

DR: Okay.

RC: And, they had a couple pinners. One was the city. I had pinners, different pinners. Then, I had [indiscernible] [00:04:29]. One was from Wando, you know, subbing for them. All the woodwork—

DR: I hear the names of these guys that were right here when I was.

RC: [indiscernible] [00:04:39].

DR: Some of them were your cousins?

RC: Yeah. Fred and them was my cousins. Joe was not.

DR: Okay.

RC: Yeah.

DR: And these were—Now, I saw Fred the other day.

RC: Yeah.

DR: He's about the only one still alive now.

RC: Yeah.

DR: Fred's a brother of Julius?

RC: No. Fred was the younger one. Fred was 81, 81. Fred was working buddy. Fred was 40 years older than me.

DR: Now, you were, you said, 10 years younger, but still in training. The opportunity to make much more money was greater now than before?

RC: Oh, much greater. That's the reason why I retired my company, Cromwell Construction. I retired my company in 19-, 1996. The reason why [indiscernible] [00:05:36].

DR: Anything else you want to say about the experience at, at Burke?

RC: No.

DR: Anything else you want to add about your experience at Burke and the education?

RC: No. Burke, Burke was a good school, you know. We had some good teachers, but if you were willing to learn, you had some good teachers.

Charlotte Dunn

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 19, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Mary Beth Reed: Well, I'm Mary Beth Reed with New South Associates. It's March 19th and we're here at St. James Presbyterian on Secessionville Road and I'm interviewing Charlotte Dunn. I have the honor to interview. You were someone, you went to school at W. Gresham Meggett?

Charlotte Dunn: Yes, graduated.

MBR: And that's one of the reasons you're here today to talk to us about the school and the time period that you attended here, so just to get the housekeeping parts thought out, Ms. Dunn, if you would say your name and spell your name and give your address and then we're clear. Okay?

CD: All right, my name is Charlotte Roper Dunn, C-H-A-R-L-O-T-T-E, R-O-P-E-R, D-U-N-N. My address is 1915 Ghana Street, G-H-A-N-A Street, Johns Island, South Carolina, 29455.

MBR: All right, thank you. Roper, we interviewed Ned Roper.

CD: That's my brother. I'm the oldest. It was four of us and I'm the oldest. My sister died so it's just Ned and then I have another, the baby of the four is Nathaniel.

MBR: Okay, all right, we'll be going to that. Well, the first part of the interview is learning about you and your family, and I have five brothers and they'd probably talk about their family differently than I would probably so it's going to be interesting, but if you

could tell me where you were born, the location, about your parents, where they went to school.

CD: Okay, I should have brought a little piece of paper to write that down so that I could remember. My parents were Ned and Katie Roper and they were farmers so I grew up in a home where we worked. I would, we would have to help them. They were such, to farm, a vegetable farm, truck farm, and they had on Folly Road a produce market, Katie's Open Air Market, at one time, and we worked so that before I would go to school in the morning we would go out and help them because they didn't have to pay us. They just had to feed us.

And so we would go and work in the fields and in the afternoon when we'd get home, we knew that if it was picking time or whatever, we would come home, put our books up, and go and walk to the field or do whatever so we, that's why as I've got older and I moved away, I know that as I was growing up that I was not going to do that for the rest of my life. They stressed you had to maintain good grades.

There were times things that come out in my remembrance because my sister and I were the oldest so that when my father had planted a lot of tomatoes and he would get my sister and I, he would come to Gresham Meggett on his big tractor and pick us up and we would sit on the back of that tractor. It was a feeder, a plant, and I was—I'm ambidextrous so that it was a certain side I had to sit on and be put to plants and he would always use us because no matter how many acres he was going to plant, we couldn't break up the plants, the tomato plants.

Now when it was time to harvest that, he used migrants or other people. We didn't have to do that. We would work with my mother at the market. It was a certain, how should I say, my parents, I think the highest grade my mother and father had was 5th grade but my mother always stressed that your brain is a computer and once you learn it, no one can give it away, unless you give it away so that they always stressed education.

My mother would always be the one at the school, the PTA meetings, they were involved. I look back at some of the parents that I, as I was, because I am an observer. I got an award last, a couple of Sundays in church, and one of my pastors, I think it was a senior pastor, said all you got was the associate. I didn't know that they were moving so well, because I sometimes can't come to church, that she sits and observes and then has an opinion based on what she sees.

And so I knew that I was not going to be a babysitter or work in someone's house to keep children because I graduated in '66, which was a turbulent time in the south. There are certain things, hallmarks, that I remember as a child, being the eldest growing up, like when they integrated Folly Beach, people would drive by and throw

bottles of urine and yell “niggers.” So there were certain things that I saw, you know, your eyeglasses are how you perceive, how you feel, how you interact.

My mother always taught us, you always look somebody in their face. Never look at their feet. They’re talking to you so that when my sister and I worked at the market, the vegetable market, we learned how to handle money, how to interact with the public, and my mother, before she—I was, she and my father were married I think it was 11 or 12 years, might have been more, before they had me.

And I’m the oldest, because my mother said that she always thought she was going to be barren like the woman in the Bible, and then she had me, and then she had my sister and then had Ned and Nathaniel, and she had one birth that was a stillbirth and I remember as being the oldest, going in the room and looking at this beautiful baby on the bed and then they had a funeral, but the baby looked like it could just cry.

And so my mother was a good historian, storyteller. She said her mother had 11 children because they were—she was from Cordesville, Moncks Corner, and she only, out of the 11, it was just her and my uncle Joe that she had and said that when she was born, her mother told her that she was premature but she understood what premature meant because she put her in a shoe box and put her in a drawer to keep her warm and she said she told her that she knew that this one, meaning her, would die because all the fine ones that she had died.

And so my mother was a granny midwife. She delivered babies in the community. My grandmother, my father’s mother, was a granny midwife also, and she said she went to school because she wanted to find out why her mother lost all of her babies. And so, that inspired me that I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to go into the medical practice.

I wanted to be a physician but my mother said they didn’t have the funds but I wasn’t—I was still going to go in the medical practice so when I graduated from Gresham Meggett, I told my mother that’s what I wanted to do and she took me—this is one of those things that influence your eyeglasses, took me to the medical university (Medical University of South Carolina) the building is still down in the city, for an interview, because I filled out the application and went and as I was sitting there, the lady got up and said there are other schools that you can go to and she pointed out Roper LPN (Roper Hospital) and other programs but I couldn’t go there, but it was the time.

It was, that’s what happened. My sister had her own influences because she went to South Carolina State and when they had the shooting on campus, she was there at the time so that it sort of influences and it gives you a determination to get your education so I, as a child, a young woman, I did not want to be a nanny, keep children in the house. Some of my classmates, that’s what they did, and so I cried so much

at breakfast, at the table, that my mother put me on a train and I went to New York where I had family and then I stayed with one of my cousins and she took me to all the nursing schools there in New York.

And I choose Harlem Hospital School of Nursing and I graduated from Harlem and I lived, I got married in New York, and had two children and I came back here to Charleston, because I couldn't deal with the cold, 'nother, I couldn't deal with "not another winter with the cold." It was 4 degrees and I had no concept of how cold that was and I was working as a nursing assistant part-time to make money before I got into nursing school and the subways, the ones that went on the upper ground, "L", they couldn't run because it was so cold.

So I walked and when I got to work, the cold water hurt my hand like hot water, because I didn't have a concept, growing up in Charleston, and so I said no, I ain't staying here no longer so my husband, we moved back here and I started working at County Hospital as a registered nurse, but my children were young and I wanted to spend more time with them so I applied to the health department, because you worked Monday through Friday.

And what was another eyeglass event for me was I had to let my sister dress my children and bring them here to church one Easter Sunday because I had to work. I said I [indistinct 00:14:43], didn't fit what I wanted, so I started at the health department and I did that as a staff nurse and then there were—I worked in family planning, same type, you know, where you're working with women, and then the opportunity came up where I could go back to school and guess where I ended up at school at? The medical university in the school midwifery.

MBR: What goes around, comes around.

CD: Yes, trust God, and that's where I graduated from and then I worked as a family planning nurse practitioner for 12 years in that program and then it was some things that happened because I'm very outspoken and I changed department. I moved to adult health and I worked in sexually transmitted disease and that was—ended up being a ministry for me, so that I did that for 17 years because I liked the autonomy. You could diagnose under microscope and I had protocol and ordered medicines, worked under the physicians and so that was my career that I had.

And then I retired. My daughter is a nurse. I gave her my baton and so she works on the 5th floor of medical university with women, women that are pregnant and have problems with their pregnancy, she works on that floor and now there were some things that happened in her life and now she's going to school to become a nurse practitioner and so live in the north area with her because I help her when she—I have one little grandbaby, she's just turned 4.

And I remember, this is an eyeglass situation, when I was in New York, I couldn't get individual's family members, even if I would pay them, they didn't want to keep the children and that helped me to come back home and so it was fine because I was tired of the cold and so it's been—in life, there are hiccups and there are bumps in the road but there's never been a time when a pathway, God in his infinite wisdom opens up a door for you that you didn't even think about and then you move and you go, and his grace keeps you so that you can do the things that you want in life, but you've got to keep him in front.

You have to, because I've learned that if you don't keep step with the Holy Spirit, he can't work with you because when Jesus died, he left the Holy Spirit to be our comforter, to help us, to warn us, and so I've learned that keeping in step with the Holy Spirit is very important so that I, I have been blessed and so next week, I'm glad you came this week, because next week my daughter and I and the big grandbaby, we going on a Disney cruise. [Laughs]

MBR: I'm glad we snuck in.

CD: God broke it up anyway.

MBR: Well, let me take you back, because you talked beautifully, you laid out your life story and I just want to go back to certain time periods. Now, your mother went to school. Do you know where she went to school?

CD: She went to a little schoolhouse in Cordesville.

MBR: That's right.

CD: Yeah, and so she said the highest grade she got to was to 5th grade.

MBR: All right, so where did you go to elementary school?

CD: I went to, at one time it was Kings Highway and then from there, I went to Gresham Meggett because they saw young and older ones, and the reason why I always remember that, when I got on the campus at Gresham Meggett, being young, I was a little girl, and somebody was bothering me. I don't remember then, but I remember one of my cousins scheme, and they'd chastise them, don't you bother her, and so I never had any more problems and I remember that.

MBR: Good to have family, right?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Well, now, so you went to Gresham Meggett probably from 7th through, and graduated?

CD: Graduated.

MBR: -- in, I'm sorry, what year?

CD: 1966.

MBR: '66, okay.

CD: Uh-huh.

MBR: Well, how did you get to school?

CD: Walking.

MBR: Okay, and the tractor? I love that story.

CD: Yeah, that's how daddy would come and get us and then another stimulus, reason why I choose, wanted to make sure I got an education, children can be cruel and sometimes when they say something, it's not meant in a good way, and so they would say y'all the farm girls, like that's where you gonna be and that wasn't so, because they didn't have my mother and father.

MBR: I get that. I don't know. Well, going to W. Gresham Meggett, I guess let's talk a little bit about that, because you did go to school there during a turbulent time.

CD: That's right.

MBR: And so, we need to learn about that and how aware you were, obviously it's something that happened at Folly Beach, you were aware of where the country was and was going, did your parents talk to you or did your teachers talk to you about what was on the horizon?

CD: What I learned and heard was primarily in my home from my mother and father and what they wanted us to do with our lives. My father was a disciplinarian. He never beat, I don't remember any spankings from him but words can hurt far deeper and he said when we were, my sister and I being the oldest girls, and he said that boys and books don't mix. You can get your education and if you lose that opportunity by getting pregnant, you'll work on my farm from sunup to sundown, so needless to say, that was not a problem in my life. I didn't even go to my prom. Uh-uh [negative]. No.

MBR: No boys?

CD: No boys, uh-uh [negative]. My sister was more adventurous. She went and then when she came back from the prom, they brought her back late because he had set a time, and I remember him going in there and getting his gun and I said, and in my head I said, he told her not to go but she wanted to go. I went in my room and went in my bed and turned over and said it's your problem. I did.

I was a very quiet introspective child. I learned how—I would not start a fight, but if you came, you got more than you bargained for. I loved Gresham Meggett, because the teachers that I had, if you were studious and wanted to learn, they would make sure you got everything that they had, so that I remember being in classes, like the accelerated classes, and when I thought about this interview, one thing that surprised me was that while I was at Gresham Meggett, I don't ever remember, you know, like there are slow learners?

I don't remember a class like that, but what made me think of it was when I came back home and I saw some people having been out in the world, and how they would interact and talk, I said oh, but they were in the classes with us and I don't recall any distinguishing. Now if you wanted to accelerate yourself, you could go up but the rest were always in those classes where everybody went and I remember going—my homeroom teacher taught typing but because I took all the classes for college, I never learned how to type because I couldn't fit it into my schedule. That's why I said okay. [Laughs]

MBR: So if you were to look back and kind of characterize Meggett and how it educated the students there, the children there, how would you characterize that? It sounds to me you're giving the impression that if you came wanting to learn, you learned. I mean, was that pretty much the philosophy here at Meggett?

CD: Yes, for the teachers that I had, they would learn your parents in the sense that if they was—there were times when they had meetings with the parent, if your parent came, and my mother would, they knew that if we did something stupid that they could call my parents and that would be the end of that. My mother always said that she wanted us to learn and there were other students, those that wanted to apply themselves, they would—it was like an equal opportunity there and then it was up to the student to apply themselves.

So that sometimes I found what happened was those students all migrated and ended up in the same classes but we would all be together like in homeroom but when it was time to take the classes, that's when you would have to break up, and I wasn't aware that there was some people that were slow learners.

MBR: I see.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: That's interesting. So, you were on a college preparatory. Your course work was all going to that direction?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: So that would include what types of classes and were there favorite teachers or mentors that you would mention?

CD: No, I think I got along with all of my instructors. I don't remember any favorite teachers. I liked them all, because I didn't have to worry about going to my parents and telling them that I was acting crazy. You could just talk to me and I would take it in. You didn't have to worry about chastising me.

MBR: Well, now this is going to be pulling, and I know that, from Kings Highway to W. Gresham Meggett, I don't know what Kings Highway looked like, but W. Gresham Meggett was a new school, modern looking.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Do you remember any first impressions, like went you got here? Was it much bigger, in terms of?

CD: Yeah, to me, I remember it being big, large. Sometimes when I'm dreaming at night, sometimes I'll end up, and it seems like for me, it's the old campus that I grew up in, and I'm just in the halls, I am looking at the hall or whatever in the dream, but I don't remember anything really traumatic. There might have been stressors, if it was something like when I got in geometry and algebra. I'm not a math person. I'm a science person. I had to really focus to get it, in order to get to where I wanted to go. It was stressors like that.

MBR: I see.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Some folks have brought up the fact that some school books, not some, but many school books, or text books, were secondhand, and I don't know if that was prevalent when you were there?

CD: It may have been but it was all that I had, so you learned what was in that.

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

CD: I don't doubt that because I remember hearing about that, but if you didn't have the resource for anything else, it didn't stop me from learning what that book had. It qualified as a book. It may have been old but you learned that you can put, when you get to something new, add that on top of that.

MBR: That's a good way of thinking about it, right?

CD: And that's what I did.

MBR: It's all about attitude, I guess.

CD: Yeah, yeah. I remember some of the books, you could see where other people had written in them and stuff, but regardless I didn't know what was, I had to learn what was in that book and once I learned that, I knew that if they brought something else then I would learn that.

MBR: Well, how about socially, all right, I understand, I went to an all-girls school.

CD: Okay.

MBR: So, I'm right there. I think my father probably felt the same way, but socially were there clubs, were there things that you got to do at school?

CD: Well, if it was the thing that I was interested in was music. I sang in the choir and I had Mrs. Merritt, and we sometimes went to competitions, and we would go to that. I enjoyed Home Ec, because my father, before he was in the Navy and he was a cook in the Navy and he told us how he cooked for all of the officers during World War II on the ship but he couldn't get the rank because he was black.

And the other side of that was my mother worked at the Navy yard and she said the foreman told her if she was a white woman, she could get an advancement but because she was black, it didn't happen, so that when I had the encounter at MUSC, it didn't sound foreign. It wasn't you personally, it was you the color, and so you understand that, otherwise, some people would have become disheartened but it was where we were at and what was happening at that time.

MBR: Did you hear of children either being selected to go to James Island High to start the integration process?

CD: I think my baby brother was in that crew, because by the time I graduated, that was after I left.

MBR: Right.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Were you in New York by that time?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: You were? Okay.

CD: Yeah, because in fact I remember working and my sister wanted to go to South Carolina State and I remember working and bringing money and giving it to my dad to help her to go to school because even when I was in nursing school, Harlem Hospital nurses had a beautiful cap, looked like a boat, and then you would put the black stripe on it when you graduated. What I did, was, I had an iron. Mom and Dad sent me a television and I had an iron in school and I took that iron and I went to all the students who wanted their caps starched and ironed and that's what I did to make money.

MBR: Ooh!

CD: I did, and then after I got tired with that, when I finished the first year, I took the LPN exam at Columbus Circle, then I took work at the hospital, not as a nursing assistant but I would get paid as an LPN and I did that.

MBR: Pretty canny.

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: Like a boat, huh? Do you have a picture of you in one of them?

CD: I saw it the other—let me see.

MBR: I just thought I'd ask.

CD: Let me see. I'm going to look in here, because I think my brother, yeah, I'm going to look because I think he did send me a picture.

MBR: Now your youngest brother is Nathaniel.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Am I correct?

CD: Yes.

MBR: Did he go to school then?

CD: He went to school at James Island.

MBR: He went to James Island, okay.

CD: Yeah, he went to James Island but my sister and me, we went to...

MBR: And I don't know where Ned went to school. I didn't interview him.

CD: I don't remember.

MBR: Because for that time, you're going to school, having a very full life, did your sister end up finishing at South Carolina State?

CD: Yes, and then she went back and got her Master's. She was a speech pathologist, yeah.

MBR: Your parents must have been very proud.

CD: Yeah, well.

MBR: No truck farmers unless—did Nathaniel turn into?

CD: No, he was a welder by trade and he didn't want to—so he went to a technical school and he was in the Air Force. I can't find it but if I find it, I will...

MBR: If you find it, I think that's great. So, when you were at Meggett, in terms of racial tensions, was it at the school at all or, you know, obviously things were going on in Charleston.

CD: Right. But it was all black when I was there.

MBR: Okay.

CD: And so it wasn't—I don't remember anything on campus but around us, stuff was going on.

MBR: So you're pulling in from what's gone on, like the...

CD: Community and different things.

MBR: --the Folly Beach.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Did you have any interaction with the white schools?

CD: No, I don't remember any.

MBR: So, it was kind of a closed...

CD: Yeah, it was. I think that's what precipitated my going to Harlem Hospital School of Nursing because it was primarily black and I was very comfortable in that, because we also went to Bellevue School of Nursing, went and interviewed there. I could have gone there. Columbia. I chose Harlem because I'd already had my eyeglass experience down here. I wasn't playing that.

MBR: You wanted to get ahead.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Well, when you came back down, did you settle on James Island, you and your husband?

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: So you came back home?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: At that point, were your parents still alive and were they still farming?

CD: Yeah, they were. Daddy had, the truck farm was bigger. He had more equipment, more acreage that he planted. He rented from, and did it, and mom to market was big, and they did that and then he died. What year daddy, I don't keep numbers.

MBR: No, I understand.

CD: Sometimes...

MBR: No, you get those later. Don't worry about that, but there are truck farmers on...

CD: On James Island.

MBR: What road?

CD: Grimble Road.

MBR: So it was on Grimble Road?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Okay, all right, I know the tractor ride wouldn't have been...

CD: Yeah, he went around the back way, so it wasn't that long. It was long enough, though.

MBR: [Laughs]

CD: So he went around and we went to Gresham Meggett and then he'd come back around and we'd go to the field and start working.

MBR: So, I'm not going to ask you what date you came back, if you had—when you came back with your husband and children, you know, when you set up your own household here, how much had the culture changed? How much?

CD: It seemed to have changed but in your daily walkings and you would still, you could recognize it. There were things that occurred...

MBR: That racism was still here?

CD: -- that racism was prevalent. You didn't come back thinking that the world had changed because no, it hadn't. You saw it. In fact, my mother and I were on the Oprah Show years ago because of where she was born, it was a book by, I can't remember, Ball, his first name, Slaves in the Family.

MBR: Yes.

CD: We were a part of that.

MBR: Really?

CD: Yeah. And, I worked with that, and mom and I went and I remember the most poignant thing about it, being on Oprah was, she asked the question and I remember my response. My response is that you live with racism every day you walk out of your house, every day. Now, compared to looking back, it's not as prevalent because it's still there but your interaction, there's more people that move into the area that don't

necessarily have the complete ideology of those of the people that are here that were a part of it.

Sometimes, it's ingrained. They don't question when they say and do things because they've done it all their lives. Unless you confront that person and they are willing to look at it, some will change and some won't and I can't change them. God changes people by what he has that occurs in their lives, but you have a lot of different people with different thoughts. Everyone isn't like that, and usually in my discernment, you can tell those that have it because they can't fake it. It's sad but it's true.

I remember when I came back with the kids and we were like going in the store and you know how children want to get into the store? My son brushed this tall white gentleman and he turned around acting like he was going to hit him because he—the little child. Well, he was going to have to scrap on the floor because he wasn't going to hurt my child, but I read it in his face and he said the N word, need to watch where you're going.

So, just different little instances where you know it's still there, and it's heartbreaking to see where we are today because of the ideology if your leader at the top says it, those that want it back like that, the plantation, then they act on it, and I think it's sad, but there's also more conversation. When you think about the African American Museum that they're building, the one that they have in Washington, D.C., and then because of, I just remembered, my mother and I were in the Smithsonian, talking about slavery. It was, I can't remember, Ned would remember what they called it.

MBR: Is it a booth you go into to speak?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: StoryCorps.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Like the StoryCorps, where you go in and talk.

CD: And we were featured in there based on what we said about slavery and bringing the slaves over so that I thank God for the glasses that he gave me, because if I walk into a place and I'm truly welcome, I can feel it. I know one time I came back. I was back here and we went to a furniture store in the north area, and the kids were with me and my sister had her son, and as we were going into the store, instead of looking at us, it was one of the, what is that store on King Street, Goldberg's or one of those furniture stores, and he just started yelling at the kids, "I don't want you in here sitting on the

brick!" I immediately just turned right around and I said come on, what? Come, and walked out.

So that you see things like that, and you know instantly what it is. If they had already done that, I could see them saying that, but we were walking in the store. Can't spend my money in there.

MBR: That's the way that one works.

CD: That's how it works. You don't say anything, just walk out.

MBR: Well, I'm going to bring you back to Meggett again and ask how going to school, because it sounds to me like your parents and your home life and the school made a tremendous difference in your life, but one of the things I was asking, how did Meggett shape who you were or what you were going to do, what your future was?

CD: Based on seeing the professional black women, I was like whoa, you get the education, and you carry yourself well, articulate, from Gresham Meggett I learned there were times when in my nursing career when I would have to come before a group, having watched those teachers, I always considered myself to have two languages, standard English and if I was in a group where they were talking Geechee or Gullah, I could move right along, and I saw that in the teachers. They were professional women. They'd trust. They would learn. Okay, it is possible. It is possible.

MBR: Did your teachers teach a standard English or was it two languages being used all the time?

CD: No, it was always standard English and if we as the students latched into saying something, Geechee or Gullah, they just kept right on going but they would come back to you with standard English so that you, if you were observant, you would hear the correct way to say it, particularly in the English class.

MBR: Did you have Ms. James?

CD: Yes.

MBR: You did?

CD: Yes.

MBR: Because another interview, he had talked about Ms. James. She was very holistic.

CD: Yes.

MBR: It wasn't just English.

CD: That's right.

MBR: She talked to you about being women, young women.

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: And I don't know if you remember any of those words or any things that she might have—she's just one teacher out of many.

CD: Yeah. I saw that in all the women teachers, and then when I got to Harlem, there was women teachers there that, I said okay, I can do this.

MBR: I think that's a great thing, just seeing women in that role.

CD: Right. And so when they talk about it now, and lifting up women, I say well, I always saw that. They were black women but that's who I am, and then there were some women that were white that I truly considered a friend because they were good to me and I was good to them. So, that I never, my mother always said, never segregate yourself. You won't know what's out in the world unless you venture out into the world.

If you don't do that, then you won't know, you may meet someone that will bless you because some people are in your life for just that time and then there's others that are in for a lifetime, you know, for whatever span, so that I never thought of, when I worked with people, as them here and I'm here. No. And then if they tried to do that, there were instances where I went and I let them know, and there were times when I saw racism and you have to learn how to pick your battles, and if you don't know, you will get burnt up, yeah.

MBR: We've gone over so many different things. Actually, you've gone over—most of my questions you've just went through.

CD: Really?

MBR: I know, I'm taken aback because you just did a beautiful job. How much, one thing I didn't ask is, church leadership growing up, was this your church growing up?

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: It was?

CD: So we would walk from Grimble Road, come around and walk here.

MBR: Walk here, okay.

CD: Because if my parents were out in the field, they would tell us we could go to the youth meetings and all those things like that.

MBR: So you had the church as a support group, too.

CD: Yes.

MBR: Did the church leaders kind of help you negotiate getting through that time, do you remember?

CD: Well, just thinking about it, it was home, school, and church. School taught educational, church taught Jesus Christ, the Bible, they showed us how to travel, to go to different meetings because at the time when I grew up, our church, it was Saint James United. They were all black churches. Now we're integrated and I was here and I don't remember when that occurred but growing up it was all black churches and you go to know and see different leaders.

And then I when I got back here and became involved, once I, especially when I retired, that's when I took on working in the church and being a part of a lot of things. I was a Sunday school teacher, a lot of committees, I was an active elder, like the classrooms, they're in different colors. That was during my tenure as moderator of the discipleship and I hadn't been over here in a while but as I was coming down, I said, oh, I can remember that we had all of these different colors.

MBR: [Laughs] All the way down the hall. Yeah, Yeah.

CD: Yeah, and then when my children were growing up, we were members of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus and they traveled all over the United States and my children traveled with me. We would go to these conferences. That was an integral part.

So, it was like how I learned as a child when I came to church, what I learned was inclusive in here and you saw others and then you could see the parallel in professional people, but I also relearned how to travel and it was safe. And some children, as a youth leader, when we would travel to conferences, some children in their home now, because my father was a chef, he always, when we had dinner we had to set the table.

And I learned and I saw that there were some children weren't getting that in their homes because how you would tell, you didn't have to ask. When we'd go to a

banquet, they didn't know which fork to use. They didn't know how to use the napkins, because they eating fast food or just get a plate of food, and just sit down and eat but those things. If you don't get it in an etiquette class, you get it by going places. My father used to say travel, see what other people are eating, because you may not necessarily be on top of the world what you're doing now. There's something else going on someplace else.

MBR: Where'd he go in the Navy? Do you know?

CD: He was over there in Guam and my brother would know more because he did a presentation on that. He was on one of those ships that they talk about, and I don't remember. I know Ned would. But he had pictures, I know was in like the South Seas or wherever because you'd see different kinds of palm trees, but then you saw bodies in the picture and different things and so he was over there.

MBR: Now I know. So he had an important career and he got to travel and understood why it was important.

CD: That's right.

MBR: Now when you called your mother a granny midwife.

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: Why the granny midwife? Can I ask you?

CD: Because she didn't go to a registered nurse school.

MBR: Okay.

CD: A midwife is a midwife but a granny midwife is one that was trained by the health department that worked under a doctor and they would go to the homes and give prenatal care, check on the mom and then when she delivered they would be there to assist them.

MBR: So that was actually a name. Granny midwife? That's how they characterized it?

CD: Yeah. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: So she had training as well.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: That's incredible that the three generations were involved in women's health you know and...

CD: And it was all spurned by her talking about it. I was talking with my cousin the other day and I had breast cancer twice and we were talking about it, so now we have to get together. We gonna get with Ned and we gonna do a tree because DNA now is very important, family history.

They just talked about it on TV this morning, they were talking about the statins and how some people can come off, if their eating is causing their cholesterol, but if it's a DNA reason, they shouldn't, and so I was saying okay and I could understand that because we talk about that a lot, Ned and I, yeah.

MBR: Yeah so because I think the family, oh yes, and the information that you get is, you just never know what's going to happen either with some of the families. Families are families, right?

CD: Families are families. Yeah, because I remember my mother talking when we were—Edward Ball, that's his name. I just remembered.

MBR: It is Edward. I was going with John but go ahead, it's Edward Ball.

CD: It's Edward Ball. It just came back to me.

MBR: That was a major book really for people understanding.

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative] and you know what the book helped me to understand? Why you see so much about plantation, so many plantations here, because that's how it was, and you have to put it together and sometimes if there's a challenge, you don't put it together

MBR: So your ancestors were part of the Ball?

CD: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. On the Ball plantation.

MBR: On the Ball's plantation?

CD: We even went there and they videotaped us and I forgot the name of the plantation but my mom told me that they had a cousin that was one, she remembers, he had blue eyes and was very fair, but they never knew what happened to him. But that happened. It happened. I mean, you got to be a realist and real, you know? That's why I like on television, they have these reality things. It depends on what kind of reality it is and I like to see that because then it typifies truly how it is and that's the reality, you know? Yeah, so it's interesting.

MBR: Kind of accepting and understanding it. That's a good thing, you know? Well is there anything else I should have asked you that I didn't?

CD: I don't know. I sometimes rattle on. I can talk.

MBR: No, you've did a beautiful job. That's why I am going through the different chunks. I hope that we can do a follow up, if need be to ask. I didn't ask one thing. The geography of James Island, you know, it is to itself, right?

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Because it is an island and so growing up here how did that effect—it didn't affect you must because you went to New York.

CD: Well, let me tell you, there's another glasses about that. I would sit and I would observe, especially during funerals, and I'd look and I'd see people, you know, the mourners, the family, oh, I didn't know that about that family. So, I decided as a teenager I would never marry anybody on James Island because they might be my family! You know the plantations, uh-uh [negative]. I ain't havin' that. And you'd get some weird gene and, no!

MBR: [Laughs] Is your husband a New Yorker?

CD: No, he is from North Carolina.

MBR: He's from North Carolina, okay, all right.

CD: Yeah.

MBR: Well, then, you achieved that goal.

CD: My ex-husband. We're friends now.

MBR: Ex-husband, okay.

CD: Took me ten years to get past that and I said forgive me for what I did to you and I'll forgive you for what you did to me. And so he's on his third wife and she comes to the house with him.

MBR: Life.

CD: That's life. Some people are so mean. Oh Lord, people have said to me, how you—I said it's God's grace. I didn't get there all of a sudden. It took me ten years to tell him forgive me and then now I talk to him maybe every week or so about the kids. They're adults but still we'll do adventures together and his wife she'll come and we

get along good. I told her, I say, I just didn't tell her this, I tell her, I say, I'm so sorry for her, she married to him. [Laughter]

No, and another joke I have, I say the only way I would get married again is if they came and it was written on their chest, God sent me to you, because otherwise forget it. I wear the glasses well.

MBR: Oh, that's too much. No, I actually said that yesterday to someone. That's why I'm laughing, too. Well, I guess let's talk about the legacy of Meggett. And when you look back and you think there was this school that educated African American kids ready to learn, ready to teach them, what do you think I mean when you look back at Meggett, the reason why you wanted to participate in this? Obviously because you must have thought it was special. Can you kind of talk to that?

CD: Because I feel that those teachers that I had, the quality and what they gave, you don't necessarily find in all schools and all teachers today. And the reason why I say that is, sometimes channel 2 will talk about the teachers, spotlighting the good, you know, the best. If all of the teachers were like that, you wouldn't have the inequality in education but some people don't teach for them to truly learn, they don't.

If the child is ready to learn, teach them, based on what I experienced. My grand baby just turned 4 in March. My daughter has her in a private school in the north area. She knows how to spell her name, write her name, she's reading, 3. The dilemma now is to find a school because they go up to 1st grade, find a school because the legacy of that school that she is going to those children when they come out they can go into word of God, they can go into any of your top schools because they know and if they got the brain to learn it they teach them.

The dilemma for my daughter now is to find a school to put her in because word has gotten back that sometimes when they get into certain schools the teachers want to know why they know so much and then they start having behavioral problems with the children because they're not stimulated by the teachers. They just keep them and if they're used to education coming out there the child, well what if they're frustrated?

So that's a part of the racism. But the legacy of Gresham Meggett is if you wanted to learn, just go in there and apply yourself and you'd get it. And it's not that way in the schools. Some schools are more prepared. They still have problems with funding. That's the School Board meeting, that they were saying the inequality of schools, some schools, but when I went to a meeting at Saint Johns and someone came, I don't even remember who he was but this man said there's a pie and everybody can't get a slice of the pie, and I said okay I know what that means.

And of course I could not tell you what he said afterwards because I stopped listening.

That's a part of the racism. That's how it is. So that if you were a parent and you want your child to get the education, you have to know where you're putting them, even today, even today and that's a reality.

MBR: Yeah, that's a good way of melding what we have today with what you experienced.

CD: And that's what I see as the legacy of Gresham Meggett because I wanted to know, I wanted to learn and they put the information there and they would test you and if you tested where you could move up they moved you up.

MBR: I probably should have asked this earlier, did your parents have any qualms about Nathaniel going to James Island High to be part of that? I mean it was the only path ahead but do you remember any family thoughts?

CD: I remember my mother talking about there was something that occurred racially down and she had to leave the market and go down there and the minister went down there because there was racial stuff going on and he was driving their car to school and she went down there and told him get your daddy's car and bring it back to the house. So there was racial tension but that didn't stop my parents. My daddy would say to her, Katie, you go down there because I will fight and so she went.

MBR: Problem solved.

CD: Problem solved. But she did it when we were growing up so the legacy of my parents, we talk about that, the legacy of Gresham Meggett is what spurred me to go to the school of nursing I went to and to keep on learning and that's...

MBR: You're very lucky. Well I thank you. Is there anything else you wanted to say?

CD: I can't think of nothing.

MBR: I think you did beautifully. Thank you very much.

CD: I just, I remember because of my experience with MUSE at the beginning of my nursing career, I ended up on a committee that when I was at the health department someone from the federal government came in and I talked about it and I ended up on a committee in Atlanta where I would go every three months and meet and they was talking about the equality and different things and I did that for a while and then I moved on.

MBR: Well you had a great career.

CD: I enjoyed nursing. I enjoyed it and now, but the one thing that helped me at the end was the biblical text that says work while its day because the night comes when

no one can work. So that when I developed AFib and I was complaining, didn't know that I had it, and I kept saying, I said, he said you have palpitations? I said something else is going on and I had to slowly get out of doing that ministry, but in order for me to deal what it was, work was, you've done your work, because of no man.

MBR: That's great. Well thank you.

(END OF AUDIO)

Terry Fox

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 21, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Mary Beth Reed: My name is Mary Beth Reed. I'm here—as I said, I have the honor to interview Terry Fox, who was a teacher at W. Gresham Meggett, which is the reason we're here today, to hear an oral history from him. We are at St. James Presbyterian on Secessionville Road. I always have to remember that. And it is March 21, the first day of spring. We hope. We hope.

I am very happy to meet you and I'm very pleased that you reached out to us. The first thing in this interview is to really kind of get your background to find out where you came from, your education, you know, where you grew up, before we understand how you landed here. So could you tell me a little bit about your background?

Terry Fox: Sure. I'm an only child, born in 1945 in Lenoir, North Carolina, which at that time was a big furniture manufacturing center. It's near Hickory. You don't know where Lenoir is even?

MBR: Not Lenoir, but Hickory, I do.

TF: I'm like, okay. Well, you've never heard of Hudson then I'm sure. Hudson was my hometown. It was a town of about 1500 people. There were about 140 students in my high school graduating class. And it drew from surrounding areas, but it was all white. Graduated from high school in 1963. Don't do the math, okay?

So I was a very much cared-for child. I was an only child, and my parents, I don't think they waited intentionally. I never asked the questions, but I think that they probably tried to get pregnant, as we say in the current parlance, it didn't work, and then it

did and this glorious animal came to them. But, I mean, I had wonderful parents. It was the Ozzie and Harriet era, you know, everything was very innocent, very pure. Thought that way anyway, to me in small-town North Carolina.

JT: What were their names?

TF: My parents?

MBR: Yes, your parents' names.

TF: Earl Clarence Fox and Dorothy Roberson Fox. He was a barber. She was a housewife as they said. He was the second-generation barber in his family. My grandfather had barbered in this little nowhere town. And then my dad went away to college. Our small town is about 12 to 14 miles from Hickory where Lenoir-Rhyne College still is, was then. And he schlepped over there and got a degree in history, came back and began to barber, and barbered for the rest of his life. I did not have at all a privileged upbringing, but I had a very loving and healthful one from my perspective.

As I believe I mentioned, there were no black students in my high school. There were no black individuals who lived in my direct community. I never saw black people. And my father's shop was in Lenoir, which was a somewhat larger town six miles away, big furniture manufacturing center then. And I know that there were black families who lived there, but I didn't see them. They had their own separate school, which was—I didn't realize the irony of it until later, but it was called Freedmen's. I imagine many of the schools of that era were, but that didn't resonate with me at all. I had no idea what that was about. I thought it was Mr. Freedmen's school or something. You know, I just didn't have that—it's a pretty innocent time. And I'm still a little bit naïve for someone of my longevity shall we say.

So I had a good time in high school, enjoyed, you know, fairly typical high school, dated, did all those things. Then in 1963, I graduated, went to UNC in Chapel Hill and had an incredible four years. It was, you know, once again, a most formative time in my life. You know, I still have—very grateful for that experience, both in the degree to which it broadened my worldviews and the things it taught me, not only in terms of textbooks, but the way to be in the world.

For example, I was, my first year, placed in a suite in a residence hall with seven other freshmen. Eight of us, two per room. And as I remember, there might have been two Southerners out of the eight, but most of them were Yankees. And you know how terrible that can be. And when I, in speaking to one of my suitemates, said, "Well, I'm going to go take a shower now," they trained me. They broke me very quickly. I no longer said shower. I'm not going to take a shower. So I learned how to enunciate and

keep my Yankee pals happy. I mean, UNC was a great melting pot geographically, not racially at that point. Am I over-talking?

MBR: No. You're doing beautifully.

TF: Okay. Well. So great four years in Chapel Hill, had—I've always been drawn towards creative, edgy enterprises. You know, there's something a little weird we can get into, let's get into it. And I did some of that at UNC and just had a great time. My GPA suffered, but hey, what the hell. I got out. Then I began to apply to graduate schools because I didn't know what the hell else to do. I also took the law boards. And I'm thinking, oh, hell, I can be an attorney. Did well enough on the law boards to be accepted into UNC Law School, but my GPA was too low. That was a similar situation to a number of the graduate schools I applied to. And unfortunately, the best grad school I could get into was University of South Carolina. Mmm, yeah.

I'm sure it's a fine school, but for me, after being in Chapel Hill, it was hellish. Hated, hated Columbia. Still hate Columbia. Just it was an awful year. Now I'm going to be entirely frank here. One of the big issues at that point was that I was struggling with my sexuality. And that started when I was young, but it really came to a critical point when I was in grad school in Columbia when I was sharing an apartment with another student, a guy I'd known casually. He was Catholic, she was Jewish, and I was alone with both of them. So it was like, what do we do here? And we had a wonderful time, and they were—they understood what I was going through but they—and they were very supportive, wonderfully supportive.

But in my dissatisfaction with life in Columbia and having been to Charleston a number of times—My roommate in that apartment was from Charleston. I visited here a number of times over the years; couple of times with my parents, once as a high school senior, and then I came home a number of times with my roommate from up there. So I'd always been sort of intrigued by the mystery of the city and the architectural grandeur, even though it was pretty faded back then, the good old days. So I made—just made the call I was going to move to Charleston.

Concurrent with that, you might think about, hmm, what was going on in the US politics, the international scene in particular? And Terry was much too pretty for bullet holes. So, you know, I, you know, I—sometimes, you know, I could have had bone spurs like someone prominent in our media these days. I just—I could not get my head around the possibility of going into the armed forces and going to Vietnam. All that was going on kind of the same time simultaneously with me and—so I moved to Charleston. My parents, as I mentioned, were devoted to their pretty little boy. That was a long time ago. But I managed to get a job and even though I had fairly high lottery numbers—I don't know if you remember all that.

MBR: Yes, my brothers—

TF: The draft lottery and all that.

MBR: ...were at that point, yes.

TF: But I had—did I have numbers or low numbers? Is it low numbers that were good? I think the low numbers were—I must have had low numbers.

MBR: Yes.

TF: I couldn't remember. I try to block it out. So I've always had the sense, although we never actually—I mean, my father may have alluded to it, but he knew the people—He was a wonderful man, very gentle and kind and well-loved in the community. And people had a lot of respect for him because the way he was in his life. And he knew the people who ran the draft board in Caldwell County, North Carolina. And I believe that they knew that the Foxes' little boy didn't need to go off to be shot at. So that—I mean, it continued to change because, you know, each year I think I'd have to go back. I'd get another number—

MBR: Right. You have to kind of re-up number.

TF: ...the lottery or go and—You know, it's crazy time. So that was the way I got to Charleston. One thing that I failed to mention a few moments ago is—I think I alluded to it, but UNC, although it was then, in my perception certainly and I think the perception of many people who were there, a very liberal institution. And, you know, a fine institution academically, but there was—there were virtually no black students at UNC when I was there. I was in an 800-man dorm and I remember three, four, five black guys in my dorm. And, you know, with my background having been so limited in racial integration, I didn't think anything about it. So, you know, just was the way it was, the way it has always been, which is, you know, I guess, a terribly narrow view. But it's—I was 22 or 23 at the time. You know this has been 50 years ago.

MBR: I know.

TF: That's crazy to think about.

MBR: I know.

TF: Crazy to think about. So I moved to Charleston and found a great little house downtown on Smith Street. That may not mean anything to you—

MBR: No.

TF: ...but it's right in the heart of the historic district just north of Calhoun, \$65 a month—we'll get back to that—and settled down into a coming-out process. And I've done it. You know, over 50 years you better hope so, hadn't we? And a new area of work. And to be once again, totally honest, I never wanted to teach. I had teachers in my family. My aunt was a longtime schoolteacher. Several others members of the extended family were educators. I never wanted to do it. But it was a job that I found and it allowed me to do the other things in my life that were important at that point. So Gresham—W. Gresham Meggett.

MBR: Was that the job that—

TF: Yeah. That was my first real-world job. And just as a footnote, in driving over here—I'm over on Johns Island, which you may not know where that is.

MBR: No, I do. I came through right—

TF: It's that way, if you will. And I was coming down one of the roads that led directly to Grimball and I thought, what the hell, I've got a few minutes. So I just drove down and looked at the school again. You know, still being used for—not sure exactly what the purposes are at this point, but it's just—

MBR: Private school.

TF: It's always sweet to see it. So that brings us to W. Gresham Meggett.

MBR: It does. Now, did you see the job listed somewhere, or—I mean, how did you apply for that job?

TF: It must have just been through—Things were much more simple back then.

MBR: That's what—it probably was.

TF: You know, I'd probably just say, "Hey, got a job?" "Yeah. Come on, honkey." And once again, I had really—and I'm a little ashamed of—not ashamed—surprised at myself about some of this lack of awareness. I don't even know that I had an understanding at the time of the fact that the schools were segregated.

MBR: That's what I was going to ask you. [Indistinct] [00:16:40] prepare you or is it you're just going to a school? You know what I mean?

TF: I don't remember much about it.

MBR: Be there at a certain time and—

TF: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yeah, basic [indistinct] [00:16:47], "This is your job. You're teaching English," which was my major at UNC.

MBR: Okay.

TF: Very useful.

MBR: Don't go there.

TF: It's allowed me to do a lot of random stuff over the years, but—so...

MBR: And you were on Smith Street, right?

TF: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: So you're a Charleston resident?

TF: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: What was the game plan? How were you going to get to your job? I mean, was it on James Island? I mean, you just—

TF: I had a car.

MBR: You would commute—Okay.

TF: Yeah. I mean, I drove. And now that I—You know, from that time, it was kind of a schlep, but I didn't really think of it that way.

MBR: That's what I'm thinking, it was a little bit—Yeah.

TF: Just something I got up in the morning and did. I mean, there was no traffic back then. I mean, I don't know—I have no idea how long it took me to get out there, but it was—the whole—You probably came down Folly Road—

MBR: Sure. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

TF: ...to get here. Well, Folly Road was—not a wasteland, but not—

MBR: At all developed.

TF: ...in no way close to as developed as it is now.

MBR: Right.

TF: And the road we call the James Island Connector would not have been there, so I would have had to—This probably doesn't mean much to you, but I had to—You know, it's probably a significant loop around off the peninsula to come to Folly Road all the way out—

MBR: To come, then come out here.

TF: ...to Grimball. But didn't think about it. And I'd come out in the evenings for PTA meetings and basketball games and whatever else felt right to do.

MBR: So 1969.

TF: 1968 I started.

MBR: 1968 you started.

TF: Wait a minute. Is that right? Yeah.

MBR: Okay. So did you teach at Meggett two years?

TF: One year.

MBR: One year. Okay, '68.

TF: And as I remember—

MBR: The school year, '68, '69, right?

TF: ...we didn't know they were going to close the school—

MBR: Oh, okay.

TF: ...until quite late in the year. And I don't have any awareness of the powers that came into play at—you know, disperse all the students from Meggett to the other schools, or even really fully where they went at that point.

MBR: Well, were you a surprise when you walked in? How did it work?

TF: To the school?

MBR: To the school. Did you meet the principal first, and who was the principal at that point in time?

TF: Alfonso Evans.

MBR: Okay.

TF: Do you want photo illustrations?

MBR: We have this one—

TF: Oh, do you?

MBR: ...but I'm going to look at it when you're done. I've never seen it in real life. I've only seen photocopies.

TF: Okay. Oh, you already have a photocopy.

MBR: So—

TF: Because I was going to suggest that—

MBR: We may if it look—Can I take a look?

TF: Oh, of course.

MBR: Alfonso Evans was the principal? So when you reported at Meggett, did you report to him, I mean, and—

TF: Yes, I remember. And I didn't like him very much.

MBR: Oh.

TF: He was a little pompous and off-putting and—Had nothing to do with race. He just—I thought he was kind of a "doof." That continued through most of my year there. Not that it tainted my interaction with him, but, you know, all the other—there were—and I counted last night. There were five other white instructors that year—

MBR: Okay.

TF: ...and perhaps a sixth who's not in the yearbook, and I can't quite figure out why she was not. But there were five white instructors who came for the first time. One of them, a guy—In my dorm at UNC I befriended a fellow from Charleston who, as

things evolved, also turned out to be gay all these years later. But he was—after he graduated, he came to the—he was trying to get into medical school and didn't make it in his first application. So he went back for the year after our graduation and took some additional classes at [indistinct] [00:21:04] University to bolster his chances of getting in.

And then the year after that—I don't know when he got accepted, but the year after that, I said, "Hey, we've got a job out here at Gresham Meggett. You want to come apply?" So he came out here and taught science with us. So we had two UNC—two white UNC grads on the faculty. And he had come from a private Catholic school of education here in Charleston. So I don't know if the—I doubt that even the parochial schools would have been any more integrated—

MBR: At that point.

TF: ...at that point.

MBR: Yeah.

TF: Because now, I mean, they are certainly and have been for years, but—So I'm sure it was thought-provoking for him also.

MBR: Well, you said—you mentioned that it was transformative for you. Can I ask you to unpack that? What do you mean? How was it transformative? Was it time in your life or teaching—Maybe you were an educator underneath all that?

TF: No.

MBR: No?

TF: Still am not.

MBR: Still not. Then—

TF: I've been in education-related roles.

MBR: Fields, okay.

TF: ...for many occasions through what career I've had, but I'm not a teacher.

MBR: I see.

TF: I'm not good at it. I don't enjoy it, in a classroom setting. A lot of what I did starting as a teacher morphed into working with—first kids with emotional disabilities, and

then I worked in a in-patient psych hospital for 10 years. And then I worked for two different small colleges here as administrator. So I've always enjoyed the interaction with younger people and I still do. And I think it keeps me a little more vital than I might otherwise be. But I'm not—I have never been a good teacher. I'm not—

MBR: All right. Well, how did—

TF: Maybe that's in my head, but—

MBR: Yeah. I was just thinking the same thing. I don't know what the students would say. What was it like teaching at W. Gresham Meggett? It was an all-black school at that point in time.

TF: Hm-hmm [affirmative], not a single—

MBR: So only the teachers—

TF: ...white student.

MBR: ...would be five out of—I don't know how large the faculty would have been.

TF: I would say 25 to 30.

MBR: Okay. So having five or six white faculty members was a significant number.

TF: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: Were the kids accepting? Can you talk a little bit about your welcome and how that worked?

TF: You know, I did feel welcomed and accepted, and I think I was as much an exotic animal to them as they were to me. It was new for both sides of us. I looked through the yearbook last night for the first time in several years, and it's like, I could immediately recognize some of the sweet faces that—of the people who were—of the students who were most sweetly responsive. I mean, there were some of them that were just so warm and charming and delightful. And I see them now 50 years later and I think, oh, I love her. Haven't seen her, of course, but, you know, really love that young person.

Couple of them—I'll show you the pictures a little later—who were just dear. I mean, really, we had such connection. One male and one female student that I had just a great rapport with each of them. And others, too, but these two in particular. There was one occasion, and only one that I can remember, in which I was threatened. There were, as I remember, about—I was in my classroom, and about four male students

came in and sort of got me in a corner somewhat threateningly. And then another male student came in and say, "Hey, you guys back off. Get out of here." And they listened to him. I don't know what their intention really was, but—I don't necessarily frighten easily, but it didn't feel right. So, you know, I was grateful for that reprieve.

MBR: Right.

TF: The classrooms were—the class size was, I don't know, 25 to 30 students, you know, not small. I remember—I look around at how clean and well maintained this church is, and the school is the same. I mean, the whole machine—They were proud of their school. And the instructors, many of them had master's degrees. Almost, as you would imagine, almost all their undergraduate degrees were from all-black schools. And many of their advanced degrees were from all-black schools. But there were a few went outside that or who'd gotten additional education up north. So it was quite a varied group of folks.

We all dressed for work. The men wore jackets and ties. I don't know if I wore a tie, a jacket every day, but—I'm jabbering. But I just remember everyone being dressed up. And there was a great deal of—my sense was—and I've thought about this a good bit in the lead-up to meeting with you—that at that point in time, being an educator was a somewhat prestigious job for an African-American, an educated African-American person. Perhaps one of the few jobs for an educated black person here. I don't know about elsewhere, but here. You know, you could go to college, get a master's degree, and come back and teach and be a person in the community at that time—I'm just speaking of my perceptions—who were—who would be respected, because at that point in time, teachers didn't take any guff. They didn't have to be nuns with rulers. They were stern matriarchs and patriarchs of "I'm going to tell your mama" kind of thing. And not that crass, but—I didn't mean that in a jerky kind of way.

MBR: No.

TF: It's just a—there was—

MBR: Parents would be told.

TF: ...a lot of—they knew a lot of—the African-American teachers, some of them probably came from the community out here. I don't know that necessarily. But they would know how to make it work within the family system. If a child was underperforming or acting out in class, they would say, "Hm-hmm [affirmative]" and it would all sort of level out after that. The female teachers always wore nice professional dresses, suits, nice jewelry. I don't remember high, high heels but probably comfortable stylish shoes.

MBR: Heels were there.

TF: And it was a group that had a good deal of pride in themselves and what they were doing. And I looked at the yearbook last night. I didn't realize until I read last night, that there was a whole adult education component over there, that they had I guess night classes for like literacy classes. That was 1968. That's pretty—progression's not really the right word, but pretty forward thinking for that point in time. And it just indicates to me a desire of the institution to—and the people of the culture, to better themselves. In the yearbook there are classes full of young women who look to be in their early to mid-twenties who are—I don't remember exactly which one. I think it was just a literacy class, like learning to read at that. So it was a way of bolstering an inadequate system that had been in place before.

MBR: Did parents—when you had to talk with the parents, parent-teacher conferences, did you see a real interest in kids' education on behalf of the parents?

TF: Yeah. I don't remember doing a lot of those, but yeah. I don't think they were quite as much in vogue as they have come to be. But, yeah, I mean, this was, once again, a tight-knit community. I mean, if you drive out that way now, as you probably have done, there are—almost all the houses are well painted and tidy. They're set in their own little lots that are well maintained and well planted. It looks still—it did then and still does look like a community that has a lot of pride in itself and takes care. I think even further up, there's been some development that is probably predominantly white. But most of the smaller houses I saw on the way out, the older houses are, I imagine, still black owned, as they should be.

MBR: It's your first year teaching. That's the other part of this. I was going to say, did you notice any difference or ever hear of any difference between the school materials, the furniture, the building itself? When you said it's well maintained, between that and white schools, did you ever hear any talk to that?

TF: No, I didn't really have any point of reference because I hadn't been in local—

MBR: That's what I was wondering.

TF: ...white schools. But I do have to say that it didn't seem as well equipped as like my high school had, as well funded. The books were not new. You know, there were indicators, now that you mention it. But as to a way to compare them to local white schools at that time—

MBR: That'd be hard.

TF: Well, I did go—when they closed Meggett, I went over to a middle school in Mount Pleasant to teach English. And it—although Mount Pleasant then was not the yuppie-centric—

MBR: Now.

TF: ...hellhole it now is, it—there was still—I remember most of my students there being white.

MBR: Okay.

TF: I don't really remember any black students, even that year.

MBR: In that year.

TF: I did teach the former mayor of Mount Pleasant English. Or Linda Page, who was the—just—she just lost the mayoral position of the most recent election. Taught her English when she was in the seventh grade.

MBR: Well, that's a claim to fame right there.

TF: Well. Didn't do very well at the polls but—

MBR: Okay. You're 1968, '69. So we're in the throes of desegregation. It's starting. Was there any tension or worry when you worked at Meggett? I mean, things were going on more in Charleston perhaps, and there were kids being selected to go and start the integration process. But was there tension in the schools, or were you aware?

TF: No. I don't recall any tension. I know that when the decision was made to close Meggett, there was dissatisfaction around that. Just as here 50 years later, if the school board is going to close a school because it's underperforming or it's in a rural area of the county, it's going to be a black school. It's the same thing happening 50 years later with the schools that have been traditionally under-supported financially. And it happens altogether too often. But I think a [indistinct] [00:35:24], at least as I read it, was the pride in the institution and the history that many of these instructors and the students and their families had with this community school.

I mean, that—we know that's gone on time and again all over the South, when—I think in many respects a lot of the African-American people would have preferred just staying all-black schools, did not see any real value in integrating. But it was a larger dynamic that any of us could look at that point in time. And they were—"they"—I don't want to make it sound like us versus them. It's just this community was happy and successful the way it was, within bounds. Now, I don't have any way of gauging

how many of the graduates went on for higher education. I know that the—a number of the students that I was most close to did, so—

MBR: Which is a measure of success.

TF: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you find out Gresham Meggett was going to be closed?

TF: I don't remember.

MBR: You don't remember?

TF: Uh-uh [negative]. Osmosis. Yeah. I don't—I honestly don't know. I was not a big reader of our local newspaper at that point. I'm sure it—the word came to the school.

MBR: And then were you just reassigned to another school the following year?

TF: No, I was, as far as I remember, sort of—"You're out of here, buddy." So then I went back to the school district and found this position in Mount Pleasant.

MBR: I see.

TF: So I stayed in those schools over there in middle schools for, I think, five—four years, four or five years. There's plenty of [crosstalk] [00:37:36] that I wasn't a teacher.

MBR: Well, did you keep in touch, I mean, or—the five or six folks that were white? Also with the black teachers. Like did everyone have lunch together? I think that would depend upon your schedule during your—

TF: It did.

MBR: ...workday, right?

TF: I remember us eating a bit in the—in a cafeteria-type thing. And I remember us having a few—Once again, the faculty was, in my experience, wonderful to me. I still look back at the yearbook and think, oh, god, she was a great lady. And there was one gentleman I'll talk about in a minute who I still see around, the faculty member. Guy named Floyd—I'll just [indistinct] [00:38:30].

MBR: Sure.

TF: Floyd Breeland.

MBR: Okay.

TF: You ever heard that name?

MBR: No.

TF: You might want to write it down and see if you could draw him out.

MBR: I am.

TF: Floyd, F-L-O-Y-D, B-R-E-E-L-A-N-D. His perspectives would be very interesting.

MBR: Okay.

TF: He was dynamic and personable and just a really open, friendly, warm man who went on—I don't know where he went to teach after Meggett, but he stayed in the school system for several years and then he became a state legislator. I don't know whether he was a representative or what.

MBR: Okay.

TF: But he was very prominent in Democratic politics for probably 15 years.

MBR: And he was a teacher at Meggett?

TF: He was, yeah, he was a teacher. I'll show you his picture—

MBR: Okay.

TF: ...when we get to that.

MBR: All right.

TF: And I continued—he's really, oddly, the only person I've ever seen—

MBR: That you see.

TF: ...with any frequency. He's the kind of person who likes to be out and engaged in things, and I'm the same. So we tend to see each other at events, you know, political, social, what have you. And the last time I saw him was probably two years ago now, just walking down George Street through the College of Charleston campus. And he's

gotten a job at the college in—I don't know if you're familiar much with the College of Charleston, but it's a—

MBR: Husband went there.

TF: ...party school—

MBR: Yes.

TF: ...largely, that continually says that they want to tackle the issue of diversity among their student body. So that was a part of Floyd's role at that point. Really if you have an opportunity, sort of ask some questions through the community.

MBR: I'm going to look around. Yes.

TF: He's a great guy.

MBR: Okay. Is there anybody else you would tell us to contact that you think would help us understand this time period? I appreciate that with Mr. Breeland.

TF: Well, when we look through the yearbook—

MBR: When we go through this, things may pop out. You mentioned Mr. Evans, right, but he was the principal.

TF: He is no longer alive.

MBR: He's no longer alive. Okay.

TF: And I probably was a little unfair to him. I don't know, something about him, I just—

MBR: Yeah.

TF: ...didn't—didn't click. As far as I can recollect, my feelings were like, this man is not really on his game. He's not sharp enough to be a principal. Uh-oh, little "judgy" for this right-out-of-college kid, isn't it? But it was a good faculty. I segued away from what we were talking about to touch on Floyd.

MBR: We talked about the difference in materials. Oh, I'm sorry. Were there any social events that the teacher—you—all the faculty members went to?

TF: I remember us doing a couple of casual gatherings. It was not an occasion where we'd meet after work or a happy hour—

MBR: Right.

TF: ...because—in part because there were no places to go to happy hour—or few, and because it was a rural school and we were all driving in, so God knows where they were all going to get back to where they lived.

MBR: Sure.

TF: But it was very congenial. As I said, everybody was dressed up and professional and—One thing that I was reflecting on is that we were always Mr. and Mrs. I don't remember any of them, other than my white colleagues, ever calling me Terry. Floyd came to eventually because, "You got to stop this shit, Floyd. You know, we've seen each other for 40 years. Let's do the first-name thing."

MBR: Mr. Fox.

TF: Yeah. But it was always Mr. Fox, Mrs. James. And I think a part of that was so that we didn't necessarily slip up in front of the students, "Hey, Terry." "No, no, I'm Mr. Fox," that kind of thing. But then also I think a part of it was the—what many of the instructors may have viewed as a part of the professionalism of their role. They had worked hard and spent money to become educators and to have—I don't want to say status, but that was a—felt like a little part of it, along with being well dressed and presenting well. You know, they were great role models for the kids.

MBR: Did you have to coach sports? Did you have to do anything like that?

TF: Are you nuts?

MBR: I didn't know.

TF: No.

MBR: No. English teachers don't.

TF: No. Too busy trying to figure out how to be a little gay boy around town. Didn't have time to coach sports. I can't dribble a basketball, even at this point in life.

MBR: Well, you mentioned Ms. James, and I know we are going to interview her.

TF: Who?

MBR: Ms. James.

TF: Oh, Willie?

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

TF: Have you met her?

MBR: Not yet.

TF: Oh, my God.

MBR: Her husband's ill or we would have—

TF: Oh, my God.

MBR: ...talked with her this week.

TF: That is so wonderful to know.

MBR: Right. Because she's very interested, but for right now, he just got home from the hospital and—

TF: Oh, that makes me tear up.

MBR: Oh.

TF: I so wondered about her because she was one of the people who was—I think she was maybe head of the English department. So I was with her on that team. But I just—that really is wonderful to know she's still alive.

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative] and very interested in telling her story, so—

TF: Oh, that's wonderful.

MBR: Right. We—

TF: When are you going to meet with her?

MBR: I'm going to call her this afternoon and—

TF: Do tell her that I—

MBR: Can I? Okay.

TF: ...started crying when you—

MBR: Oh.

TF: ...let me know she was still around. She was—And honest to God—And I'm a little ashamed of some of this. I don't know that I've seen, other than Floyd, any of the faculty. Maybe just in passing. One guy who's no longer alive, I do remember seeing him around a lot. But wow—

MBR: Not Ms. James.

TF: ...that is—that's Willie. And I probably never called her Willie, but—

MBR: Well, I didn't know. I just got her full name, so when I called, I wasn't sure if I was supposed to be talking to a man or woman. Just like when I did your call, but yes. And she—a lot of things that you said, people have also said about Ms. James is a role model. I mean, she was—

TF: Oh, she was always standing up straight and well dressed and always had the perfect little brooch on as I remember. We'll check the brooch in a few minutes. I mean, she was just—she was great. That makes me so happy to know that she's still in the community and alive. She may not have been more than a couple years older than I am, but there are a lot of people younger than I am who have since left us. So that's great.

MBR: Right.

TF: Excuse my sentimental—

MBR: No, she's there. Oh, I don't—

TF: ...thinking about that.

MBR: I will let her know.

TF: That really makes me happy.

MBR: Who was it? Diane Hamilton was also a first-year teacher. But I think it's social studies, so you may not have been—known her.

TF: Oh, yeah.

MBR: You know who I'm speaking of?

TF: Yeah.

MBR: But she was fun. She said that she would take the bus out here and then walk to the school. And then—

TF: Oh, my.

MBR: ...at some point Ms. James saw her and said, "Do you want a lift?" So they ended up carpooling. And now she drives Ms. James to the doctor's.

TF: Oh, man.

MBR: So they've kept in touch and—So it was a very beautiful story about the two of them. So Ms. Hamilton keeps up with her, let me put it that way, and her needs, so.

TF: Yeah, I remember her. She was very sweet, too. You've already met with her?

MBR: Yes, I met her earlier this week.

TF: Oh, I'm so excited that you're—

MBR: We've had great response from the teachers, and that's with Ms. James—

TF: From my era?

MBR: Well, I consider you a great response, and Ms. Hamilton. And Ms. James is going to be down the line. Ms. Hamilton mentioned a Mr. K. but didn't spell—I don't know. We'd have to look and find him in here, whether he's still alive. But—

TF: Well, they'll know how to—I mean, I'm sure—

MBR: They know how to contact folks.

TF: They'll [indistinct] [00:48:20] with Floyd.

MBR: Okay. Good point.

TF: I hope he's still in good health because he's—

MBR: Good point.

TF: ...a terrific guy. Willie's about—I mean, honest to God, I've probably have never called her Willie, but—the other person who I remember most fondly from the faculty. So that is just such good news.

MBR: Well, they said that—Ms. Hamilton pointed out that when—she went on to Fort Johnson after Meggett, and I guess Ms. James had her MA. But then department chairmanship went to the white teacher, not necessarily with the same education. So I'm sure that was hard.

TF: Oh, yeah.

MBR: I'm sure that was hard. But I guess it got better as you went. Because I think Ms. Hamilton became her department chair fairly quickly. She was a, you know, you could tell, an educator, right, right.

TF: Well, I—Did she ever marry?

MBR: I don't know. I didn't ask that. I didn't ask that.

TF: She kind of—

MBR: Perhaps not.

TF: ...always felt a little like an old maid in training.

MBR: She was—Now, I went to Catholic school, so I was like—Did you ever talk to your parents about what you were doing? Did they understand that you—

TF: Oh, yeah, they were proud of me. You mean for going into the—Oh, yeah, they—

MBR: Teaching and—

TF: Yeah, they were totally supportive. I think they were a little puzzled because they didn't know black people either. And I know that sounds odd, but this was a small town, not really rural, but small town surrounded by rural areas. And then there was another little town five miles away and another one six miles away. So it was—we had television and everything, like indoor plumbing, but it wasn't a real diverse population by any means. So, I mean, I think they were just kind of a little puzzled but pleased, so.

MBR: Well, that's neat. Well, I guess if you could characterize stuff looking back, what kind of role would Meggett have played in terms of getting people to have opportunity to have equal education? You know, what—the segregated school. I think you've

talked about this already, is pride and things of that nature. But when we think of legacy, because we see an awful lot of these students really interested in this place, you know, it being listed on the National Register. People don't go to those National Register Review Board meetings in Columbia. They just don't go. A busload went up to Columbia that day—

TF: From Meggett?

MBR: ...to celebrate. And I thought that said a lot—

TF: Yeah.

MBR: ...about the school. And I think you've hit on a couple of those points. But maybe if you could think back and kind of bring it together about how important the school was and certainly what it was to you.

TF: Well, there was a great deal of cohesion in the faculty, and I think everyone who was there really wanted to do the right thing and do the best things for the students. There weren't—I didn't like teaching, but I liked being there and I liked the opportunities it gave me. I learned as much from them as I ever taught them. There was—you know, about how to be in the world or how to be with people who are—You know, I probably didn't know how different we were until I got there. You know, I was blithely going on through life without really thinking a lot about that. And yet how much the same and how wonderfully warm and welcoming they were.

I mean, I'm sure that there had to have been individuals there who, even, you know, among the faculty who didn't want me there, students who didn't want me there, because they didn't want to make that change. And who knows if the whole system would have been better if all this craziness hadn't come to be. But it had to, or at least—I don't know what else culturally we could have done. I don't know if that really answered your question.

MBR: I think it did. I think it did.

TF: I'm bumbling.

MBR: You're not bumbling at all. You've done great. Is there anything I should've asked you about that I didn't?

TF: No. But I do want to tell you how my experience there culminated for the year. And I'll show you some of the people—

MBR: That's what I was going to—

TF: ...when we look at the yearbook. I taught mostly junior English, like third-year students, and really loved a lot of them. We had a great time. We had easy engagement. Hopefully I taught them something. But it was a really good relationship—interrelating rather than relationship. And—so at the end of the school year, we knew the school was going to be closed, I gave the kids a party at my house downtown. Cokes, cookies, maybe a cake or two. I had about—the neighborhood I was living in—Are you familiar with Ashley Hall school?

MBR: No.

TF: It's a very "poshy" girls' school—

MBR: Oh. No.

TF: ...downtown. Not in a posh neighborhood back then. Barbara Bush went to Ashley Hall—

MBR: Okay.

TF: ...all those years ago. It was in a neighborhood that was marginal, and racially mixed at this point. And I mentioned—You were away, but I found—when I moved here, I found this wonderful little house. It's what's called a Charleston single. And it's a—I don't know, it's probably dated from the 1840s, beautiful little house, two bedrooms, some formal moldings in the living room and dining room. It was a jewel. Still is. \$65 a month, which, you know, the same house would be \$3,000 a month downtown now. So, you know, these—we planned in advance. The kids—some of them had cars or had access to cars. They brought others in. I probably had 20 of the kids come to my house just—I mean, I—it was an open invitation to my students. Anybody could get there who wanted to come. Purely innocent. We played music. Some of them danced. I might have danced with them. We had a great time. It wasn't alcohol. It wasn't anything inappropriate at all. I think we ended by 9:30 or 10:00 so everybody could get back home. It wasn't on a school night I'm sure. So we had a great time. And they were wonderful, wonderful young people.

About two weeks later, I get an eviction notice. Apparently someone didn't like the fact that I was having young black people in my house. So—came from the rental company. I don't know—even remember who owned the house at that point, but—And this was doubly odd because it was in the house adjacent to mine was an all-black family. It's like—I don't know. It was just an odd point in time. But this was just before—maybe concurrent with the Charleston hospital strikes, which you probably read about that.

MBR: Do you think—did you have to move?

TF: Yeah.

MBR: You did?

TF: Yeah. They were not going to have that.

MBR: It was firm.

TF: Yeah. So that's all right. It was a sweet little house. It's a good place to live, but—And I, you know, don't have any regrets because I loved doing it with the—

MBR: The kids.

TF: My other UNC-grad colleague came. I think—maybe—I don't remember if there were any other teachers I—

MBR: Teachers.

TF: ...who came. But we were all chaperoned. We were all totally appropriate, just having a good time. And think about from one perspective, I was only—

MBR: How old?

TF: ...four or five years older than they were. We felt—again, not in any inappropriate way, but we felt like almost contemporaries.

MBR: Sure.

TF: They were—the ones that I was particularly [indistinct] [00:57:54] were very savvy and—

MBR: They were juniors?

TF: ...just grounded young people.

MBR: That was a great way to end the school year, but I'm sorry you lost the apartment—or the house, excuse me.

TF: Yeah, well, me, too. But it was—it turned out fine. It allowed me to move into an apartment—this is totally not related—over in another neighborhood, which allowed me to be neighbors with a—You've probably never heard of this story, but I'm not going to—We don't need to put it on the tape, but Charleston's first noted transsexual, Dawn Langley Simmons—Never heard of her? That's the way her voice was. She was a

Brit. Dawn. Yeah. That's another story for another time, not really related to Meggett except for the fact that she did marry her African-American chauffeur/butler/mechanic, depending on what story you're reading. Sometime Google Dawn Langley Simmons.

MBR: All right. You gave us our homework assignment. Thank you.

TF: Well, you'll have some laughs. So I traded my wonderful little house for another crazy experience.

Wilburn Gilliard

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on February 23, 2019 at W. Gresham Meggett School (Septima P. Clark Academy), James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed is the interviewer; Terri Gillett was the technical assistant.

MBR: Hi, this is Mary Beth Reed with New South Associates. It's February 23rd and I have the good luck to interview Wilburn Gilliard at the W. Gresham Meggett School. I think I hit all the points on that way, in case we-

WG: That's correct.

MBR: ...do something there. Basically, the interview, Mr. Gilliard, has four parts to it. The first one is great. It's where I get to know you and you tell me a little bit about your background. Where you were born, your parents' names. If you could give me some idea of your childhood, if it was on James Island, your connection.

WG: Okay. I was born on April 5, 1946 at Roper Hospital. I'm a native James Islander. My parent's name is Samuel C. Gilliard. And my mother's name is Eloise Richardson Gilliard.

MBR: Richardson. It's a common name out here.

WG: Right.

MBR: Can I ask you what your dad did for a living?

WG: He did carpenter work. A combination of different things. He was somewhat of a jack of all trades in some things, but at the time you do what you have to do to survive. But most of the work that he did was carpenter. He spent most of his time working at

Detyens Shipyard on calking and some other things related to the ships. I've never been there, so I'm not familiar with the details of it.

MBR: I got you. How about your mom?

WG: My mother was a domestic worker and in later years, she became a – call it nurses aid, which is a CNA nowadays. So that's what she did.

MBR: Did you come from a big family?

WG: No. My family's large. I mean it's small, not large. It's just two of us. I have one sister. I'm the oldest and I'm about a year and a half older than she is. So it was just the two of us.

MBR: All right. Well, can I ask you, did your parents – what schools did they attend? And to what grade, I guess? And where?

WG: They attended Society Corner School, which is located here on James Island on Secessionville Road. Well, this was an elementary school. My dad attended that, so did my mother. And she later attended the Adult Education Program that was administered here at W. Gresham Meggett. And she eventually got her high school diploma.

MBR: Neat.

WG: And after she decided to enroll, we encouraged her to continue. And a lot of us have done well. My sister and I were in college.

MBR: When she did that?

WG: Yes.

MBR: Oh, that's terrific. Is the house that you grew up in, is that still standing?

WG: No. Unfortunately it's not.

MBR: It's not. And that was on what street or road?

WG: Osborn Road.

MBR: Okay. All right. Did you live with extended family around you?

WG: We lived in a little small community consisting of relatives. Next door to us was my grandmother. My grandparents initially, but my granddad died in early '50s. I think I

was like first grade at the time when he died. And behind her was an uncle. And then a little farther back was some other relatives. So it was just a little small area consisting of about six houses. So we were a little bit isolated from the mainstream.

MBR: Someone told me there are different parts of James Island. You know, like Cut Bridge. I apologize. I don't remember them all. What part would that have been in?

WG: We're kind of attached to the Bees Field area. That's an area that the other interviewer, David Richardson is from. So we're fitfully called Behind God's Back. There's a little dirt road about a quarter of a mile or longer to get back there where we were. So we were a little isolated from the other folks.

MBR: So it's Bees?

WG: Bees Field. Something called Bees Field.

MBR: Bee Field. Okay.

WG: It should be Bees Field.

MBR: All right. All right.

WG: Yes. And that's near Sol Legare all agreed. Yes.

MBR: Okay. That helps.

WG: Yeah. It's on Folly Road just before approaching Sol Legare.

MBR: So you spent your childhood growing up with your extended family around you. Was there an emphasis in your family towards education or not?

WG: Yes. It definitely was the emphasis on the education from the time I could remember. Like I said, I grew up – at least the way I remember it, I guess learning the A, B, C's and being threatened with – I kind of remember not wanting to do it, and I would be threatened that my dad would be in the house soon. He's outside doing some work and that I needed to know it by the time he got in or something. I remember those days. So, yes. Education was stressed. Yes. Definitely.

MBR: So where did you go to elementary school?

WG: I attended Society Corner in the beginning. Society Corner Elementary School.

MBR: So where your parents went to school.

WG: Where my parents, which was located on Secessionville Road. I started first grade there. January, I believe. This was first grade in 1952. '52 and '53 school year. January of '53 we moved from Society Corner here to Gresham Meggett. So I was part of the original – well, my original school year started at Gresham Meggett, so to speak. So my first grade year started here, so I attended school here for 11 out of the 12 years.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

WG: Yes.

MBR: You managed that just– the timing?

WG: Right. Fifth grade was done at Kings Highway Elementary. When I reached my fifth grade year, they moved us all out of Gresham Meggett into Kings Highway for that year, then they closed the school on Sol Legare and brought the kids here. They had to move some of us back here my sixth-grade year. Those were on the west side of Folly Road that came back. And those on the east side of Folly Road stayed at Kings Highway.

MBR: Okay. School boards. Yeah. Yeah.

WG: Right. Right. So a lot of folks are not familiar with what happened when the new change took place, but I kind of remember all those detailed things. So in a sense, I started school here and I finished here.

MBR: Right. Right. With that one hiatus, really.

WG: Right. Correct.

MBR: So you started at Society Corner and then came here.

WG: Correct.

MBR: Do you remember your first impressions of coming here? I mean, it was a modern school.

WG: No. Well, it was a brand new school. We came in and one of the things that we had to do was to unpack the desks. They were still packed in cartons with the packaging material wrapped around it. Yes.

MBR: So they just delivered the desks and left them there?

WG: That's what it appeared. And this wing was the only wing that was completed. The wing next to us, they were working on that at the time. So all the kids from Kings

Highway moved here. And the first graduating class was the class of 1957. Those prior to that, they went to Burke for high school. So that group, I guess those were what? Sixth grade at the time they came here and they finished out the school year here, then they went on to Burke.

MBR: That's pretty interesting that you had so many years here, you know?

WG: Yes. Okay? Because initially, it was an elementary school, then they finished the wing next door. So we moved there. By the time I got to sixth grade, that wing was completed, so that was – it was called junior high wing at the time.

MBR: At that point? Okay.

WG: Right. And then later they built the red brick wing, which was called the senior high wing. The cafeteria was not built in the beginning. That's red brick also. So it was just the block building here.

MBR: Just this one here. Right.

WG: One of the classrooms in here, they modified it, but there were two classrooms was caught in a wall between the classes. So they were opened up to make like an auditorium.

MBR: Oh, that's what they did initially to make the auditorium space?

WG: Right.

MBR: Okay.

WG: Opened up two classrooms and it would have-

MBR: We called them assemblies or – yes.

WG: Yeah. Assembly, chapel, whatever. I'm not sure what name it was called. I remember attending and different things as a first grader and remember the milk being distributed in the bottle. Little miniature milk bottles. The traditional milk bottle shape. They were in the little small miniature bottle. I guess, whatever. Then later they came up with the carton. The milk cartons, yes.

MBR: I had forgotten about the little milk bottle.

WG: Well, that was unique. I haven't seen it since.

MBR: No. Did you get chocolate milk, too?

WG: Yes, we did.

MBR: Okay. That was always a big thing.

WG: That was my favorite. That was my favorite. Yes.

MBR: That kind of made your day if you were able to get there in time to get – yeah. Well, I guess then, if you came into school and you had to unpack desks, was there an awareness that there was a difference between African American schools and white schools?

WG: No, no, no.

MBR: Or that there was a disparity?

WG: We weren't even aware of the other schools. There weren't any in this area. This was basically the only school in the area, so this is all we knew about. There weren't anything else here. And the difference between the two schools we learned as we got older. You know, first grade I remember my first grade class we had first and second graders in the same classroom. So the teacher had to teach both grades. It was an adventure just to be in school, and we left out of an older building to come into a new building. So that was interesting in itself just doing that. So a lot of things community-wise or country-wise, statewide, we weren't aware of. We were kids.

MBR: Got you. But it was a new school. Do you remember it looking modern? The fact that it is a modern building for its time.

WG: It was very modern in comparison to where we came from. I spoke to my aunt and I asked her to sign up to be interviewed. She was mentioning to me once about the building at Society Corner had leaky roofs and they had to put buckets around the classroom to catch the water and so forth. And she said it was a big difference to come from that to this. So that was a major transformation then.

MBR: Right. We talked one time about where the African American schools were before Meggett. So it was Society Corners. Was there a Three Trees?

WG: Yes. There was Three Tree off of Fort Johnson Road. Also the Sol Legare School. And they had – what became Murray-Lasaine. I'm not quite sure what the names were originally. But they had Cut Bridge. It's near the Cut Bridge, which is on Riverland Drive and Camp Road near the James Island County Park now.

MBR: So when Meggett was established, did these folks come here? Or most of them?

WG: They came, like, middle school. Okay? They were in the feeder schools to the middle school here. Well, we did have a middle school, so to speak, as they do now, but Gresham Meggett had from seventh grade on through 12th grade. Okay. Initially, it was elementary schools, then the elementary middle, then they had the high school, then they took the elementary out of here. Okay? And they built Baxter-Patrick Elementary School. Baxter-Patrick was named after two elementary principals. Mann Baxter was the principal at Society Corner Elementary and Patrick was the principal at Sol Legare School. So with them being combined-

MBR: Relationships.

WG: Right. So they gave the school that name, Baxter-Patrick. And that's on Grimball Road here also on the other side of the horseshoe.

MBR: A lot of geography. It's good. Yeah. Yeah.

WG: Yes. Yes. Yes.

MBR: So let's talk about Gresham Meggett. We can talk about it first as an elementary school. It's kind of hard to pull on your elementary school, your thoughts. You do remember having to unpack desks. Are there other things that you remember? Do you remember what the daily round was on elementary school? Did you have one teacher all day? Or did you have several?

WG: All the elementary classes was one teacher.

MBR: Just one. One teacher. Okay. So switching classes, that sort of thing, is not going to happen until later, right?

WG: Correct.

MBR: Right. Okay. So let's move to the high school, when you started high school here. You definitely knew the territory because you had been here.

WG: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

MBR: Were there others? I guess there were others in your class. You were with a group that had been here and would be here for those 11 years, right?

WG: Yes.

MBR: It must have made you kind of close?

WG: Right. I mean, like most of the folks from elementary. So we went from elementary to middle school to high school together. And so you apparently knew everybody. Like a community type of feeling. So that's how it works. Yes.

MBR: How far did you have to travel to come here? And by what means?

WG: Initially, I had to walk. As a first grader, second grader, we walked to school. The distance, I would assume – well, by automobile it's several miles. We took the back shortcuts. About two miles.

MBR: Did you have someone to show you the way? Or did other people in the extended family also go at the same time?

WG: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. You always had older kids to follow along with and learn the way to go. You roam around the area so you know where you live and other things in relationship to that. Yeah.

MBR: Hopefully it shortened the walk.

WG: Right. Now, when I first went to Society Corner, I have an aunt who's 90, is older than I am. I used to tag behind her, because I was born in the month of April, and my mother tried to get me enrolled in earlier and they would not allow it. So I had to wait until I was six years old before I could be enrolled. So they said I can still come, attend, but I could not be enrolled.

MBR: You're not matriculated. Yeah. Yeah.

WG: Right.

MBR: So that means you're really smart the next year probably. So if you had to talk about Meggett, would you talk about having a culture or a place that really nurtured you?

WG: Yes. There was definitely culture. It was definitely nurturing. I enjoyed school. I looked forward to having perfect attendance. Yes. I enjoyed school.

MBR: You were one of those kids?

WG: Yes. I mean, wasn't nothing to do at home but work.

MBR: No, I get you. School was a good alternative.

WG: Right. I mean, it was nothing else there to do, so school, I looked forward to going to school. Yes. I enjoyed school. Yes. I had a number of perfect attendance certificates. If I was out sick for some reason, I was upset because that blew my perfect attendance for the year. So, yes.

MBR: That's great.

WG: So, yes. Definitely a culture here. And I mean, this was it. That's all we knew. I mean, nothing else. Nothing to compare it to. Only thing we knew of the white school that we received used books from the white schools. And that's all we knew about them. Okay? And so we had nothing to compare to. And like I said, early on we had to walk to school. And we later got a bus. We had later maybe one bus that took care of the whole island. I remember us being packed into the school bus. Okay? And I mean, it was neat we didn't have to walk, but we still had to walk a good distance to go to the bus stop. And then years later we received additional buses. But I remember us being packed on those buses, because that was it. And I mean, we couldn't complain about it because that was better than walking. So everything was a step up. Like I said, we had nothing to compare it to other than where we came from. And a lot of folks don't understand that concept, but it was better than what we had, so we appreciated it at the time.

MBR: I hear you. Well, when you came to high school, obviously this worked. Was there an academic track? Was there different courses of education that you could pick?

WG: Yes. We had college prep and just the general academics. I picked the college prep, but I kind of mixed it up.

MBR: Did you want to go to college? Or was that just-

WG: Yes. I wanted to go. My intention was to go. My dream was to go. My problem was how was I going to go? And as I got into high school, reality set in in terms of will I be able to go? My parents didn't have the money to send me. So I kind of deviated a little bit from the college prep course. I took ag was one of the courses out of the general track and brick masonry. And I took brick masonry because I heard they made a lot of money. Back then, jobs was limited for black males in particular. And so being a brick mason, I felt that at least I can make a living doing that. So I took that. So that's where, as I said, I deviated a little bit so I took that in addition to the other college prep courses I was taking.

MBR: Were you involved in any athletics, or extracurricular, or that sort of thing? Like what did they offer, or what did kids here enjoy most?

WG: We were very limited. Only thing we had athletically was football. We didn't have a basketball I think. The basketball at one point, and then it was disbanded. I don't know the reason. And so football was it. I participated in football, I lettered in football. I enjoyed that. It was an honor to be a football player. There wasn't anything else to look forward to, so we didn't have much, but we didn't moan about it. We appreciated what we did have and we went on from there.

MBR: I see. What schools did you play? I mean, what were your regional-

WG: We were a single A school. So other single A schools in the community, which were the equalization schools. We played Haut Gap, which is on Johns Island. Played Wallace High School, which was West Ashley, off of Highway 61. We played Laing, which was up on Mt. Pleasant. We played Lincoln, which is McClellanville.

MBR: That's a pretty good regional coverage. Yeah.

WG: Right. So that's the area. They were all small black schools. So it was classified as single A, so that was our category.

MBR: They gave you like that network.

WG: Right.

MBR: In terms of seeing the other schools, that would be one outlet through athletics.

WG: Right. Now, as you – what do they call it now? I don't know. Conference or whatever, if you advance in that, then you play other schools outside the area. They kept moving up to the state level. So they had a system. So we would play schools St. Helena and Beaufort or what's that? St. Helena Island– so you have Beaufort there. I remember we played Robert Smalls and St. Matthews. No, no. Robert Smalls should be in that area also. I'm sorry. There was another school that St. Matthews we played. John Ford. I'm sorry. John Ford and St. Matthews. We played Ruffin. It's in Ruffin, South Carolina. I remember lower state championship we played a school in Columbia. I can't remember the name now.

MBR: So you travel and – I mean, that's one way of seeing-

WG: Yes. Yes.

MBR: I mean, it's like a way to get around.

WG: Right. Those who were top of the conference here, they went to the next level and next – you know, we played like I said, up to the lower state, then the state. You know,

who became state champion. And we had a very good football team. Always did. And like I said earlier, that's the only sport we had.

MBR: You poured a lot into it, huh?

WG: No, you know. There's some time near the end of the football season we did not have 22 guys that have a decent scrimmage. You know, folks are out for injuries and other reasons. So we made do with what we had.

MBR: You just got there and play.

WG: Right. So we got there and we played. We put our heart into it. We were serious about it.

MBR: Did you play as an upper classman, a junior or senior or younger?

WG: I started at sophomore. Sophomore, junior, senior year.

MBR: Oh, all three? Okay. Wow. So your folks – actually all parents. How involved were they with your education here at Meggett?

WG: They were involved. They attended PTA meetings. My dad didn't attend a lot of the football games, but some of the chores I was responsible of doing after school, he put my – to play football, he had to take over and do some of those things. Now, we did farming. We had animals like chickens, hogs, cow, horse, did plowing. Someone had to take in those animals in the morning and in the evening. As I got older, that became my job. So we had to make adjustments to deal with those things in the evening when I got home so that I could come to football practice.

MBR: Kind of enabled you to be able to do that. Yeah.

WG: Right. So I would say that was very supportive.

MBR: Yes. I think so too. We're just going to applaud them right here actually.

WG: Yes. And sometimes I look back on some things we did in high school I was surprised at. I remember the first couple of summers, had some small jobs. One of them, like my summer after my junior year in high school, I worked at Woodstock, which made crates for drinks. Bottled drinks. And located in North Charleston. So I had to get up in the morning, catch a ride to get there. And the guy I caught the ride with, he lived on Johns Island and he's coming on Maybank Highway, so Folly Road and Maybank, which is at the bridge– the Cut Bridge– I mean the, Wappoo Bridge. I had to catch a ride with him. There were three of us. Two other guys, because their mother was one

of the owners of the company. And that's a good distance from here. And I'm not sure how you came, but you came on the connector or perhaps the Wappoo Bridge.

MBR: Yeah.

WG: But it's named the Wappoo Bridge. So my dad had to take me to that stop in the morning to catch the ride. So I had the cows and the horses and other stuff that I needed to do in the morning, so he had to help also with that. And then he had to go to work. I certainly think back about what he did. At the time, I didn't appreciate it, but now I can appreciate some of the things. It was a strain on him, but I was working there for the summer. Well, I did two summers. So yes.

MBR: Did you ever think about taking up farming?

WG: No.

MBR: You want to elaborate on that?

WG: Well, I mean, a lot of folks did farming and that's all they did. You know, from the time I can remember, I did farming. Okay? I mean, my life's in farming and did the hoeing, the planting the seed, the harvesting, everything is evolved. We also ran a roadside vegetable stand in the summer. Yeah. So that was my job. I did that, my sister and I. We did all these things together. So after I was old enough, I would plow the fields, do whatever with the horse, with a plow. And my mother, my dad, they would come out and help after they got home from work. So it was a family affair, so to speak.

MBR: It would have to be.

WG: Right.

MBR: Did your sister go to school here, too?

WG: Yes, she did.

MBR: She did? Did she finish here?

WG: Yes, she did.

MBR: Okay.

WG: She was away for one year also. She did 11 years here. Now, you mentioned about the farming, and the reason I laughed, because the last thing I wanted to do was farming. And I always tell folks farming encouraged me – I said there have to be a better way to make a living than this. And so that encouraged me to go to college.

That was one of the catalysts. Definitely a catalyst. And farming's a big business now. Things have changed. Things have changed tremendously in farming. But back then, I mean, that's all they knew. I mean, I've worked in the hot sun plowing and doing all kinds of things we did. So, yes.

MBR: It's hard work.

WG: It was. Picking okra. Back then there was no rubber gloves. Okra, when they first stopped picking it, it was fine. You could do it bare handed. But as it got older, the little stuff would get into your fingers and it hurts. You used socks, but that didn't work after a while. The socks became wet and soaked, but you had to pick the okras. And okra grows very rapidly. So three times a week you picked the okra. Monday, Wednesday, Friday. And you've got a look that says, "Why?" Because they grew. I mean, like Monday you leave them on the bush about that long, and by Wednesday, it was here. It grew rapidly.

MBR: Wow.

WG: Yes.

MBR: I've never grown okra.

WG: Okay. So, yes.

MBR: Okay. So you decided not to be a farmer.

WG: But I have a garden nowadays.

MBR: What goes around comes around.

WG: Yeah. I've got a lot of plants in it.

MBR: Have you ever grown okra in it?

WG: Oh, yes. I've grown okra, corn, tomatoes, string beans, all that stuff. Yes.

MBR: Well, you got me on that one. Going to school here, it really afforded an opportunity for you and your sister, obviously.

WG: Yes. Yes.

MBR: And when you say college, did you decide where you wanted to go to school? And you tried the brick laying thing as a possibility, an alternative, as something to do with my hands, you know, kind of thing.

WG: That was a back up.

MBR: So how did it all work out in your choices there?

WG: To be honest, I did not know a lot about colleges. I mean, we did not have the exposure to schools. There were kids ahead of us who went to college, but didn't see them afterwards. They went, and a lot of them, they – through the summer month they were out of state working or somewhere. So we didn't see them. So our knowledge of college then was very limited. Only thing we knew was like teachers would make comments about college. My impression of college was that you spend most of your time studying in the books. I mean, that's what was drilled to us. I remember the summer before going as time approached to go to school, I was very upset until I ran into a guy with the class ahead of me. He was away for the summer. He came home, I ran into him one night. I talked to him for about ten, 15 minutes or so, and he just told me some things and it was such a relief. The weight just lifted off my shoulders, because I had a better picture of what to expect. Prior to that, I had no idea of what to expect. Now, my senior year, I managed – the choir was invited. We had an outstanding choir. I was not on the choir.

MBR: Okay.

WG: And they were invited to South Carolina State to perform. So I maneuvered and was able to go with the choir to go to the campus and see what a college campus looked like. That was my first and only visit to a college campus prior to my going there. So college was something I wanted to do, but I didn't know a lot about college, other than it was a means to an end. And how I got interested talking to – well, I was interested, but trying to figure out how I was going to go, talked to the guidance counselor. My senior year was the first year we had a guidance counselor.

MBR: Here?

WG: Here at Gresham Meggett.

MBR: Okay.

WG: We didn't have any. Okay? And so talked to the guidance counselor. She was telling me about you need to consider going to school. And the question was how? How can I go? So she started to tell me about there are things like student loans, work scholarships and some other things. God, I had no idea what was involved. So she laid it all out. And I really appreciate what she did, because she was a big help in that area for me. Encouraged me to go.

MBR: What was her name? Do you remember?

WG: Her name was Ms. Adams.

MBR: Okay.

WG: And like I said, that was her first year here. First year we had a guidance counselor. And when you sit and think back on some things, you're very grateful to some people that had some affect on your life early on that you didn't really realize early on what roles they played. And so I begin to think about her. I think she's deceased now. She wasn't here forever. She spent a few years and she moved on somewhere. But I'm very grateful, the help she gave me, because I managed to get a – Charleston County offered a scholarship at the time. They were small, but now I look back, it was huge. But it was like – I'm trying to remember. I think it was 1200 dollars at the time.

MBR: I don't know how well that took you through the year.

WG: Yeah. I was trying to remember how it worked. I can't remember now the breakdown.

MBR: That's all right. But you applied for a scholarship?

WG: Yes. Yes.

MBR: And got it.

WG: Yes. And then I applied for a student loan and applied for work scholarship. So between the three, I was able to go to school. And the work scholarship was a big help and my academic scholarship. After my first semester, I canceled the student loan because like someone at work told me I was getting too much money back, so he said they would cancel the job that I had, because they decided I didn't need it. So anyway, I canceled the student loan after the first semester. So I made it through school that way and working a side job whenever I could. So that's what I did.

MBR: That worked out great. Yeah. So adviser. She made a difference in your life. Are there any other teachers that you remember or people that helped?

WG: Oh, yes. Most of my teachers, we had some very good teachers. One of them, my homeroom teacher, my math teacher, she was here today and I didn't get a chance to talk to her or at least say hi.

MBR: What was her name?

WG: Gwendolyn Manigault. She was also my homeroom teacher. Very good math teacher. I had two very good math teachers here. She was one of them and before her was Ms. Nema Bennett. Now, Ms. Bennett was my homeroom teacher. They were good friends. And she went out on maternity leave, and then she didn't return here after that. She went to another school. But Ms. Manigault took over and those two ladies – no one after that taught me math like they did. I minored in math.

MBR: Oh, you did?

WG: Yes. I minored in math. But no one else can touch those two in math as far as I'm concerned. Yes.

MBR: That's good. How involved were your parents with your education here? Was there a PTA?

WG: Yes.

MBR: And were they part of that? Or was it mostly – you talk about your father supporting you in a very real way. Did your mom, was she part of the PTA?

WG: I think she participated in the PTA mostly. Most of the PTA, I think they're structured differently. I'm not sure, because I never attended any. But I know she attended PTA meetings. They were always involved. I mean, my dad, even though he didn't come to meetings, he was still involved because he made comments about things or whatever. So they were involved.

MBR: So they knew the teachers here?

WG: Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely. Yes.

MBR: Okay. We talked a little bit before that here – I'm trying to say. How much did you know about what was going on outside this community during the 1960's? You know, you're there during the Civil Rights Movement, really. And this school was an equalization school and it gave great benefit. But then there was the ultimate goal of integration and having truly equal schools at some point. And how much were you aware of all that or not?

WG: We weren't aware a whole lot, because a lot of the integration push came after we got out of school. After I got out of school.

MBR: That makes sense.

WG: Okay? Now, I left here in 1964. Graduated in 1964. So a lot of the things were just brewing at that time. I think University of South Carolina was just integrated, because

I remember Ms. Adams, guidance counselor, asked me if I wanted to apply there. And I said, "No." I didn't know anything about any colleges. And it was going to be a struggle for me to go to school and it was a rough time to get to Orangeburg and it would be harder to get to Columbia. And I was telling someone about that one day, like I found out about some of these other schools out of state, North Carolina, Tennessee, other places, Florida that folks went to, folks from downtown. And I'm saying, "Wow. You know, it's amazing that kids went to these schools all over the place." And I caught hell just trying to get to Orangeburg. My dad had to hire someone to take me to school. The car he had, he didn't trust it up to Orangeburg.

MBR: To get you there?

WG: Yeah. So when I think back on it, there's a lot involved. You ask about they involved in the education. He went out of his way and got someone and paid them to took me to school. I mean, he went also, but he didn't feel like his vehicle could have—

MBR: Got you there safe. Yeah. Yeah.

WG: So, yes. So I mean, that's involvement, that's support, as far as I'm concerned. Yes.

MBR: No, I agree. I agree.

WG: Yes.

MBR: Did your sister also go on to college?

WG: Yes, she did. We both went to South Carolina State, because I told them, you know, see if they can take care of her. I had me covered. I can handle me. So concentrate on her. So at that time, Dad was making a little bit more money than he had been, so they were able to help her out and she got a job working also at school.

MBR: Just made it work. And when you left college, what did you end up doing?

WG: I went into the Army.

MBR: Okay.

WG: Okay? I finished up and my degree was in engineering. I went into the Army. At that time, the draft board, they were very busy. They were at the height of the Vietnam War. My intention when I went to school was to go into ROTC. I wasn't able to do that. I passed the written exam, but I couldn't pass the physical. Okay? Well the draft board attitude at that time was if you were out of school, well, likely you were drafted. If you were in college and you drop out for a semester, you have to notify your draft

board. And if you notify your draft board, you got a call. You got drafted. So some folks took a chance and stayed out. I mean, they were out for a semester and they came back, and the draft board drafted them. They found that they were out, and they got drafted anyway in the middle of the semester. My attitude was they're going to have to come and get me, because the money I paid, I wasn't going to waste it, because they didn't care. And being African American, you know the story that most of us fought the war.

MBR: Yes.

WG: We got drafted at a higher percentage rate than others. So I didn't go into advanced corps. I did two years of ROTC. I didn't do the advanced corps. My senior year, it was okay for me physically to go into the Army then or in the Military I'll say. But I was turned down because my blood pressure was elevated. So that's why I couldn't get into advanced ROTC. At the end of my senior year, only thing I had to do was say, "I do." Raise my right hand and say, "I do." I was processed already before I got out of school. Okay? So we have what's called, while I was at school, a two S deferment. Which is student deferment to defer from being drafted while you were in school. Once you graduated, the deferment expired.

MBR: Right.

WG: So after I got out, I went looking for a job and folks said, "How do you classify?" And I'm saying, "I'm unclassified right now." They said, "Come back in two years. You know you're going to be drafted." That was the culture. That was the culture at the time. So I was out of school for like a month and I just went and say, "I do." Because that was already processing. So I went into the Army and – well, with the intention of going to Officer Candidate School. I assigned a special program, supposed to do that. This gave me a two-year obligation. The contract was that if I did not make it through Officer Candidate School, I was only obligated for two years. If I made it through, well, you know, it would be longer. I signed up for – three categories you had to sign up for. Senior corps, engineering corps and one had to be combat, which was [indistinct 00:46:59]. So after I did my basic and AIT, I waited for class day to go to one of those three.

I never got it. They said the class was full. Kept being – I was held over by three months. And finally I got a class day to go to infantry OCS. That was not one of my selections or choice I was given. And my choice was take it or leave it. If I take it, I leave it. If I leave it, I was heading to Vietnam. My basic training, my advanced individual training, or AIT, was combat engineering. Okay? So I didn't get the engineering class, I didn't get the signal call class, and artillery.

So anyway, I was shipped to Vietnam. I didn't make it through OCS. Long story behind that. But I wanted to, but some folks saw differently.

MBR: On the way.

WG: So went to Vietnam as a private first class as a combat engineer. Got there, went through in country training, and then was assigned to the artillery battery. The whole group of us. We were all combat engineers and they stuck us in artillery battery. So everybody like, "What are we doing here? We're not trained to do this." Two of us of the group was selected to go into the fire direction center. That's DC. It's like the headquarters and we're the one that does all the computing of the data, to fuel to the guns for the fire missions. So they started training us and anyway, I made it through that. The other guy, he did not make it. Some of the training was similar to my math background and so forth, so it was fine. You had to compute the data for a fire mission. So they had all the data from a real fire mission and they just run us through the exercise after they taught us how to do it. You had to make a slide rule and some other stuff. And you had to compute the azimuth, the distance, the type of charge for the rounds you find, all that. It's a number of things was involved. So anyway, I ended up in fire direction center. I had to learn that, so I learned that OJT. And that was fun. That was better than working on the guns.

MBR: Well, yeah.

WG: Because we were in a building. We didn't have to work outside.

MBR: How long were you in Vietnam?

WG: I did only 11 months there, because my two years was up. So when I left I was sergeant E-5 and I was chief of section of the fire direction center. And most people do not go from an E-3 to – I went from E-3, E-4 and E-5 in less than a year. So I spent only 11 months there. So when I came home from Vietnam, I was technically out of the service since I finished my time there. My two years was up. Go back to the contract I mentioned. So that's what I did.

MBR: Oh, boy.

WG: Yes.

MBR: And then did you work as an engineer after that?

WG: Yes. I came home and spent a week here in Charleston, and I moved to New York. I needed time to readjust. The whole first year of service I was in training, so I was part of what's going on – like folks talk about all the good time they have in the Military,

and go out here and party. I didn't experience any of those things. And I went from training to Vietnam. So the two year isolation and I had to adjust to a lot of stuff that was going on, came back and they just instituted the Monday holidays. That was strange and different and a lot of other things. You had to catch up to what's going on, get back in to focus, get my mind settled.

MBR: So you spent time in New York? When did you come home? When did you come back to James Island?

WG: I came from Vietnam in August of 1970, and I spent one week in Charleston, and I just needed my time.

MBR: Yeah. Downtime. Yeah.

WG: Right. So I went there. I worked at Alexander, which was a department store for a little while. I got married at the end of December. There is nothing else to do. My wife was in Rhode Island at the time.

MBR: Okay.

WG: I met her at South Carolina State. She was two years behind me, so-

MBR: But she was from-

WG: No, no. She was from Charleston. So that was commute to Rhode Island. Providence, Rhode Island from New York. You know, see her, back and forth. Anyway, we got married the end of December and she went back to Rhode Island...., got married, she went back to Rhode Island, I went back to New York until near the end of January I moved to Rhode Island officially. I moved there. And there I started working with Raytheon as an engineer at Raytheon in submarine signal division. And later I left Raytheon, did work for the Navy, submarines. They built the sonar system for the submarine. Where they do the pinging, the ponging. You know, determine what's in the area. I started production control, then I went to industrial engineering. And I think they took a chance and decided to hire me. They put me in a management training program, worked there for like six months, and then they moved on. And at the end of the second six months my industrial engineering, my boss asked me to stay. He said, "They don't know where they're going to send you next anyway." And so I stayed with them, and so I was there for like about three years. And then I left and went to work for Owens Corning Fiberglass. I was the engineer.

And when I was first hired, we couldn't produce enough. We made fiberglass yarn. They call it the yarn because there was bobbins and all that, but that was the basic for a whole lot of things. They use it in other things. You know, some of it they pounded

into like a powdery– to put in– filling of the teeth. They had what’s called conductive roving. It puts graphite on the yarn and use as the spark plug cables in your car. Vehicles.

MBR: Okay. Sure. Well, you’ve had a varied career, though.

WG: Yeah. Then some was used like angel hair for Christmas trees. That’s fiberglass.

MBR: Yeah.

WG: And some was– we chopped it in two strands about two and a half, three inches of top strand, and they put it in fiberglass to reinforce like chairs and hats. And fiberglass is part of a whole lot of things.

MBR: It’s ubiquitous, a lot. Yeah. Yeah. We don’t always know that.

WG: Right.

MBR: Well, how did you end up back here?

WG: Okay. When I first started with Owens Corning Fiberglass, we couldn’t produce enough. 18 months later I was on the street along with several other people who worked there almost 30 years. The market just fell out and so forth. I worked as internal auditor with Bostitch Tech Farm for six or eight months. In the meantime, I was going to school working on an MBA. So I finished that. I had my last class Thursday night, Friday went to work and was told I was going to be let go. It was fine. I mean, there was nothing to hold me there. I was ready to come back home then. At that point, I was ready to come home.

MBR: Okay.

WG: And the classes were holding me there. That was it.

MBR: You finished your MBA, allowed that – okay.

WG: So I was done. Now I could go home. I had became homesick. I had never been homesick before. But I went to college, I went in the Military, I went to Australia while in the Military. I was never homesick. I got homesick in Rhode Island. I couldn’t believe it. If I saw a car with a South Carolina plate on it, I mean, like, just laying after. McDonald had a national band, kids from different states. They were performing in Providence. And I found out I went there and I had to find out who was in the band from South Carolina. It was a new guy from Greenville. I just needed to contact him, I needed to talk to him. That’s how bad that was. Okay?

But anyway, I was applying for jobs all over the place, and anyway, I got a call from Cummins Engine Company located in Charleston. When I got the call, when I say call, a telephone call, I thought they were a company in Rhode Island actually. So they called me and asked me to come in for an interview. And during that time, the market in South Carolina was very bad. I mean, I wasn't relocated anywhere close to South Carolina. And some other companies in Klaus, Kansas City, Missouri and all that. And well, that's just as far away as I am now, because I was ready to come home. And so when I found out that they were in Charleston, hung the phone up, jumped up and screamed because I couldn't believe it. So I came in. I had the interview and they got the job and they moved me here. They moved my family, everything, they paid for the whole move.

MBR: Great.

WG: So that's how I got back to Charleston.

MBR: So you've been here-

WG: So I spent six years in Rhode Island and then we came back here. So I came back here in December of 1976.

MBR: And here you are.

WG: Two days before Christmas. Yes, I've been here ever since. I spent ten years with Cummins. And then they each shut down. That's been the story of my life. A company closed and I'm downgrading. Downgrading. They didn't shut down. They downgraded. Took a year to do that, because when they first mentioned it you didn't know that they were going to do that, but they did do it finally, because there were rumors years earlier about it. So I did that and then after that, I did small jobs in different cases, different things, and then I eventually went into – became a life insurance agent. So I did that for about ten years and then I retired from doing that.

MBR: Well, boy. That's all the way around. All over the place.

WG: All over the place. All over the place. I mean, I left some things out, but a couple of small ones. You know.

MBR: That brings us back here. Well, all right. Let me get back to Meggett– to closed up, really. You know, we blew up that photograph of all you guys going up to archive and history when the school was placed on the national register. Usually no one goes to those things, just to let you know that. So that picture of a busload of folks from here going up to witness that really made clear how important the school was to the community.

WG: It was.

MBR: And I think if you could, in closing, kind of talk about what Meggett meant to you and to the community, and how it shaped you. How it shaped you through all those different career paths that you just told me about.

WG: Well, it all started here with everything. Because like I said earlier, this was all we knew. We had good influence from some of the teachers we had. Like I said earlier, that they told us about colleges, but they didn't go to a lot of details in stories. They shares some of their experiences, what they did. I thought it was a lot rougher than what it was. It was rough, but different degrees of it and different levels. But Meggett, I think it's dear to all of us. Really dear to us. I mean, this was it. This was our world. It's all we knew. We didn't have anything else to compare it to. I know you asked for a comparison. We didn't have those other schools to compare to. This was our world. This was it. I mean, this was home. Home away from home. We had the opportunity to get to know other students that you remember all your life these folks. I mean, this was part of our life. When you talk about W. Gresham Meggett, it has very strong, deep meaning to most of us, because this was it. We didn't know anything else. It's just like home. Your home. Where you grew up. Just the same as Meggett. It helped shape our lives. The teachers, students, other staff members we had, they helped us to become who we are today. Folks from Meggett have gone on and done a whole lot of things professionally in the world. We have doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, some of everything.

MBR: Right.

WG: Okay? They mentioned about teachers standing out. Some of the former teachers, they were in there. And there was one woman in there, she went on, she became a teacher. She's doing sub work now. She's older. So we have people in all professions that was here. A couple of my classmates, a good friend, they went into ROTC, advanced corps. My roommate was one of them. He became I think a lieutenant colonel in the Military. He's in Germany. He stayed in Germany. Another classmate— there was only two from my class who went into advanced corps. He's back in Charleston now, but you know, he became an IT person. And some other classmates are teachers and different things. So, you know, professionally-

MBR: Right. A very accomplished crowd.

WG: Right. It was spread. My class, we had about 52 graduates out of my high school class. And I know we had about ten out of state that went to college. And I'm very proud of my class, because my class, like I said, we had the largest number to go to college from my class, which changed things. Most people did not look forward to going

to college until my class graduated. And other folks who look down and say, "Well, if they can do it, we can do it." It changed the culture here. Folks started looking forward to going to college. Prior to that, folks would say, "Oh, I'm going in the Military. I'm going to business school." Something like that. But there were a few that went to college, but like I said earlier, most of them we didn't know anything about them afterwards. All we knew, they supposedly went. There were some folks who had scholarship, but they didn't go because they said the family did not have money to send them. And sometimes wonder about it and said, "Well, there's a possibility that they could have gotten a loan or something to go," but a lot of it has to do with the individual and how serious you are about going somewhere and what you want. One of my favorite lines is as long as you want something, you'll go far in life. And I pass this onto folks. And if they don't understand that, I explain to them you have to want something to get something. If you don't want anything, it doesn't matter. So as long as you want, that's what I always pitch to my kid. As long as you want – sometimes kiddingly if they want to say, "Oh, Daddy, I want some toy," or whatever. I say, "Good. As long as you want something, you'll go far in life."

And both my kids, they've done well. I have a boy and a girl. I came out of a family with a boy and a girl. I'm the oldest and my sister.

MBR: I thought about that.

WG: I have a son. I have a daughter. They're both doing well. So, especially because you mentioned about being involved in a kid's life. So, yeah. I just pass it down. I'm not sure if my son or daughter mentioned. They all went to South Carolina State also.

MBR: They did?

WG: Oh, yes. And they said, oh, they knew they were going there. I mean, there was no doubt about it. And it wasn't like, "I want to go here or there." And a lot of folks go to school for the wrong reason. You know, because their friends are doing it, or this one doing, or this the popular place to go. They kind of knew that's where they were going. My son played football at South Carolina State. Matter of fact, he had a football scholarship. And my daughter, she played basketball a couple years and she didn't quite have a scholarship.

MBR: But she liked – yeah.

WG: A little help.

MBR: Yeah.

WG: But he's an IT person now. DVA. And my daughter, she's a speech therapist

MBR: You must be very proud of them.

WG: I am. I am.

MBR: I'm sure they're proud of you as well.

WG: Well, yeah. Well, we're proud of them. They've done well. We haven't had any problems or anything with them. They knew where they came from.

MBR: Well, I thank you so much for talking with me today. Is there something that you wanted to say that we didn't touch on? I guess that would be-

WG: I think we pretty much covered everything. The last question about something about Gresham Meggett. How dear it is to all of us. It means a lot. I wasn't here when they shut the school down, but that was a big blow to a lot of folks. Desegregation, they shut the school down and they went through other stuff with it. But it meant so much to so many people, and not being from here – when I say not being from here, I mean from James Island, having attended here. A lot of folks don't understand the role that W Gresham Meggett played in our lives. It has a much bigger meaning I feel to us than to a lot of folks from that school that attended. Now, a school that had been in existence for a number of years I know is sacred to a lot of folks, but to some folks, well, it's just a school. But this was our life. We didn't have any big social life. I mean, everything evolved around W. Gresham Meggett, what was happening here. So this was it. Like I said, just athletically, we were limited with just football. We didn't have any other sport. We didn't have baseball, basketball, golf or anything else.

MBR: But you're saying something that's really important I think. Because a lot of people worry about the equalization schools, people romanticizing them as being – but in reality, you're talking about something that was the lifeblood of the community.

WG: It was. It was. And that's what I'm saying. A lot of people don't understand that. I mean, and I understand what you mentioned about comparing it to other schools. You didn't have anything to compare it to. This was our world. This was it. Good, bad, or indifferent. This was it. This is all we had. We had nothing else to look forward to. We couldn't say, "Well, hey, I wish I was over there." One of the things I didn't mention, that we were told in the media that attending the white school, you got a better education. That was some propaganda that was fed to us. Also, integration was propaganda also. Attending a white school, we were led to believe that white kids got a better education than we got, because we were a predominantly black schools. It's just what you heard in the media.

One of my concerns when I was at school was the fact that I was in engineer curriculum and we had restrictive electives. And I got to the point where I wanted to take some other course that I wasn't supposed to take because our electives were restricted. So we had to take certain things. And I was bothered by that. I felt that I wanted to be a little more well-rounded. I wish I could have taken some other courses that I was not allowed to take. I did go and talk to the dean and so forth, so they allowed me to take another course. I took a course in psychology. And she was Filipino. She had been on a Woodrow Wilson Scholarship or something. But anyway, she worked here around different schools. She had taught, too. So one of the things I was curious about, how did we compare to white kids? Well, yeah.

MBR: Why not? Yeah.

WG: Yeah. I want to know. Because the only thing I knew is stuff we always heard. So she said like, it's the same. It ain't no different. "Really?" I mean, we were always taught that we were something else. You know? So that had some meaning to me. Okay. So I didn't know that. Okay. So we are all pretty much the same. So when I went to Vietnam and I told you I worked in the fire direction center. I was the only black in that area. Everybody was white. Okay. So I dealt with white folks. I sold them vegetables did a few other little thing, but I didn't have a whole lot of experience dealing with white folks. Okay? So now I was thrown in a white world, and that didn't bother me. I mean, I wasn't terrified as some folks would be. I'm very flexible.

And anyway, so got my training there and a lot of the jobs that I mentioned I had, I was either the only black person or one of a few, whether I work at Raytheon. Like I said, they had about 1200 employees and there were three other blacks. They were all older than me that worked there and each was in a different building. I was in a building with one of them. I was like 24 years old, he was in his mid to late 30's. And we were the only two in the same building. One other guy, I never even got to know him. So I learned years later, I looked back on it, when they hired me it was kind of, "Well, we'll hire one to see how he works out." And then later they brought another young black in, then another one, and then another one. I said, "Oh, shit! I was the guinea pig on that one. I didn't know it." No, I'm serious. For the last ten years. I wasn't really thinking about it, the only guys came in after me. I said, "Okay." So I did well and they said, "Let's try another one."

MBR: You might have set the bar high. I don't know.

WG: Yeah. So anyway, I'm saying that to say these are things that I'm proud of, you know, how things worked out, and it all comes back here. We had an excellent football coach. Matter of fact, he taught me science. He was the football coach, and he was also the principal.

MBR: Oh, gee. Oh, boy.

WG: No nonsense person.

MBR: Yeah. I was just going to say. You caught it at everything with him, right?

WG: No nonsense person. And when I talked to Ms. Adams, the guidance counselor, she said, "Oh, Mr. Evans," that was his name, Alfonzo Evans, "Oh, his brother's in charge of the dining hall. That might be a good place for you to work." "Okay." So that worked out. So he's from Orangeburg, so his brother was in charge there. But one of the things I learned from him and also another from football coach, David Mack, he was supposed to be here today. But he left here and taught downtown, and then he became one of the area superintendents downtown. But we had a no nonsense football team. Strict rules, we abide by – we got compliments on how we perform on the field, from the officials, they complimented the coach, he passed it down to us. Like, we were organized, we did what we were supposed to. The play was over. We were taught to get back in the huddle and get ready for the next play, and that's what we did. No dragging around. Football practice, you were there for practice. You didn't mess with the guys on the sideline, you know, spectators. You didn't interact with them or anything. You were totally playing. If you want to play football, you play football. If you want to interact with them, turn your uniform in, you're going to join them. Okay? Very strict. And I learned that the discipline that they taught us, that's what I borrowed in life from them. Those are things that has followed me. You run a tight ship, you have a tight organization. You run a slack ship, you're going to have a slack organization. You got somebody working for you, they're either an asset or a liability. You don't need liability. You want somebody who's going to be an asset.

MBR: Asset.

WG: And through life, those things have followed me, and that's who I am.

MBR: That's really a great way to finish. Thank you.

WG: And that's going back to W. Gresham Meggett. Gresham Meggett.

MBR: Yes. It does. Well, I've really enjoyed-

WG: It all started here.

MBR: ...this interview. I hope you have.

WG: I have, too. I'm hoping that I was able to share some stuff with you that was meaningful. And it helped shape, form us, and prepared us for the future. And I have no regrets about attending school here.

MBR: No. I don't blame you.

Edward Greene

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 18, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. David Richardson was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

David Richardson: My name is David Richardson and I'm here at St. James Presbyterian Church in the process of interviewing Mr. Green. Would you state your full name?

Edward Greene: My name is Edward Greene.

DR: And what's your date of birth?

EG: 4/4/45.

DR: Where do you currently live?

EG: I live on James Avenue and Seaside Lane. Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: Were you always living there?

EG: No, I was raised up on 1092 Fort Johnson Road.

DR: And then, so between those two places is where you've lived most of your life?

EG: That's right.

DR: Okay. Where did you spend your childhood?

EG: I spent my childhood on Fort Johnson Road. First, I attend Three Trees School and then later on I attend W. Gresham Meggett Elementary School and then W. Gresham Meggett High School.

DR: Three Trees School?

EG: Yeah.

DR: Where was Three Trees School located?

EG: That was located on Fort Johnson Road across from the Len Geezer Farm [phonetic 00:05:53].

DR: Okay. And what period of time was that, sir?

EG: I attend there for first, second, third and fourth grade.

DR: Who was the principal?

EG: Miss Hamulkul [phonetic 00:06:07]—Miss Greenwood. I'm sorry. Miss Greenwood was the principal.

DR: Okay. And from there where did you go to school at?

EG: Went to W. Gresham Meggett Elementary School.

DR: Okay. What was the father's name?

EG: Well, daddy's name was Samuel Greene, my mother's name was Ciel Greene [phonetic 00:06:28].

DR: Samuel Greene lived where?

EG: At 1092 Fort Johnson Road.

DR: And what was his occupation?

EG: He first started working at Carolina Supply and Cement Company, for Carolina Supply and Cement Company, and then later on he worked for the State Port Authority.

DR: And your mother?

EG: My mother used to do housework. She used to work for the Oswell [phonetic 00:06:55] family. And then she left there and she used to do housework, do curtain, in her home. And then she later worked for the Sister of Mercy down in Fort Johnson on Fort Johnson Road.

DR: And where did the Oswell family live?

EG: Oswell family live across the street from us on used to be—right now it's Ocean View Road. It didn't have that name before, but it used to be Oswell Place. That's right across the street from us.

DR: So your early education was at Three Trees and then to Gresham Meggett Elementary.

EG: That's correct.

DR: And do you have any siblings, brothers and sisters?

EG: Yes, I have seven sisters and I have four brothers.

DR: Where do you fall in line with the family order?

EG: I'm the seventh child.

DR: You're the last one?

EG: I'm the seventh.

DR: You're the seventh.

EG: Yeah.

DR: Okay. All right. And was education highly emphasized in your household?

EG: Oh, yeah, education was highly emphasized in my home. My parents used to make sure that a lot of time that we studied. They used to attend PTA. That's most of the time when they have PTA meeting after school. And then sometime people have to bring cakes and different stuff at the school and you had PTA meetings. So it was very emphasized on education.

DR: Now, this was at the Three Trees School?

EG: This was at W. Gresham Meggett School.

DR: So they were very much involved in your lives...

EG: Right.

DR: ...educationally.

EG: Right.

DR: Okay. Where did your parents go to school?

EG: You know, my parents went to school—they had a school right there on Secessionville Road. I'm trying to remember. It's Society Corner School. Used to be on Secessionville Road. That's the school that they went to.

DR: Okay. On the island, but at Secessionville Road. It's Society Corner School. Where did your siblings go to school?

EG: My sister, older sister, they went to school at Gresham Meggett. Three of my sisters went to school at the parochial school at this church which is the James Presbyterian Church parochial school right on Fort Johnson Road. And then the elementary school, they went to school there. Then a little later on, all of them came to Gresham Meggett School. But then when my younger sisters, they started going to school at Gresham Meggett, King's Highway, and then later on, some of them went to Fort Johnson, Fort Johnson and—well, James Island High split and became Fort Johnson and James Island High, so...

DR: Do you know what years those might have been?

EG: They were in '69 or '70. That's when my younger sister went to Fort Johnson and James Island School.

DR: So you graduated from Gresham Meggett High School?

EG: [Overtalk] I graduated from Gresham Meggett in '64.

DR: Okay. So that was before the integration of the schools, then.

EG: Yeah, I graduated before they integrated.

DR: Okay. What was it like when you were in elementary school? What was the school day like?

EG: The teachers were real strict. And being by strict, the teachers could have tell our parents what we didn't do. And that's one thing we didn't wanted because if the

teachers was right and if the teacher tells them that we didn't do something, our parents would beat us when we get home.

DR: So they had full confidence in whatever the teacher told them.

EG: They had full confidence in the teacher. The teachers and the neighborhood, they had full confidence. Anything that the neighborhood tell them or the teacher tell them, they are right.

DR: So you grew up at a time when adult had the right to discipline children.

EG: Exactly right. They definitely had. I mean, they'd beat us, they sometime wouldn't let us look at TV. So I don't know what I was during the day because we was young guys. We were pretty mischievous during the time. But I think by the neighborhood and the parents, they keep us in check.

DR: Keep us in check, huh.

EG: Yeah.

DR: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, was the school year a full nine months, six months, or how long was the school year?

EG: The school year was nine months.

DR: When the time that you were still working on the farms.

EG: Oh, yeah, definitely. We worked on the farm. We pick up potatoes, we pick up tomatoes, we pick up cucumber, we pick beans. We work in floral bed on people house. We sold Lisitol [phonetic 00:12:06]. We sold Patches Berry [phonetic 00:12:07]. We sold Holly. At that time, we did a lot of making change for ourselves. We'd caddy on the golf course. So we did a lot of work for ourself at the time. We help our parents with the income because, you know, we had 12 kids in the family.

DR: There are 12 of you in the family?

EG: 12 of y'all. So we have to help the parents out at that time.

DR: Tell me, what was the size of the house that you grew up in?

EG: We had three bedrooms, a living room, a dining room and a kitchen. My first house we had a outdoor toilet, see? And we had to pump water. We had to pump water to wash, we had to pump water to rinse. One to wash, one to rinse. And had a hand pump. Had outdoor toilet. And a lot of time our parents had a field that we had

to go in and haul, pick beans. And then we have to go and get wood to warm by, go in the woods and get woods. Each one of us have to get a bundle of wood and then sometimes we have to get wood to make sure that father catch the fire in the morning.

The boy had to be wake up by the time he go to work because we knew that we would grow up to be mans and we have to get a job. We used to wonder why, "It's not time for me to go to work, why we have to get up early with him?" So he got us up early. Say, "I want you to put your shoes on and put your pants on. You can go back to laying in bed." But if somebody call you to work, you can be—First of all, you got to pick up whatever he needs and head off to work. But if you don't, if somebody got a will in you to talk about, "I got to put my pants on"" they going to get somebody else. So he say, "Stay ready, man, put the shoes on, then you can lay back on your beds."

DR: Directing your attention back to Gresham Meggett, were you able to be aware of the difference between the black school and the white school?

EG: Oh, yeah, definitely. When we were coming up, we get the leftover book or the reject book. Any of the writing books used to come to our school and we used to get the book that James Island High, they done finish with it and we get the book. But one thing I will say about teachers, we had homework and we had stuff like that, and if we don't do it, they keep us after school. I notice that with the lights we played football, our parents put on different stuff, teas and different stuff like that, to buy and support to try to get a light, we play football.

DR: So you're telling me they raised money to buy the equipments.

EG: Buy the equipment, buy the lights. We went without lights for a long time, everybody else, James Island and them had their lights and we never had our lights. It been a while before we could get lights up there. And then when we got our lights out there, everybody was so happy when we got our...

DR: So you don't think those two schools were equal.

EG: No, definitely not. Definitely not. They wasn't equal. We knew that.

DR: When Gresham Meggett was consolidated into the high school, was there any suspicion in the community why they built that school?

EG: Why they built...

DR: Gresham Meggett.

- EG: They built Gresham Meggett at the time. They built Gresham Meggett because they didn't want us to mingle with the kids in James Island High. You don't want us to be together. That's why they built the high school. But our high school was the first black high school in the island. Before that, people used to go to—when they finish their elementary school, they had to go to Burke School to finish up.
- DR: So what did Gresham Meggett mean to you?
- EG: Gresham Meggett mean a lot to me because right now, all the rest of schools that blacks used to go to, they either tore it down or it's not there anymore. And to have Gresham Meggett still standing there, it's mean a lot. We cherish that. We have some good times at Gresham Meggett. The teachers there mean a lot. The teachers see that we grow up in the right direction.
- DR: So are you saying that you believe the teachers really cared about their students.
- EG: Oh, yeah. Back that time, the teachers really cared about you. Because either you going to do the work, and if you don't do the work, they going to keep you after school and make you do it. And if you talk in school and disrupt them, they'll keep you in school and make you write 50 time, a hundred time on the paper what you were doing wrong, or if you wasn't paying attention. And they keep you. And you bet they going to tell your parents that they keeping you and you have to walk home, see?
- DR: Let me ask this question: You know what the Gullah language means?
- EG: Yeah.
- DR: Did you all speak Gullah or you spoke English at Gresham Meggett when you were in class?
- EG: Coming to school, all of us speak Gullah. But then in the time that when we go to English class, our teacher was kind of straighten it out the right way, you know, because the English teachers, they going to make you speak the right way. But then we go right back and in another class we speak the Gullah language.
- DR: So you're saying the teachers didn't make you ashamed of your language, then.
- EG: No.
- DR: So they taught y'all, but they did not discourage you using your language, the Gullah language.

EG: No, they didn't discourage us. They would make you say the right word at the time when you in your class, but they don't discourage us from speaking Gullah.

DR: So they taught English like a second language to you there.

EG: That's right [laughs].

DR: You know, many of our families have traveled away, places like New York. And people up there said they speak different. Bad English. Make them ashamed. Did you feel that way when you were at Gresham Meggett, ashamed of your language?

EG: No, no, I wasn't afraid of my language.

DR: And you still speak it, don't you?

EG: Oh, yeah, definitely [laughs].

DR: Now, do you think the community was proud of Gresham Meggett?

EG: Oh, yeah, very proud. Especially when we have football game and different game, we really get good support. PTA, really good support. So they are proud of the school in the community.

DR: Was the school construction an improvement from Three Trees?

EG: Oh, yeah, definitely.

DR: Tell me about that. What's Three Trees was like?

EG: Three Trees was a wooden structure. We had three classes in Three Trees School. And we had a big potbelly stove in the corner that you had to get wood and put in the stove. And then you have the principal used to teach one class, which is Miss Greenwood, Miss Alma Greenwood [phonetic 00:21:10] would teach one class, and Miss Sanders used to teach the other class.

DR: So those are the three teachers?

EG: Those are the three teachers.

DR: How many students in a class? I mean, how many classes? How many different grades in a class?

EG: Oh, man. I'll try to remember. It was first, second, third and fourth grade for me. And so a teacher used to had two classes. One teacher used to have two. They have one in the back and one in the front.

DR: Two grades, then. In one class.

EG: Yeah, two grades. In one class.

DR: So how many classrooms did y'all have at Three Trees?

EG: Three. Three classes.

DR: And so if there were three, there were six grades there, then.

EG: I can't remember. It's been a long time. I remember we used to have one in the back and one in the front. And sometimes we used to get distracted by some of them be talking.

DR: Tell me about that potbelly stove.

EG: Our potbelly stove, it must be, what, about five feet high. And they used to heat they coffee on the top. We used to get wood and put in. You had wood in the afternoon. Anytime somebody do something bad, they had to go out there and get the wood and stack that wood in the corner. And then you got to put the wood in the stove and keep the heat going, you know. But it was nice, yeah. We all enjoyed that.

DR: Now, when you went over to Gresham Meggett, you just describe sort of what the classroom was like at Three Trees. Those teachers at Three Trees also went over to Gresham Meggett, the new school?

EG: Yeah, they went over there.

DR: Did they continue to teach two classes, two grades in one class?

EG: No, they only had one class there.

DR: So when you got to Gresham Meggett, your first change was every teacher had one class.

EG: That's right, one class.

DR: And was that because you had Three Trees taught students within this community off of Fort Johnson Road.

EG: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: But when you went to Gresham Meggett, there were students from other areas of the island.

EG: Mostly on James Island. Mostly around, like, Fort Johnson Road, Camp Road, Green Hills and community like that. When you get beyond what we call [indistinct 00:23:37] or Tea Lake, which is going back on Fort Johnson Road, then people from there used to go to the parochial school.

DR: And where was that?

EG: That's at this place. Location's in James Presbyterian Church. Parochial school. So everybody from Camp in Fort Johnson go to parochial school and everybody from Camp on the other side of Camp Road going to Three Trees School.

DR: You ever heard the term Sanders School [sounds like 00:24:05]?

EG: Yeah.

DR: What does that mean?

EG: Sanders School and parochial school are the same.

DR: Where was Sanders school?

EG: Sanders school was on St. James Presbyterian Church property.

DR: Oh, so that was the Presbyterian school.

EG: Yeah.

DR: What happened in May at these schools?

EG: May Day. May Day for parochial schools or Sanders school. Parochial school, I mean, they had May Day. And May Day right now is still going on. This is the 89th year, coming this year, for the school. 89th.

DR: Did you go to May Days?

EG: Oh, yeah. I attended just about all of them. I used to go to one because my sister used to be [indistinct 00:24:55] in the parochial school. And I attend those. And then

ever since they came, St. James take over from the parochial school. I attended all those except for the time when I went away to college and the time that I went away with military. So I attended part of all of them.

DR: So when you transferred to Gresham Meggett, it first was an elementary school?

EG: Yeah.

DR: And then it grew and became a high school.

EG: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Who was the principal?

EG: Mr. Leroy Anderson [phonetic 00:25:34].

DR: What do you remember about Mr. Anderson?

EG: [Laughs] Mr. Anderson was a tough cookie. But he [indistinct 00:25:46]. Mr. Anderson, he used to go around carrying a lash, Lash LaRue [phonetic 00:25:50]. Mostly about a two-and-a-half foot [indistinct 00:25:53] on the side of them called [him] Lash LaRue. And I remember distinct that we had a...

DR: Wasn't a cowboy that used to have that name, too?

EG: [Laughs] Yeah. Yeah, a cowboy used to have that.

DR: And what was that with the cowboy? It was a whip, wasn't it?

EG: Yeah, with a whoop, that's right. And we used to go to the store. Just before you get to Gresham Meggett School, there was a store near, about 200 feet away from the school.

DR: Talking about Patsy's Store [phonetic 00:26:28]?

EG: Patsy's Store. And we used to go in there. And the bell used to ring. Mr. Anderson come in there with that whoop [laughs] and he cleaned the house [laughter], cleaned the house with that whoop coming out there.

DR: Be sending you into class.

EG: Yeah, send you to class [laughter]. And he used to walk down the hallway. Anybody be walking down in the hall he used to use that whoop.

DR: Were they afraid of him or respected him?

EG: They respected him.

DR: You think he cared about the students?

EG: Oh, yeah, definitely. He cared about them. But he wanted them to be in class when the bell ring. He don't want you to be walking the hall because a lot of guys come to class and they used to go to the bathroom and they used to walk in the hall. So he will make sure the students is in the class.

DR: So when you first went there, did you change classes or all day you stay in the same class with the same teacher?

EG: Yeah. In the elementary side, you stay in class all day. In the elementary school.

DR: So but when you went to high school...

EG: We changed class.

DR: Okay. And so the students would go to the different teachers' class.

EG: Right. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: I see. You had homeroom teacher?

EG: Oh, yeah, definitely had a homeroom teacher.

DR: Who was your homeroom teacher then?

EG: Oh, I had Mr. Mack [phonetic 00:27:50] be the homeroom teacher one time. Then I had Miss Bennett. Then I have Miss Spears. Miss Spears—I mean, Miss Bennett and Banks, the same. Miss Bennett used to be Miss Banks before she got married. Then she became Miss Bennett. Then I have Miss Spears as a homeroom teacher.

DR: Now, you stated a minute ago that you were aware of the difference between the white and black school.

EG: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: How do you know that? Tell me how you know that there was a difference.

EG: Well, for one thing, we always get the old books. And I knew at the time that when we pay for books, we pay for new books. And we was told that some of the books

you could see had "James Island High" in the book. So we knew the book come from them to us. When time for our lights, the James Island people had their lights way before us. It took a long time for we to get our lights. And that's why we know we wasn't...

DR: So how did you get your lights?

EG: Hard working parents.

DR: They raised the money themselves, huh.

EG: Raised the money themselves to get lights and put on different PTA teas and different stuff like that to get the money for the lights.

DR: Did the teachers ever teach y'all that there was a responsibility to do better?

EG: Oh, yes, they all would tell us that you got a responsibility to get our work, and if we don't get our work, how do we expect to achieve and get ahead. You say that education is one thing that when you get an education, nobody can take that away. And they described to us to do better. And especially in the future if you want to go to college, you need to study, you need to get your work. And the good part about making us recite the poems and different stuff like that, they get down on us about that.

DR: Do you have any of your siblings that went to James Island High after you left?

EG: Yeah, I had my baby sister went there and then I had three of my sister went there. Three of my sister went to James Island High School.

DR: Did y'all ever talk about the difference in the experience?

EG: Only thing I know they say is they didn't like the idea. They would have liked to finish Gresham Meggett because at that time it seemed like they wasn't being treated equal. And they always talk about it. "We really want to—they did us wrong, we really wanted to finish Gresham Meggett."

DR: So you think that they had the belief that the white teachers didn't want to teach them?

EG: I didn't quite ask them about that, but I know I think about more that the way the student around them treat them.

DR: Oh, the peer treatment.

EG: Yeah. I didn't get the information that they say anything about the teachers, more likely the peers, the way it's around them when they went; the way the children themselves...

DR: Would treat them.

EG: ...would treat them.

DR: How did they describe that?

EG: You see, they didn't want them there.

DR: So they were hostile?

EG: Sometime they were hostile. They actually had to be in a group together, otherwise, they would be, you know, a fight.

DR: So the black students that was in the white school, that were attending the white school, felt the need for them to corral together for protection.

EG: Yeah.

DR: But what about those that were in different grades? That corralling only occurred during the recess or other times during the school?

EG: Mostly, they were trying to sit together in the class, but the teacher...

DR: Split them up?

EG: ...split them up. So when they go to recess, most likely, they be together because that's the time that you could see the integrated schools together, the kids around there feel as though they didn't want them there. So they have to mingle together in order to feel to be safe by their being with their peers.

DR: So there were fights?

EG: I can't recall if she'd tell me anything about fights, but I know they say they felt the unevenness in them that they didn't want them there.

DR: What did you do after you left Gresham Meggett, when you graduated in '64?

EG: I had two scholarship. I had one football, one golf, with South Carolina State. Started at South Carolina State. And being at the time, the service used to have two electives.

They used to have a 1-A and 2-A. And a 2-A mean that you in secondary school; 1-A mean that, you know, you just registered. And so I been in the ROTC at South Carolina State. And then when I went to South Carolina State, you know, Coach Dawson [phonetic 00:34:05] went to coach for golf. And I was a cross-handed golfer when I went there. [Indistinct 00:34:11].

DR: What do you mean by a cross-hand golfer?

EG: Well, a cross-hand golfer mean that you cross hand. You don't hold the club the same way that regular people hold the club.

DR: Okay.

EG: So he said, "Greene, I'm going to give you a bag of ball and I want you to change." I was pretty good cross-hand...

DR: Okay.

EG: ...but he said, "You going to change." So I said, "Coach," I said, "I'm pretty good where I is." He says, "No, you going to change." So he gave me the idea. He says, "Now, here it is. I want you to change." So I went on and hit ball and practiced and practiced and I did change. But in the meantime, I was in ROTC. We used to walk through the campus, every afternoon on campus. And when we used to walk through the campus...

DR: This is marching or just walking?

EG: Marching.

DR: Okay.

EG: Marching with ROTC. I had a sergeant named Sergeant Jackson. Never forgot his name long as I live. And he told me, he say—I can't remember whether I went home that weekend or what, but I happened to...So anyhow, I got the letter from there, from Selective Services. Wherever you at, it's just telling you to report to the nearest recruiting station. So you know...

DR: Drafting you?

EG: Yeah. I never thought nothing else. I mean, I'm in college. You know, I never thought. I thought they would get rid of this thing. So sergeant say, "Greene, you think you going to be living tomorrow morning?" So I look at him all like that and I said, "Yeah,

I think I'm going to be living." He said, "Well, you better report to your nearest recruiting station." So...

DR: Did you understand why he asked that question?

EG: You know, I just was dumbfounded as he was. I said, you know, you got to take a little [indistinct 00:36:06]. I guess he say since he's military, he can't do nothing with them at the time. So I just catch the bus and went down there. So I feel I'll be back in the morning. I woke up...

DR: Now, this is the bus in Orangeburg.

EG: Yeah.

DR: Okay.

EG: So I went down there, Fort Jackson, went down there. So I say...

DR: You went to Fort Jackson?

EG: Yeah.

DR: Because Orangeburg—Fort Jackson is out of Columbia.

EG: Fort Jackson's in Columbia.

DR: You had an induction notice or...

EG: The letter was an induction [laughter]. And that's why I took it to the sergeant of ROTC. So he told me, he said if I live tomorrow morning, you know, "You think you going to live tomorrow morning?" I said yeah. So he says, "Well, you better report to the Navy."

DR: That's the urgency of it.

EG: Yeah. So I report down there. So when I report down there, [indistinct 00:36:52] I say, "Well, you know, I'll be back, you know." So I see the guy. I say, "This letter here came to me, but I'm in college. And why you send me this letter here?" He said, "Well, we sent you several letters and why didn't you answer?" I say, "I didn't answer because I'm not home, I'm in school." He said, "Well, why wasn't you getting your letter?" I said, "My mother didn't send the letter to me." He said, "Well, this letter here, you in the Army now." Well, my heart dropped.

DR: Just like that?

EG: My heart dropped. And I just knew President Turner was at the time the president of the college, and along with Sergeant Jackson, I just knew they'd get me. So you know, I wasn't responding to hardly nobody yet. I was angry at the time. Very angry. So anyhow, that went on. And nobody never responded to me. And I was in the military [laughs].

DR: So did you leave Columbia to go back to Orangeburg or you stayed in Columbia when we you went to the...

EG: No, they kept me. But at the time they kept me, I was just feel that I'm going back to school. But I thought all the time, you know, they was getting everything ready for "We made a mistake." So anyhow, I went in the military. I was pretty mad at everybody then before the [indistinct 00:38:24].

DR: Changed your plans, then.

EG: Yeah, we changed the plan. So anyhow, I went on in. Been in there. Saw two years. Been in Vietnam for a year. Fort Gordon. From Fort Jordan, went to Fort Polk, Louisiana. From Fort Polk, Louisiana went to Vietnam. Back from Vietnam back...

DR: You had two tours in Vietnam?

EG: No, I had one, see. And then after, I went to Fort Benning in Georgia. I went to Fort Benning in Georgia and they were trying to get me to re-up. And being that my MOS was [indistinct 00:39:02] which was a weapon, so I told them I wasn't going to [indistinct 00:39:09]. They say, "Would you like to play golf?" I say, "Yeah, I would like to play golf." They say, "Well, we can give you a job on the golf course." But I knew that my MOS I had, they would send me back to Vietnam and I just barely got out of there. I just barely got out of Vietnam. So I said no, I wasn't going to re-up.

DR: So you in combat in Nam?

EG: Yeah. [Indistinct 00:39:29] carry an M-60 for one year. So once I got out of there, I went back to school. My scholarship was still good.

DR: So this is two years now.

EG: Two years in the military.

DR: And they released you after you did that tour.

EG: Yeah.

DR: And you returned back to State.

EG: No, I didn't go back to State. I went back there just to talk to Coach. Coach told me, he said my scholarship was still good. But right then, I figured after you come back you're so mixed up from the war. And so I went and I got a job for the first year with South Carolina Electric and Gas to be a lineman. Because I was going to school to be an electrical engineer.

DR: Oh, yeah?

EG: So anyhow, and then after I worked with them for a year, they were training me to be a lineman. And just out making me take all these—one month you be on the pole truck, one month you be on the service truck until you learn to be a lineman. And you just had to dig the hole for the [indistinct 00:40:41] transformer, you know, when you put in a new section. So I told them I dig enough foxholes in Vietnam. I say I don't want to dig no more foxhole. So I stopped. I leave there and I went to Tech and get my Associates Degree in Electrical Engineer.

When I was going to school to be a electrical engineer, Associates at Tech. And then I was going to school at the same time to be a general electrician. So I was studying to be a general electrician, at the same time I wanted to get my Associates degree in electrical engineering. I traveled for a different place. I helped wire the World Trade Building in New York City before it blew up. Bellevue Hospital in New York City. I light their substation on Myrtle Beach. I went to Missouri. I went to several different other state doing electrical work. And then I end up back at the VA Hospital being the electrical supervisor there for 37 years. And then I retired in '09. 2009.

But I remember going back to summer days at the W. Gresham Meggett and [indistinct 00:42:02] used to bring pecan to school to sell. And Stucky [phonetic 00:42:06] used to take the pear farmer, he used to sell the pears for three cent and three for a dime and make money [laughs]. I always used to tell Stucky about...

DR: [Overtalk] Where the pear came from?

EG: Arthur [Indistinct 00:42:20] had a tree with pears on them. And then with pecan, he used to sell pecan and he used to sell pears.

DR: That's right.

EG: And then Stucky [indistinct 00:42:28] used to take a box [laughs]. [Indistinct 00:42:30] you remember that shit?" [Laughs] I say yeah. I tell [indistinct 00:42:35] every time I saw [indistinct 00:42:36] "You remember when Stucky used to take your pear?" He says, "You remember that?" [Laughs] "Yeah." But we had a good time.

DR: I remember when we used to—English teacher. We call her Big Rich. Mrs. Richardson. Cornelia [phonetic 00:42:57].

EG: Yeah. And we used to walk from down there at Ocean View and Fort Johnson Road, had to walk to school. And when we missed the bus, we used to have to catch Big Rich. She had a '55 Chevy. All of us used to miss the bus, so we have to get on Big Rich and we have to sit on Tubby [indistinct 00:43:23] lap. And he drive that car be all the way down and back and he bring us to school. And when we missed [indistinct 00:43:31], she live about two block from our house. When we miss it, then we have to walk to school. And then when we walk to school, we have to stay to school late because we get to school late. The teacher make us stay late.

But our father, we had a big bull. And we used to have to chase that bull before we come to school. We have to stake him and take him to a new place and eat grass. And me and my brother, we used to go down there so there was a chance to move the bull to another location down Ocean View Road. And when we take it there, we pull our stake up, that bull drag me and my brother across that marsh. And we only got on our school clothes. Soaking wet through the ditch.

So the next day, our father ask me, he say, "Did y'all"—We didn't go the next day, we didn't move the bull because the bull dragged us. But our father, we get a beating because we didn't move him because my father going to check and you don't want to [indistinct 00:44:30]. So we say we going to get a beating if we doesn't get well, we got to walk to school. We got to find a way how we can do the bull.

So me and my brother said, "Yeah, well, I'll tell you what we do. We go look at a spot ahead and see where a tree was." So after we pull the bull up and he start walking, we probably give him some slack and wrap him around that tree. And when he go up and jerk back like that, when he jerk back, we say, "We got him now." [Laughter] Then I'm taking him from the tree and we stake him down. But boy, that bull drag us through the water. [Indistinct 00:45:07] going to school, you know. So we walked all the way to Gresham Meggett School. And then when we get there, we might done missed the first period class...

DR: So what distance that is?

EG: Gresham Meggett School is, I say, about two miles. About two miles from there.

DR: So Gresham Meggett School is a little better than a mile from Folly Road.

EG: Well, we walked three miles, then [laughs]. But we walked that bull, I tell you. But we had...

DR: And St. James is about a mile from Folly Road.

EG: Yeah. It's a good three miles.

DR: So you know, you talking about another two miles down the road.

EG: Yeah, we walk. The moment we get there, so they, "Why y'all late?" [Laughs]. The teacher want to know why we late. So they think we done do something wrong. And we tell them, you know. But that's what happens. But the kick was they don't know what you got told to do. Because like I say, we have to go in the woods, we have to do this. But these kids don't have no chore like we used to do like that.

DR: They're not sit down, play games because there were no TVs then.

EG: Yeah, we had chores to do.

DR: Based on your overall experience, how do you credit Gresham Meggett for contributing to your experience in life after you left this island?

EG: I'll say I give them a 90 percent. Why I say that, because they teach you there, especially the man teachers, they instill in us how to get along with the other one [sounds like 00:58:06]. The man is how to control ourself. And by at that time being segregated, it helped us as black more because the parents believe in the teacher and whatever the teacher say go. And it keep us in check because the teacher would call our parents to help keep us in check. And I think Gresham Meggett School, along with the parents, everybody who went there was saying that I think they making us go in the right direction.

And then the rule they got now that the teacher can't do nothing to the student, we going back in the opposite direction. I've been on the constituent school board for 15 years and the things that I've seen come through that school board I can write a book on. You can say some of the students and teacher right now, they almost like they in combat. The kids can tell them anything and they can't do nothing about it. Kids can curse them and they can't do nothing about it.

DR: So you're saying there are less rules and order?

EG: Definitely.

DR: Do you think some of that relates back to the period of segregation?

EG: Yeah, definitely.

DR: Where they had to protest, and protest requires violating the law because the law was unfair?

EG: Yeah, it was unfair especially because say you got one of the white teachers right now, they don't want the blacks to tell the student or they don't want the blacks to teach some of the students, they don't want the black teachers to correct their student, punish him. But they got to remember that we, as black, our parents have raised a lot of the blacks in their home, have raised a lot of the black that go to the white house and mind their children. And so I don't know why they think that at this time they don't want the black teachers to scold their children when they're going the wrong direction because you...

DR: So that's what your...

EG: ...you not born—white or black, you not born to hate nobody, you are taught to hate people.

DR: [Overtalk] So that's what you saw and, you know, you experienced when you sat on the school board?

EG: Yeah. See, I mean, I see it in a lot of student. And you can tell the way they talk and then you can see it in there. I mean, from the young to the old, they come to [indistinct 01:01:14].

DR: [Overtalk] So when you were at Gresham Meggett you had only black teachers.

EG: Yeah, definitely. All black.

DR: So the white schools that you served over when you were on the school board, they were integrated.

EG: Yeah.

DR: What kind of numbers of black teachers did they have at those schools?

EG: Through the Murray-LaSaine, they had majority of blacks there. James Island [High].

DR: Did you have less problems at those schools when the majority of teachers were black teachers and administration was black, too?

EG: Yeah.

DR: They had less problems that you all noticed.

EG: As [indistinct 01:01:52] because Murray-LaSaine was combined. Murray-LaSaine, at that time, they had about 20 percent-30 percent white. James Island had more whites than black. Fort Johnson did the same thing.

DR: Now, tell me, what grades were at these three schools you're describing?

EG: Murray-LaSaine been from the first grade to the fifth grade and then the middle school go from sixth to the eighth grade.

DR: And these schools were for the entire island or just sections?

EG: No, this school...

DR: Part of the same...

EG: They been for the entire island.

DR: For the entire island?

EG: Yeah.

DR: Okay. They were bussed there from all over the island.

EG: Yeah. Murray-LaSaine, Harbor View was the elementary school, and Star Point was the elementary school. But then you had at that time two middle school and two high school, okay?

DR: Okay. That's it.

Diane Hamilton

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 18, 2019 at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed is the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Mary Beth Reed: . . . Mary Beth Reed with New South Associates. I'm interviewing Diane Hamilton. It's March 18th. I'm doing the St. Patrick's Day thing.

Diane Hamilton: Yes.

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MBR: 2019. And we're going to be talking about her time teaching at W. Gresham Meggett High School. And I—Again, thanks for coming.

DH: You're welcome.

MBR: And being willing to do this. So, I need to learn a little bit about you, Diane, if you would. Where did you grow up? And how did you end up at Meggett? Can you kind of talk—

DH: Yes.

MBR: . . . about how you got there?

DH: Okay. I was born in Charleston, West Ashley. As a matter of fact, I still live on the same spot that I grew up on in a house, not the same house. I tore the old house down and built a new house on that spot. So, I was born in Charleston. I was familiar with James Island because my father was the minister of Bethel AME Church on Central Park Road. So, as a child, I would come over—Not every Sunday. But I visited kind of regular with—I was a daddy's girl. So, I would come over and visit with him. My mom stayed at the home church and, of course, mostly I stayed at the home church, as well.

I graduated from South Carolina State College, as it was known then. Our graduation was May 15th. And I had come home about a week or two earlier and had spoken with my high school English teacher, who was really my mentor. And she was the one who guided me through the process to apply for college, to get work aid scholarship and all of that, to actually attend college. I attribute all that to Mrs. Ruth Brown.

MBR: At what high school?

DH: At Wallace High School.

MBR: Okay

DH: Yes. Which was a competitor of Gresham Meggett. They were all part of that revitalization—That's not the proper word.

MBR: Is it equalization?

DH: Equalization Act. Came out of that respect. And I'd spoken with her. And she told me who to contact with Charleston County School District. And she also told me, "Now listen, she is going to sound kind of gruff and what have you. But don't you let that bother you. Simply state" and she told me A, B, C, D, whatever "State so and so." I said, "Yes, ma'am." I followed her instructions. And I did that. I went on back to college. And then I received a telephone call that I had an interview with W. Gresham Meggett on the 16th with Mr. Al Evans. And I also had an interview that Wednesday with Mr. Linton for the school in Mount Pleasant. I can't think of the name right this minute, but the school—

MBR: Laing.

DH: Laing High School in Mount Pleasant. And, so, I came here. I actually rode the public bus from West Ashley to James Island. And then got off on Folly Road and walked to the school for my interview. And Mr. Evans wanted me to go directly to the superintendent's office, I don't recall the name of the superintendent at that time, to sign the papers. But I told him, "Let me think about it." But I knew right then I was going to accept the position. But I had already committed to a second interview. So, I wanted to do the second interview, as well. And one of my college classmates borrowed a car, because I was not driving at that time. He borrowed a car. We were just friends, but he borrowed a car and took me to Mount Pleasant for that interview.

And Mr. Linton also wanted to take me to the superintendent's office over there to be hired. And I said, you know, "Give me a little time." I came home. Then I wrote him a nice thank you note thanking him for the opportunity and all. But my mother, who

was ailing at the time—I told him I thought it'd be best if I worked closer to home, especially since I did not have an automobile. And, so, I didn't want to have to travel from Mount Pleasant—And I didn't know how I was going to arrange that, anyhow. And, so, I accepted the Gresham Meggett position.

And, later that week, after signing the papers, Mr. Evans called and said, "Ms. Hamilton, what are you doing for the summer?" And I said, "Well, I'm just going to be looking for, you know, a job until fall when school opens." And he said, "Would you like to teach summer school?" I said, "Yes, sir." So, I was hired to teach summer school that June. And, so, I started that June. Again, I rode the bus from West Ashley to James. I was younger then.

MBR: How old were you?

DH: I was 20. I had not reached my 21st birthday yet, because I'm a December baby. Oh, great month, great month.

MBR: I am, too. It is a great month, yes.

DH: Yes.

MBR: But I'm in the same boat.

DH: Yeah. And, see, if I had been born during this time, see, I would have been held back, you know, until the following year because of the late birthday. But then they allowed me to start at 5, age 5. But anyway, I went to the meeting for the summer school. And I saw these people in the room and they were very gracious to me and what not. And at the end of the session, there was one lady who looked quite familiar. And I looked at her and at the end of it I said, "I know you." Of course, she didn't know me. I said, "I know you. You used to live on my street." That was Mrs. James. She was an adult and teacher. I was a teenager, so, of course, she wouldn't know me. And I would only see this lady get into her white car, drive away, come back, park the white car. And she was so busy and what have you. And it turned out that her mother was my dorm mother for my last three years of college. Didn't know that.

MBR: Wow.

DH: But we—You know. But anyway, she now lived on the Peninsula. And so, she said, "Well, Diane, you know, you could ride with me." A lot of people carpooled in those days. She said, "You could ride with me. If you can get to South Windermere, I'll pick you up on my way from city. And then I'll take you back home in the afternoon." And, so, that was my transportation. And, so, we went on. And then, when fall came,

we kept the same arrangement. And I started taking driving lessons. And November 12th I got my first car and I started driving myself.

MBR: Fabulous. That's fabulous. So—

DH: And Mrs. James and I have been friends ever since. And we worked together those three years. And then they closed W. Gresham Meggett. And I don't know who made the decision, but they selected three teachers from Gresham Meggett to go to the new Fort Johnson. And it was Mrs. James, who already had a Masters, which was very rare in those days. She had a Masters in English. And Mr. McCray, who had a Masters in Mathematics. And I was selected for Social Studies. I only had a B.A. I don't know how I got in that group. But the three of us went to Fort Johnson.

MBR: Oh, my gosh.

DH: And we have been friends ever since. All right.

MBR: Do you remember what you got paid when you first started at W. Gresham Meggett?

DH: I don't remember the—Was it \$3,000 a year? Some figure. But I do remember we were only paid once per month and for nine months. So, but I remember thinking, "Now, during the summer, I'm going to have to have something to bridge me across those months." And, so, I would do little things in the summer. But that doesn't last very long. Because then they decided they would divide our paychecks. Still the same amount of money, but they would divide it in 12 sessions. So, they we would receive a check every month. But at first—And then, later on, they went to being paid every two weeks. Because then you were only paid once a month. So, you had the budget which was—I mean, you—That's what was expected of you, so that's what you did. So, you were paid once a month. And you took care of your expenses and what have you.

MBR: How were you prepared for becoming a teacher at W. Gresham Meggett?

DH: Oh, I was well prepared. Oh yes. I was well prepared. When I graduated—Well, Mrs. Brown in high school—I was in the college prep classes and what not. So, when I was getting ready to select my college, I wanted to go to the closest college, but the toughest college in the state. I didn't want to go to just any school. And, so, at that time, South Carolina State was the top school in this state. And it was the closest. Because, when I graduate in 62, I could not attend the College of Charleston. If that was available, I know I would have gone to the College of Charleston. But it was really the best thing for me to actually be able to go away from home and be submersed in that environment and what not. So, that was perfect for me.

And, so, that's how I ended up at South Carolina State. And, of course, I was not one to want to select—Well, I followed the—They had an outline of what courses you were to take and when you were going to take them. I followed that catalog step by step. I never moved anything around or tried to avoid this teacher, teacher A or teacher B, whoever. Because I knew that South Carolina State had a reputation. If you did not have all of your requirements, they would pull you out of the line, even if it was the week before graduation, or the week of graduation. So, I was not going to let them—I was not going to get messed up. Besides, I didn't mind—I preferred having a hard teacher, or hard teachers as they call it. And, so, I was prepared. And, of course, I did my student teaching in Gaffney, South Carolina for six weeks. And in those days what would happen is you actually left the campus and you were sent to live in a community. So, I went to Gaffney, South Carolina. We boarded—There were two of us student teachers and a newly hired secretary for the school. And we boarded with this lady, whose daughters were at college. So, she—Her husband was military and, so, that's how she earned extra money and whatnot, by boarding college students.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative]. That's great.

DH: And, so, for six weeks—And, so, we went to school that first day and we were introduced to our supporting teachers, supervising teachers. We had not been given any materials. I mean, books or anything, you know, we would have gotten that the next day. Well, we came home. We were so excited. Sat down and the lady had prepared our meal. She prepared all of our meals and everything. And, so, we were all sitting there talking about our experiences of the day. And she looked outside and she said, "Oh, it's snowing." She said, "Ya'll might not be able to go to school tomorrow." Well, we're from Charleston. We thought, "Okay. So."

MBR: Snow.

DH: Woke up the next morning. Snow. No school. One day. Two days. Three days. Four days. Five days. I think we missed seven days of school.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

DH: And we couldn't even use to time efficiently and prepare because we had no materials. So, we were the only ones out there playing around in the snow.

MBR: That's a great school story, though. Well—

DH: And then I had a very good supervising teacher. I taught U.S. History. I had five classes of U.S. History. And she stayed in the room with me. I know some supervisor teacher would leave you the minute you get a super—They'd give you the book—

Well, they didn't do that. Of course, with my student teachers, I never left them either until—Because those were my students. Until the last week or two, I might start to walk out, but I stayed. Because how can I evaluate you if I'm not there to observe? That's—Plus, these are my students. I'm getting them back.

MBR: The Gaffney School, was that an all black—

DH: Gaffney High School. All black—

MBR: Black?

DH: . . . high school.

MBR: Okay.

DH: Gaffney High School and Gaffney—I think it was—I know it was in Gaffney, South Carolina.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: The school may not have been named Gaffney High. But the school was in Gaffney, South Carolina. And the principal offered me a teaching position, also. But I didn't consider it at all because I knew I wanted to come home to Charleston. My father died my senior year in college. We went back in August. He died in September. So, I—Well, I wanted to come back anyhow. And, so—And my mother was here by herself. So, no—Flat, I turned that down. And I believe it was Bufford that they had applications and, you know, for teaching. I looked at the application. I knew I wanted to take it because I wanted to be home. But then I saw where they were paying male teachers \$300 more than their female teachers. So, I immediately put that in the trash can.

MBR: Good for you. So, you had a lot of preparation.

DH: Yes. So, I—

MBR: I feel like you were ready.

DH: Yes, I was ready.

MBR: A 20-year-old.

DH: A 20-year-old. A 20-year-old.

MBR: So, coming to your first class at W. Gresham Meggett. And you do Social Studies.

DH: Yes.

MBR: How big were the class sizes? Were there more boys than girls? Can you kind of characterize—

DH: Well, it would have been that summer school class. Which was probably under 20 students. But two things I can tell you about that class. The students were very respectful. When I had to go through the students' records, I discovered that one of the young men in my class was a year older than I was. And a second one was six months older than I was. But, you know, they were very respectful. Of course, they didn't know my age. They just saw me as the teacher. But the environment in those days—This is the teacher. You're the student, so, you know, you didn't have any problems, any behavioral problems, not in that respect.

MBR: Was Ms. James a mentor to you?

DH: Well, she—Oh, yes. Because she was an experienced teacher. She had taught in Summerville six years before she started teaching at Gresham Meggett. Because she's older than I am, yes. But we shared some of the same values and whatnot. So, we really became—I said—I spoke to her this morning.

MBR: I think that's wonderful. I like that you're both considering riding together. It's the same pattern.

DH: Oh, yes.

MBR: I know.

DH: Yes. And now—That's something. Because now she is not able to drive because of some health issues. And, so, I'm her backup driver to take her to either medical appointments or to go run errands for her. Just Saturday a neighbor of hers died and she wanted to give the family flowers. And, so, I went and bought the flowers and brought her back to them. We went together. I don't know the neighbor, but I met her then and we went and delivered the flowers and whatnot. So, yes, we've been around, yes.

MBR: That's really neat.

DH: Yes.

MBR: Well, the years you taught, they were really important years, like, in public education.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: Not only in South Carolina. Because desegregation was—

DH: Right.

MBR: . . . was out there. When you were there, did you—Were the children prepared for what was ahead? Do you understand—Did they know that the W. Gresham Meggett experience was going to radically change?

DH: No. I don't think—We weren't aware of that. But you know, even at Wallace, our teachers taught us—And, you know, we had limited opportunities because of the time we were brought up in. But our teachers brought us up to reach for the moon, so to speak. So, they prepared us so that when I went to South Carolina State College I was able—For example, my weakest subject is math. My ninth grade algebra teacher was very smart. However, her idea of teaching—She would come into the room. She would say, "Okay, class. I want you to read pages 15 through 20." And then she'd walk out the door. And then she'd come back a few minutes later and she expected us to know everything on that page without explanation. Luckily, for us, she got pregnant. And in those days you couldn't—Once you began to show, you couldn't remain in the classroom. Even though you were married, you couldn't remain in the class—Yes. Married women couldn't stay either. They had to leave. And, so, she had her child. And, then, she will eventually end up in a college, which is where she—

MBR: Was meant to be.

DH: Yes, you're right.

MBR: Right.

DH: Yes. As a matter of fact, she's still alive. I'm not close to her, but she's still alive. Oh, I was about to tell you—So, when I went to South Carolina State, I was hoping—You know, they gave you, during orientation, a mass of exams and whatnot, so they could place you, etc. But I was hoping to be placed in a remedial math class, so I could learn some math. Well, I figured out the problems on my own. They put me in regular algebra and trigonometry. So, I guess, so I was prepared. And with the English and the history, we had really good teachers at Wallace. So, we were prepared for what was to come. Now, I had no warning and no earthly idea—Maybe I should have known, but I didn't know that they were going to close Gresham Meggett and, you know, integration was going to come. I know that there were some teachers who left Gresham Meggett and went to James, the old James Island on Camp Road.

But I didn't know about closing Gresham Meggett or that I may end up in a totally different environment. And, of course, at Fort Johnson, there were only three black teachers. We were the three who came from Gresham Meggett. And we were the only three teachers there for a million years, it seems. Mr. McCray left after a few years to become an assistant principal. Then he later became a principal. As a matter of fact, the school on Camp Road, as I drove past it this morning, they have Camp Road Middle. That was not the name of the school. But he was principal there for a long time. And, so, that only left Mrs. James and me for a number of years. And then when Mrs. James had her baby, Tim, she was gone for six weeks. So I was the only one. But, I mean, life goes on. And then they started hiring one or two other African Americans. And then, later on, they hired more African Americans. So, I was accustomed, you know, to working in—I was trying to find a yearbook, that last yearbook for Gresham Meggett last night.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And I could not find it. I know I talked about giving it to some of the students who have been planning some activities a few years ago. So, I'm not sure if I followed through with it. But I must have. Usually I would have kept at least one.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, that concerns me that I couldn't find just one copy of it. I found other yearbooks and I found the first year for Fort Johnson. And I was looking at them. I actually went through and counted the—There was 70 African American students. But I don't remember the student body. We were—

MBR: At Fort Johnson?

DH: . . . probably—Yes, we—

MBR: That first year?

DH: That first year. I think we were probably about 600, maybe 600. Because they pulled students from the old James Island—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . and then a few students from Gresham Meggett. And that's how they made up the student body for Fort Johnson.

MBR: All right. Did—Were you welcomed there as teacher? Did the other teachers—How'd that work?

DH: Well, let's put it this way. At Gresham Meggett, when you walked in in the morning to sign in, Mrs. English, who was the secretary, greeted you. "Good morning. How are you." She literally made your day. So, you felt welcome or what have you. We went to Fort Johnson. We walked into the front office. And we were so used to saying, "Good morning." And no one responded. No one. Said, "Okay . . ." "So, luckily, I had three years under my belt. And Mr. McCray and Mrs. James, they were old pros, so that was all right. But I was lacking. At lunch we ate together. They'd say "Oh, come on, Diane, you need to do so and so." So, I had my support there.

And I remember a math teacher, Mrs. Jansen. Her classroom was on a hallway that was perpendicular to mine. But in order to get to the faculty restroom, she had to pass my door. And we had to stand in front of our door. And she would pass. And when she get [turns away and puts her nose in the air]—But by the time she retired, she was—She'd call me—All that had changed, of course. Her granddaughter—She had a grandchild who was in one of the middle schools over here. And a social studies teacher gave the child an assignment which was ludicrous, really. It was, like, a date and then you find—It was just ter—It was a terrible assignment. It really was. And, so, she actually called and asked me for help with her grandchild. And that secretary in the front office who didn't want to speak, after a while, "Ms. Hamilton, can I help you with something?" With, you know—We had to put—And Mrs. James and Mr. McCray—If grades were due on a particular day, a report was due on the 10th, we had ours done, like, on the 8th. I'm afraid we never asked them for any help. So, after a while, "Ms. Hamilton, can I help you with so and so? Can I do so and so for you?" Eventually, she had a granddaughter who ended up in my class.

MBR: Because you taught white and black students then, right?

DH: Yes. So, I had primarily white students. And I taught—Usually I taught electives. So, a lot of times I had smaller classes. I had primarily white students. And, when I started teaching the AP, my advanced placement college class, I only had—Once in a while, I may have one black student, but usually I had—So, that was no problem. And when I retired from, in 99, there, I thought it was over. I received a call from the School of the Arts. I didn't particularly care for the magnet process.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Because when they were going to open the academic magnet high school, they asked me to interview. I said, "No. I'm not leaving Fort Johnson to go—" "But Ms. Hamilton, come for the interview anyhow." "Okay. But I'm not leaving." So, I went for the interview. And we sat—My interview was a 3 o'clock and it ended at 5.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

DH: The gentleman—I'm don't—He was the first headmaster. We had the best conversation. We talked and chatted. We had a great time for two hours. But I—still wouldn't leave. because I didn't particularly care for the content. So, when I retired, I received a call from School of the Arts. "Ms. Hamilton, could you come and help us out a couple of weeks?" They had hired a ninth grade world global studies teacher. But at the last minute, the teacher was offered a position somewhere else making, I think, \$22,000 above Charleston. I mean, that was a no-brainer.

MBR: You gotta go. Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And, so, the person left. So, here school was going to open in a week and they didn't have a social studies teacher. Well, they knew—Well, one of the persons over there used to be on the district level. And I was department chair for 17 years, so knew me and what have you. And I had worked on the curriculum for the actual writing of global studies. That's my favorite. Anyhow, so I said—And they said, "You don't have to do any administration. You don't have to be department chair. You only have to teach one subject. You don't—I usually taught three. You don't have to teach but one subject and it's global studies." Okay. "Help us out for a couple of weeks till we find someone." I said, "Okay." It lasted five years.

MBR: Five years.

DH: And the first three years I was the only black on the academic faculty and the arts faculty. And then, third or fourth year, they hired a gentleman on the—As a matter of fact, the person they hired was Mr. Singleton. He's a well-known musician here locally now. I can't think of his first name right now. But he was on the acad—He was on the arts faculty and middle school. So, high school I was still the only one that looked like me. So, I'm used to—I mean, children are children. You know, they are people. I get along—

MBR: You get along fine.

DH: Yeah, we all get along. Yeah.

MBR: Well, how about when you had to deal with parents? I mean you came from W. Gresham Meggett. And in the interviews I've done so far—

DH: Yes.

MBR: People have talked about nurturing. That this was—This school, people came to learn.

DH: Right.

MBR: The teachers were of high caliber.

DH: Oh, yes, yes.

MBR: Class size—

DH: Yes.

MBR: . . . smallish?

DH: Yeah. Class size was not an issue. I had probably 25, maybe a little bit more. I don't remember class size being a big issue.

MBR: Big issue.

DH: It's just a different environment. I'll tell you one story, which I should not, but I will. I can't remember whether it was my first or second year there. I'm the type of person who didn't leave the school as soon as the bell rang. So, I usually tried to set things up for the next day. Get my ideas together, my lesson together and whatnot for the next school day, or whatever. And I was in—My classroom was on the third wing. Which means the far, the back wing. And, so, I felt safe being there by myself in the afternoon in the wing. You know, you have the staff that's cleaning the building. But I didn't have any issues or anything. I sat there and one day, one afternoon, rather, the young lady came. She was one of my students. She came. And I was sitting at my desk working. And she came and she said, "Ms. Hamilton, I'm going to kill you." And she said—And I think she said she was going to do something to herself. I said—I just looked at her. I said, "Okay." Make a long story short, we—I talked with her, I guess about an hour and a half or two hours. She was in her already 20 or 21. She had failed U.S. history several times before. And she was in my class and I didn't believe in curving grades and—

MBR: Yeah.

DH: . . . that kind of thing.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, she was not doing well in my class. So, she was just at the end. So, I talked to her and shared some experiences with her and what have you. And I still sat at my desk. And when she walked up, she put the razor blade on my desk. The principal never knew about it. I never report—Now if that happened today—

MBR: I know.

DH: . . . I would have a written report out. But I never reported to the principal. I never told anyone about it. And the young lady—I never mentioned it to her again. She came back to class the next day. I didn't hold it against her or anything. We just moved on. But I can't remember whether she passed or failed my class or not. But I never—We never had any other interactions. But that was the climate where you could talk to children. And if someone is, you know, in that situation—I know at Fort Johnson I started doing homebound and it was usually in those days for the girls who had gotten pregnant. They weren't bad girls. They weren't causing any problems. But in those days they couldn't come to school, so they'd have a homebound teacher take them their work. I didn't know any better. I tried to teach the girls whatever classes they were in. And I had this particular—I remember Mrs. Daniel, who was the guidance counselor. She was too cute. She tried to impress upon me, "Now, Ms. Hamilton, we want you to serve as this lady's, young lady's teacher, homebound teacher." But basically she was saying to me, "You don't have to worry about whether she passed, the grades, anything." Because the type of—She had cancer and it was here somewhere [the neck].

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And they were treating her. She had to go in for radiation. As a matter of fact, on Mondays her skin was kind of brown and by Friday her neck would be black. And then it would lighten up those two days she was off. And then what have you. And she said, "You know, as soon as that cancer gets—" So, she wanted me to understand, I think prognosis is to die.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: So, I said, "Okay." I thought, "Oh, my gosh. What am I, what have I signed up for?" Because, my mom wanted me to be a nurse, but I knew I couldn't handle that. And, so, I said, "This girl's going to be, you know, stretched out in bed. How are you going to deal with this?" And I thought, "Okay." I drove up to her house and there was a young person in the yard watering the flowers. So, I said, "Good afternoon." I introduced myself. "I'm Diane Hamilton. I'm here to see . . ." and I called her name. That was the girl I came to see. I thought "Okay." She never called off one session because she felt sick or was having a reaction to the medication. She loved going to school. She actually would lie to her mother to go to school. Because once in a while her mother would pull her out of school, or keep her home to do something. And she would tell her mom, "I have a test." Because she knew if the mom knew she had a test, the mom wouldn't keep her that day. So, whether she had a test or not, she would say she had a test, so she could go to school.

And this particular day she was quite depressed because she had a cousin who was in a special ed class. And that cousin was going to graduate and come out and what not. And here she was being—She was just so—I ended up spending an extra hour-and-a-half or two hours that day with her. You know, not being paid or anything, because you only get so much whatever, but because she just needed that interaction. And we just talked and talked back and forth. And, luckily, we finished the section. And in those days, the English department had something called mini-courses. And, so, the year was divided into four pieces. And you had to earn your credit in all four segments. You couldn't average it together in order to get the passing grade. But the girl, before I started tutoring her, she had failed one quarter. Not—Think in the 60s, 68 or something like that.

MBR: Close.

DH: And, so, the time that I had with her, plus they gave me extended time to go during the summer a little bit to help get her caught up, she passed those quarters. And I gave her the work and she did the work. And, so, I spoke to the principal. And I explained and he gave me permission to average her grades, because, after all, they didn't think she was going to survive.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: She survived. She did not come back to school the next school term because they had to extract her teeth. And her mother didn't have the resources to, you know, get the new set put in. But the year after, she got her new set. She came back. She melted right into the student population just like anyone else and she graduated. I didn't see her anymore. And many years later I had a—This would have been '80, '82. I had a little cousin, who's also my god-child. I went to pick up Melinda from daycare and who was in there? This young lady. Picking up her 3-year-old. She survived it.

MBR: That's great. That's very inspirational. No, I appreciate you letting me know that, you know.

DH: You don't ask me all of that.

MBR: No, no.

DH: But it's not the right school, but it's—

MBR: It tells—No, but it tells you—No. Fort Johnson's very much a part of this story—

DH: Yes. Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: . . . too.

DH: Right. Because that's where the students—

MBR: Yeah.

DH: And I remember I had—I gave my students a project—My—I guess probably U.S. history. I can't remember the title that I—This was the old days when you had floppy disks.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, the information's on the floppy disk. But they had to, as a part of this history project, they had to interview at least one person who either worked at Fort Johnson, James Island, attended or work there. Fort Johnson, James Island and Gresham Meggett. And then they had to deal with—People who worked there, students. Then they had to talk to their parents—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . and their grandparents, too. And, so, they had to pull all of this together. And I remember somebody did a videotape. Where could I find that? But anyway. But I wanted to meld the schools. And, then, there was something from Gresham Meggett. I think Mr. Veroney did get it. A cornerstone or something that put, I think, in the courtyard. Because I'm thinking, you know, we have the name Fort Johnson. Well, that was moved to the old James Island building. And then, so you had James Island and old James Island. The name was then put on the Fort Johnson. But I'm in the classroom, but I'll say, "Oh, I'm at a different school." And, then, we—They took the mascot, which was the old James Island mascot. But they kept the colors from Fort Johnson. So I wanted to have a piece of James Island because that's how—

MBR: Yeah, yeah.

DH: So, that was their big project. And, so, the kids did a good job of that, too. Kind of, you know, meshed the three together. Because that's the foundation of how Fort Johnson came, was from—

MBR: From there.

DH: From—Yes.

MBR: Well, I guess, in 1969—

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: And I can, you can correct me—

DH: Yes.

MBR: Did—Were there white teachers at W. Gresham Meggett?

DH: I'm trying—I think—

MBR: Did they start introducing—

DH: . . . we did—I think they started—So, I should have been aware. I think we did have a white teacher at Fort, I mean at Gresham Meggett. I know we didn't have any white students. That I know.

MBR: Ah, okay.

DH: It was still a totally black population, student population. And then, some—I remember Margaret Smith, who taught across the hall from me. As a matter of fact, that first year, before I started driving, there was a gas station by the bus stop in South Windemere. So, I would buy peanuts. And we would share the peanuts in between class. Margaret Smith taught psychology, I believe, and maybe some U.S. history. But she was social studies. She ended up marrying another gentleman who taught somewhere—Got her second husband, Mr. Richardson. But Margaret went over to James Island. Yes, I remember—Beforehand, before.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And then the next thing, three of us were thrust into that environment.

MBR: Did you feel like you were thrust? I mean, were you happy to be picked? I mean—

DH: You know, I really didn't think about it. That summer, it was a strange summer. That was the summer I did that. I was—It had to be—I had a summer job. I traveled working between, whatever, if something came up. I went to an agency that handles jobs.

MBR: Sure.

DH: I can't remember—

MBR: Employment agency.

DH: Yes. Employment agency. And this family had lost their governess. And, so, they needed someone for a short while to look after two children, a 7 and an 8-year-old. 7 and 8 or 7 and 9. 7 and 9. And, so, I was hired. That was the hardest job of my life. It was really hard. Number one, I had to stay with the family during week. I know, I was forced to stay in their beach house on Sullivan's Island.

MBR: That was your summer?

DH: Well, that's just the first part. That's the first two weeks. Really bad. It gets worse after that. And I stayed—I mean I had this whole beach house to myself.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

DH: And then I would go in in the morning. And I'm—Oh, I did have to do two really terrible tasks. At night I would have to damp-mop the kitchen, which was really hard. And then I had to put, open a can of cat food and put it in the automatic container. And then it opened early in the morning so the cats could be fed. That was real difficult. The little kids—I mean, they were 7 and 9. I didn't have to do anything for them. They would go down to the beach and play and what have you.

But then, after two weeks, I had to take—That's when the real hard work started. I had to take them to their grandmother. And we were traveling by airplane. I had never flown before. And, so, we went out to the airport. And the plane was based out of Florida, National Airlines. Plane came in. We were seated on the plane. And we sat and we sat. And then this, they called them stewardess at that time, now they're flight attendants. But they came and said, we have to de-plane. And, of course, the kids were so disappointed. I was too, because I wanted to get this part over with. And, so, we got off the plane. We got back with the mother. She took us back to—And the two little kids were just so sad. We went back to Sullivan's Island. And the mother told us what happened. In between Florida and Charleston, the airplane lost its hydraulic fluid. So, if it had taken off it would have had difficulty landing.

MBR: Oh, boy.

DH: So, the next morning, same routine. We came back out, got on the plane. Same plane, National. Another National. And we flew into—Was it Richmond? I know we had to make one stop. But she had someone to meet us and walk us to our changeover. And there were only two ways to get to the grandmother's home. And one is to fly. And the other is ferry. I was praying for the ferry. But when we got off the airplane, a gentleman came up to me and said, "Are you Diane Hamilton?" "Yes, I am."

MBR: Oh, my.

DH: "I'm here to pick you up." "God damn." A four-seater. So, the two kids are in the back, like you're in a car. I'm in front with the pilot. And just a short flight to Fisher's Island. And we get to Fisher's Island and—

MBR: Virginia?

DH: New York. It's really New York. But you have to get there by going to New London, Connecticut.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

DH: So, we had to fly to New London. That's for the change. We went to New London, Connecticut. My first time there. And only time, so far. And we got off the airplane. And the housekeeper was there to pick us up. And so we get up and go. We drive. The island is about 9 miles by 7 miles. And the wealthy, the rich and famous lives there. And we went to the grandmother's house. It was three days before I met the grandmother.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

DH: I saw her one afternoon. We were looking at the dogs in the dog kennel. And she was standing there—Very nice. And we just chatted. That was how I met her. Because she had a housekeeper. And the housekeeper supervised the staff. And, so, it really got hard now. Because, in the mornings, the children—We would have breakfast, the three of us. We would go into the big house. Bigger to where—because I stayed with the children. We stayed. And we would go for our meals. And then Alice, the cook, would prepare our meals. And we would eat, the three of us. And then we would get up from the table, leave everything and then the chauffeur would drive us to the children's club house, country club.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: You know, they had one for the adults and one for—So, I read so many books. I'm trying to figure, where'd I get all those books. Because all I had to do was sit there and keep these little tickets. And the kids would come and just get—"Diane, I need 10 tickets." "There are your tickets." And they would—And then at lunch the chauffeur would come and pick us up.

MBR: And go home.

DH: And we'd go out and have lunch. And then he would bring us back. Then he'd come back and get us. So, it was a real hard job.

MBR: You—Oh, my goodness. That sounds like a fairytale.

DH: It does. It was. And, so, that was it. And then one weekend—We were out there, what, two weekends. The chauffeur had a little too much to drink and he didn't come back when he was supposed. So, he was gone a couple of days. And it was the day—I think it was Thursday, everyone on the island, worker, they had that day off. And, so, they had a place for them to go for their recreation.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And, so, the house didn't demand, but asked me, could I—And they knew I could drive. "Would you mind driving the staff, too." And they had at least three vehicles. One was some foreign-made car. It was too small anyhow. I couldn't drive it. It had stick shift. Then another, I wouldn't be able to drive because of reason. So, the only one I could drive would be the station wagon. So, I drove the—And I drove them to their place, so they could have their entertainment. They thanked me. You know, the—But that they asked me, "Would you mind driving?" I said, "No." And then they asked me to plan a little birthday party for someone. It was fun. But the family is the Manigault family, who owns the Post and Courier.

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MBR: Makes sense.

DH: Yeah, makes sense.

MBR: Makes sense.

DH: Yes. But it was the wife's mother, was Peter's—The wife—They're not married now. They're divorced now. But it was Peter's wife. She was the nicest person to get along with.

MBR: So, this was your summer in between—

DH: That was my summer.

MBR: . . . Meggett and Fort Johnson? Or between Meggett—

DH: I believe so, yes. It had to have been—Yes. Because it was very close in there. Yes. So—

MBR: You really—I mean, I was going to say, How did you prepare yourself for being thrust into, like, what was now— You—

DH: Yes.

MBR: I think I'm looking at someone who's fairly intrepid.

DH: Yeah, but going to Gresham—You know, I just—I made up my mind when—Oh, the reason I brought all that—I knew there was a reason. I brought that up because it was while I was there, when I came home that one weekend, I saw that I had mail. And the mail was a letter from the superintendent's office saying that I must report to the superintendent at such and such a date, such and such a time. And that—And I went to that appointment. That's when I found out Meggett had closed. They did no preparation, nothing. That's how we found out. A letter came saying report to the superintendent. And the superintendent said you have now been reassigned to such and such a school.

MBR: Was there a community outcry? Did people—

DH: No. Far as I remember, nothing. We just accepted.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Now, in 1983, when Fort Johnson merged with James Island, we had a whole year of preparation. First, all the department heads, we had to —And I was department head.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: We had to meet the department heads at the other school. And then they brought the students' leaders over. And then they brought the student bodies. But for a whole year they made preparation—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . for the merging of James Island and Fort Johnson. But they did not do any of that when they opened Fort Johnson they decided—For example, the head of the English department was Jean Bentley, nice lady, from the old James Island. She didn't have a Master's degree. Mrs. James, who was head of the English department at Gresham Meggett, had a Master's degree. Only one white teacher had a Master's degree. And that was Lois Vivan. She came here from New York. All—I mean that wasn't prevalent. You know, everybody have a Master's or more now. But that was not prevalent at that time. But Jean Bentley was made the chairperson of the English

department. Somebody else was made chair of math. But McCray had a Master's in math already.

MBR: Oh.

DH: Yeah.

MBR: Oh.

DH: So, you had that. So, there was no preparation. And, see, I was there to witness both times. No preparation. But the second time, boy, there was tremendous prepar—And then Mr. Hyatt, who was our principal, said that for the next year, instead of deciding who would be department chairs—By this time, he had starting letting—Well, we had Ms. Wiggins, who was my first department chair at Gresham Meggett. She came from the—I mean at Fort Johnson. She came from the old James Island. When she left to become—Well, she retired. Mrs. Horsley, who was new to the school, a couple of years, became a very good friend of mine. We did some traveling together. They made her the chairperson. And, then, when Ms. Horsley decided to leave, Mr. Hyatt said that, instead of him appointing someone, he said for the department to elect someone. So, they elected me. I was the only African American in the department. But, any rate, they elected me chairperson. And that's how I became chairperson. But—So, when we merged with the old James Island, for that first year we had to—If you were chairperson at Fort Johnson, then you were co-chairperson with the other person. So for—

MBR: Yeah. So much better.

DH: But I—

MBR: Yeah.

DH: I remember the lady who was the chair at James Island. I had never seen her before. Because she didn't bother to attend—You know, you have district meetings?

MBR: That's what I wondered.

DH: We had—So, I knew all the chairpersons at Burr and Mildenom [phonetic 00:48:59] and Middleton—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . and Ellen McCline [phonetic 00:49:02], at St. Andrew's [phonetic 00:49:04], white teachers and what not. We knew each other for years. Because we would—We

served on textbook committees. We served on other committees. Never saw the one from James because she didn't bother to show up. But that's another story. And, so, then we shared the job. I said—Well, you know, you receive mail every day. So, you go to your mailbox. And I always have something for social studies every day. I said, "I tell you what. Why don't you pick up the mail twice a week, I mean twice a month. And I'll pick it up." Do you know that during the weeks when she was supposed to pick up mail, there was never any mail? That was interesting.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: For a whole year. And then I found out later that's the way she behaved at the other school. If she saw something, she might share it with people in the department or people she hand-picked and what not for that department. But that was just—was not her style.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: So, I'm used to—And then, when I have a meeting, I would have an agenda printed out.

MBR: Right.

DH: And anything I find out, I'm going to share with my—Because that's who I am, thinking I'm in this position and what not.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: So, then, after a year, the people voted. And they still voted me and that's how I'm chairperson. So, I am made chairperson. So, I served a total of about 17 years.

MBR: At?

DH: Fort Johnson—

MBR: Fort Johnson.

DH: . . . and James Island.

MBR: And James Island.

DH: Between the two, yeah.

MBR: Between the two.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: Well, I think they recognized your abilities. It's clear to me. It's—I hadn't really thought about it. That people coming in with—That had higher degrees and more experience—

DH: Oh, yes.

MBR: That wasn't probably recog—Because there wasn't any—It was just a very quick response to integration.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative]. It had—

MBR: Without preparing—

DH: I'm sure the people—

MBR: Who was really prepared at this point?

DH: I'm sure the people at James Island had something, because they had decided who was going to head the various departments.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, they knew. But we didn't know, as far as I know. I don't know what Mr. Evans knew. That was the principal. But I know—I got a letter over the summer. We got letters over the summer that said, "You have now been reassigned." And they didn't negotiate. Is this a good time for you to come? It's—The letter stated the—And luckily I was in town.

MBR: Right.

DH: Suppose I was on that very difficult job.

MBR: That's what I was thinking.

DH: On Fisher's Island.

MBR: Well, did people lose jobs? Did teachers that were at Meggett

DH: A lot of those—

MBR: . . . lose jobs?

DH: A lot of those teachers were sent to middle schools.

MBR: Okay.

DH: Now, see. Your certification—My certification's in high school.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Secondary education. But most of them, a large number of them, were sent to middle schools. And then—They didn't—I don't remember anybody basically losing a job. But they were not in high school anymore.

MBR: Right.

DH: And, for me, I wouldn't want to teach—I liked the upper level. The ninth—not ninth. Eleventh and twelfth graders, ten and above, is what I preferred. I wouldn't want to go to a middle school or an elementary school. I don't think anyone went to elementary school. But I know a number of them went to middle schools.

MBR: The middle schools.

DH: And then a few went to the old James Island. More went to the old James Island. Because, I said, they only pulled three of us for the Fort Johnson. And two out of the three had Master's. So, that's how they made their choices.

MBR: I think so, too.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: Did you have any difficulty with parents? Or the student body—

DH: Parents were—

MBR: . . . at Fort Johnson? I mean—

DH: Yes, right.

MBR: . . . at least for the first couple of years.

DH: Right, for—You know, parents would come in—For example, I know—I had an assignment—I always had my students to do research, what have you. And there was a book. I don't remember the title of the book. But it was a U.S. history book.

And in the appendix, there were, you know, a long list of references. And there was one person in there who someone took issue with. They thought the person was a communist or something. I can't remember. It was one—And so, they actually—I guess they called the principal. And then they had Mr., Dr. Draper, who was the social studies coordinator from downtown—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Came in and had a conversation with me. Guess what? I didn't move the book off of my desk. So, that was a moot point. And then another occasion, I had a calendar in my room that had the pictures of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. And somebody took with the picture being on my wall. The picture stayed on my wall. I didn't take it off. What have you. And, so, those were my only—And I remember once—He's deceased now. But John Graham Altman, remember— Oh, I'm sorry, you're not from here.

MBR: Right, right. Okay.

DH: You would not have known John Graham. But anyway, he was—But anyway, I had a parent—This little girl was like one of my top students. And I—And you know with some times kids would go home and they'd talk about what they learned in class. And, of course, she was hearing some things in class—I guess she was accustomed to hearing a certain perspective.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And, in my class, she heard—She just went home and chatted and what not. And the parent took issue, but did not come to me directly. Instead, the parent went to John Graham Altman. So, I wrote a letter to John Graham Altman and I sent the parent a copy. But I addressed it to him, because they didn't address me.

MBR: Right.

DH: And I simply went down the line. Nothing happened. And that worked out—Yeah, I'll tell later. I did get to meet him afterwards. But the child stayed in my class. And then—Was it that year or later that year? I used to do a mock trial. And the little girl wanted to work with mock trial. Sure. So, I let her come in with me. And the father actually came to the competition with the family. So, that's how my encounters ended. And, then, they invited me to talk at the school board one night about some of the things that we did in my classroom. And I used to have some students participate on the teleconference. I had two types of teleconferences.

One with C-SPAN, because of the Closeup Foundation. And, so, I would get a grant. And once they would select three schools from across the whole country to be able to call in and ask questions of professionals on that topic. And, so, what I would do—I had it set up so whatever my topic—I would select a topic that I didn't know very much about. So, I would end up doing research. I'd learn something. And, so, I would assign it to my students. So, they would do their little research and what not. So, they could formulate their own questions. I'm not going to tell them what to ask. So, my students were well aware of the topics. Except the very first one, because it came so quickly. But we survived it. And, so, we did that. And, then, the day of the event—Oh, first of all, the first time we were allowed to do this, we needed cable in school. And we didn't have cable in our school. So, I went to the principal and I said, "Mr. Hyatt, we need cable TV in the school." So, he told the librarian—Someone told me that when Comcast—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: I think they were a store cable then. They made some kind of a deal or something about making, having public access, whatever. So, I mentioned this to Mr. Hyatt. And he told the librarian to contact—Bottom line is we got the cable. And actually, the cable was completed like morning—

MBR: Of the event.

DH: That was cutting it close. Because you had this equipment that you had to connect to it so the students could call in. And there was no visual, but their voices were heard, you know, as they asked their questions.

MBR: They must have loved that.

DH: Yes. We did this for about eight, nine years? Something like that. I did that after—We used to take students to DC. I wasn't having that many students going. So, this was another way. And I would, I think the first one we had about 70 kids to—participate. Because I encouraged mine to participate, meaning they had to. That's because they had to do the research. And, so, they really wanted to. And then I would set up duties. I had some to be greeters that afternoon. And then we would invite someone from the Citadel or the College of Charleston or Baptist College to come and serve as our in-house expert. And, so, they would have registration. And then, for an hour, my students could ask a local expert about the question. And then from 5 until 6—And then from 5 until 6, they would call into the national studio in DC and C-SPAN. And then they would ask their questions.

I talk about Brian Lamb. I just wanted to see if it's still on TV this week. And, so, it was just a wonderful experience, you know, for children. And, so, I talked about that

teleconference. And, then, I had another where I took a student through SCETV in Columbia. And that worked out. So, but again, John Graham Altman, of course, was there. And he asked me some questions himself. It was really nice.

MBR: That's great.

DH: He was very polite. But he was definitely a difficult person to, you know—You didn't want to get on his wrong side. I'm sorry. I'm going to explain this, yes. Because we had a situation where two, three—All three of them are Caucasians. But these two teachers decided they would send something that this third teacher did to John Graham Altman. And that lady was—And she really didn't deserve it. She was being kind to a student. And she was put on suspension without pay for three or four days. She couldn't afford that. She couldn't afford that out of her salary. She was a single mother of five children. Her husband had left her. She couldn't afford that. But those other two teachers—they sent it to John Graham Altman. And they exploited that. And that was awful.

MBR: Yeah. Well, I'm taken aback at your, the breadth of what you've lived through.

DH: Oh.

MBR: Okay?

DH: Yeah.

MBR: And, like, when you look back—

DH: Yeah.

MBR: . . . at the teacher experience at Meggett.

DH: Yes.

MBR: And you compare it to—Can you compare it to the Fort Johnson? Were there really any difference between the two schools in terms of your student body? And the kids and their need to learn?

DH: Now the students, no—Some—I remember this one boy in particular. He was never rude or disrespectful to me. He failed my class. That's all right, too. He sat on the front row in the center, I remember. But he just couldn't fathom the idea of having a black teacher. So, he just couldn't, wouldn't do the work, couldn't do the—He just couldn't get through that. So, you had that. But, again, at Fort Johnson, I never had a student who called me a bad name, or yell, or scream, or anything like—I did not have

that. Even from the beginning, I know there were some who would have preferred to be elsewhere. They would not sign up. And since my class was elective, too, most of the time they didn't have to take my class.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Now, if I'd taught a history, a regular U.S. history, well that's not an elective. But mostly I taught world history, which was—But I would have a full section. I didn't have—You know, I had 20, 25 students. A nice-sized class. And when I taught my AP, my AP classes were usually small. But that's just the nature of the game there.

MBR: Right.

DH: My largest was 21. I was talking about that class recently, too, because some of those students have gone on—One of them, Damon Wilson—He was such a—He was a student that the students liked him and the teachers. You know, usually it's one or the other. And he went with me on one of the trips to DC. He was one of my students that went with me to DC that year. He graduated from our school, went to Duke. And I think his first year he wrote an independent program which took him to Poland for nine weeks or —be was a brilliant—program.

MBR: Yes.

DH: Yes. And then later he—Well, his last—Well, I can't say the last of it—I just talked to his mother and she told me what he's doing now. But when Condoleezza Rice was National—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . Security person for the Bush administration, it was his task to advise her on—He's the—Yes. And his mother is the president of Trident Tech[nical College] And I never met her. When I was taking him on the trip, I called her on the telephone just—You know, I was making contact with the parents. And I explained and she wrote a full check for him to go with me.

MBR: Wow.

DH: Yes. And then I had a young lady, Katie. Katie was something. Katie would have a watch on this hand and she would have a watch on this hand. And neither one worked. I said, "Katie, why do you have a watch on?" "I just liked it." But she was the nicest—No problem. She went on. She studied something else in college. And she started going to, like, international relations in Georgetown or something like

that. She worked at one of the embassies in, I think, Guyana. And then she ended up working for six months with Madeleine Albright.

MBR: These students are great.

DH: Yes. And her brother, who's a lawyer. But her dad is a federal judge. He's Michael Duffy. His—I taught two of his three children.

MBR: That must make you feel really good.

DH: Yes, yes. And, like I said—And I've had parents—When you're talking about getting along with the parents. I've had parents who I made an assignment and they'd come and want a conference. I said, "Okay." So, I'd go into the conference. And Mr. Hyatt is sitting there and Mr. Fleming, the assistant principal, is there. I don't let—They don't care. And it's my conference. So, we talk and they just listen. And usually when the parent leaves, the parent—Like, one parent, "Ms. Hamilton, is there anything I can do for you?" I said, "Yes. There's one thing." Because we used to collect \$2 social studies fee. And with my teacher discount, I would always buy books. That's about old, old days. And because the students would always have to read, you know, do book reports. And then, at the end of—For example, we did Hiroshima. Now we say Hi-RO-shim-a. We called it Hiro-SHI-ma in the old days.

MBR: Me, too.

DH: And there was a—Think of another title I used. But anyway, related to World War II: And, so, that's—Hiroshima. And there was another one about the children. There was case studies of teenagers and what they did during the Second World War. And their resistance activities. Excellent little book. But I used to—I said, "Well, you can get me some more money to buy whatever." So, that's how it worked out. And, then, I will give you one other story. There was a woman who came one morning. If looks could kill, you would not be having this long interview. She was so angry, angry, angry. And she sat across from me. She was not—I was—I had a little manila folder. I said, "Good morning." She was angry. She said I was failing her daughter. "My daughter brought all these papers home and you are failing her." This was a progress report time.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: I listened to her. I said, "Okay, Mrs. Whatever. I don't know what papers your daughter showed you." And I opened the folder. "But these are your daughter's papers." Because I used to keep them.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And so, this is her grades, this is what she has made. And then the daughter came into the room acting wild in the office. Because we were in the principal's office. And she said to her daughter, "You've got a wonderful history teacher." The daughter just kind of looked at her. She didn't say anything. So, the daughter said, "I don't think you should—" The mother said to the daughter, "I don't think you need to go somewhere." They were planning a trip that weekend. The daughter just looked at the mother and kind felt betrayed, I think. "I'm going." It turned out that the girl and the father were very close. The mother probably did not have a college education. Which shouldn't have been a factor. She was the mother. But I guess they kind of held her hostage, whatnot. She was going to do whatever she wanted to do. She was in charge. And you know what that mother said to me, "She's my daughter. I have to believe her." "No, you don't." But I didn't tell her that. But, you know, she was angry.

But when—So, I always kept the information. If I have something to show. That happened to me once at the School of the Arts. These, in government, there would be a large binder they have to put the information in. And I had these two little darlings. They decided they would do their own binder—She didn't have to read all that stuff. So, they put it all together. They don't know I turn every single page and every single one. They used the same information. They changed the font. The same identical words. And, so, I gave them an F, both of them. And the project counted a large percent of the grade. So, it caused the boy to fail totally and the girl's grade to drop from a B to C.

So, the parents came in. Especially, the School of the Arts, you know, you're supposed to be selective. You're supposed to cater to these little darlings. Okay. And then they said we're supposed to meet between the parents. Well, they showed up. The parents came. They brought the two children, which I don't have an objection to in reality. But I wasn't told this in advance. And then they had the two principals. That's okay. Two assistant principals. That's okay. So, I let them talk. So, then I questioned little boy. "Oh, we worked together. We didn't—" I said, "Okay, now, just tell me, you know, which part of this did you do?" "Well, I can't—" He couldn't identify one thing he did on his own. Not one. And the mother, "They tied up my phone. I couldn't get to my—Because they were on there doing all this work." So—I said, "Look at page five here." And I just went through.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, then the parents—I said, "I'll tell you what." And, I must have given them a zero, I guess. I said, "I'll tell you what. Since you said they did some of the work and what have you, I'll raise is up to maybe a 50." You know, still an F.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: "How about that?" So, it ended up with the girl's grade just dropping to one letter and the boy, he actually failed. So, when it ended, they said, "Does Ms. Hamilton have the last say so on this?"

MBR: Yes.

DH: So, the next day I was expecting to be called into the principal's office, Mrs. Meyers. I just knew I was going to be called in. So, I waited all day with a smile on my face. I didn't get a call. So, I walked in the building that afternoon and I saw the two principals. And one of them was real tall, must be 6'—He towered over me. I think I'm tall, but he was 6' something. They walk over and he hugged me. I said, "Aren't I going to be called in?" They said, "Be called in for what?" I said, "The way the conference last night, the parents know—Is Ms. Hamilton—" They look at me. "That's all—That was first semester. Government. So, they had to come right back to me next semester for econ. Both of these courses are required for education. They didn't cause any problems. Well, they didn't cause any problems before, they just cheated.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: They came back. I didn't have an issue with them at all. I used to have them doing—I thought, even though, you know, you're super-smart, you still need to know things like how to fill out a tax return.

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MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, I had them to go through that. And the girl came back and said, "Ms. Hamilton, I got my \$300 refund." She did her own taxes.

MBR: That's fantastic.

DH: Came back and told me. The boy, after he graduated, came back and visited me once. So—

MBR: That must have been—On that, I know this—I have, probably, a couple more questions—

DH: Yes, yeah.

MBR: . . . this is a good—In terms of materials like books, desks, the things that make up a school. How different—Like, people we've interviewed that have gone to Meggett—

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: They got leftover books, second hand books.

DH: You know, I heard—

MBR: Or was that earlier on?

DH: . . . someone talk about—Yes.

MBR: Yes.

DH: They would get. But while I went through the same thing at Wallace. You know, we used to get the second-hand books, too, and all. But I guess—I never personally let that—I didn't know anything definitely about having new books. So, it did—And then our teachers, they taught us more than was just in the book. So, they broadened things.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And, with my own experience at Gresham Meggett, I remember thinking there's—Before I knew all those other things. Mr. Evans, I remember—I still have that book. And that's been over 50 years now. He brought me a U.S., no, a world history book. It was a really good book. He said, "Ms. Hamilton look at—" But again, I was only there three years. So, I wasn't there—I'm trying to think. I was there—They had a book selection. You see another reason I would serve on textbook collections is, see, then you get all the books—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . from the publishers. Because they have to give you a set, in order to—So, I would use, pull information for my students. So, for me that wasn't a big issue. Maybe it should have been. But I was always one to use additional materials to supplement the textbook. Plus, at that time, I had some of my college books which were, had information that—So, I could supplement from my college textbooks. And, then, I knew where the library was. I would go to the library and I would do research. And that's why I started—I really didn't start out to get a Master's. I just decided, you know, I want to know more about this topic. So, I went to the Citadel to learn more about a particular topic. And then, after a while, I looked at my record and it said I only needed three more classes for a Master's. I said, "Oh, I guess I'll get a Master's." But I didn't set out to get one.

MBR: Right.

DH: I just wanted to fill in where I was weak.

MBR: Good. Well, was there a difference when you went to Fort Johnson? I mean were there new books there? Where there—

DH: Oh, yeah. There were new books there. I was on text—any book if I wanted. For example, when I started teaching the AP, we used to use, I remember well, Palmer Colton. That was the textbook. But then I came across—And then I started working with a professor at Clemson. After teaching AP for eight years, the state of South Carolina decided that every AP teacher had to take a two-week course. Even though you had taught eight years.

MBR: Yeah.

DH: I remember Mildred Almon [phonetic] at Middleton. She was like the dean of teaching AP. She could teach—She could teach a room full of PhD's. And she only had a Master's, I mean a BA. I don't know why she just didn't want to do it. It wasn't that she couldn't do it.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: She just didn't bother to get anything above her BA. But she knew much more than that.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And if she got into a room—And I've seen her with a room full of PhD's. She's the teacher and they're the students. That's just her personality.

MBR: Right.

DH: You know, she was just a lovely woman. But, anyway, so, we took—So, with my associate with Dr. Pars [phonetic 01:14:16], I took a course from him. I had to take my two-week course. And then, the next year, the year after, I got a call from Clemson. And I thought, "Okay, why is someone calling me from Clemson?" It was Dr. Pars and he said he wanted me to be his—Each section you have the professor and then you have a high school teacher who teaches the same subject. And that's supposed to be the master teacher.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Because you kind of relate with the teachers maybe, better than the professor to them. Whatever. The practical side. And he wanted me to be his master teacher. So,

I thought, "Oh, you are mistaken. You mean Mildred Almon. You don't mean me." But he meant me. And, so, by being, working with him, he always selected excellent textbooks. And when I came back to school, I just tell my principal I would like—

MBR: You knew.

DH: And I was department chair. I had to order it. And sometimes—I remember once at Clemson—At, well through—Yeah, Clemson, I'm in the bookstore. They don't think of getting good books out of Clemson. But I have gotten some really good history books. And they had—They were going to use a new edition of a book. So, they had all these, just one year old books. And they had them for 40 cents? No, not 40 cents. I know, some ridiculous—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Maybe a dollar, is what—Maybe a dollar. So, I just bought all they had, about 40 of them. And then, see, I built, you know, my collection.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: So, my AP students, the day they walk in, they don't get one textbook. They get issued at least five or six. And then as we go, depending on the topic we pull from. And that way they get to see different point of view, which is very important in AP European history. And they begin to help their thinking and evaluate their thoughts and what have you. And dealing with different resources. So, I've always had—The way I've—Even with Mr. Evans, just in that early stage—I was still learning then. But, you know, I had resources. So . . .

MBR: I think that's great.

DH: Yeah.

MBR: No.

DH: Yes.

MBR: I just thought I'd ask books, because—

DH: Yes.

MBR: it would come up.

DH: Right.

MBR: I guess—

DH: It depends on the teacher, too, and how much—

MBR: It does.

DH: . . . you love to—

MBR: And how much you—

DH: And as a—

MBR: . . . put your, get your papers—books.

DH: Right. And when I went to the School of the Arts and—I wasn't supposed to be teaching AP. I was only supposed to be teaching that global studies for one year. Well, the next year—No, that first year—After the first semester, we came home for Christmas break. And Ms. Elias [phonetic 01:16:55] called me during Christmas break and said, "Ms. Hamilton, we need you to teach AP for the rest of the year." I said, "You already have a—" But she—Her husband, was being relocated. And, so, she was leaving. But then I had to give up one of my classes in order to pick up the AP. And I really didn't like having to give up the one class. That one class was a class that had a great number of African American students in it. And then I picked up a class that didn't have any. But that's all right, too.

MBR: That's just—

DH: They were a good—

MBR: That's just the way—well they were students.

DH: Yeah, yes.

MBR: Yes.

DH: And, so, I had to pick up that class. And then I end up teaching the AP. And they were using a regular high school textbook. No, no, no. You don't teach AP using a high school textbook. You use the AP—You use a college level book. You want them to become accustomed to the language of the text. You want them to become accustomed to the questions. How they are phrased.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And how they are organized. You can't do that with a high school textbook. So, I took, told Mrs. Myers I'd like to order this particular book. So, she ordered it.

MBR: She did?

DH: So, I haven't had any problem getting—I just ask—

MBR: I'm going to ask, I think, one—

DH: Yes.

MBR: . . . a couple more questions.

DH: Yes.

MBR: And that's it.

DH: I'm sorry.

MBR: No, no, you're doing great. The children at Meggett.

DH: Yes.

MBR: Did they speak in a dialect during classes at all? I mean, how would you do that?

DH: That would—That's hard to ask me. Because, see, that's the ground I came out of.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: When I was at home—My parents were not college educated or high school educated. My dad was a minister but he was—He had more classes than my mom did, but he was self-taught, you know.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: He taught himself and what have you. And I remember in, when I was going to college, I would be at home. And, of course, I'm going to hear the broken English and what have you. And then, when I got to college, I had to shift. So, you just automatically shift, depending on where you are. So, the dialect didn't bother me. It didn't even come up at Gresham Meggett. And we had some—I remember I had an eighth-grade class. Those students were super. They were like a sponge. That's the only time I covered every single chapter in a textbook. We took the U.S. history—and

I don't like skipping, you know. Even though I may not like a topic. I just turned it into a project—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . to make it interesting for me, as well as for the students, and what have you. Because, but I think they need all the information. But I started at chapter one and we went straight through the whole textbook. There was a set of twin girls in that class, the Davis girls. If one made a 93 on a test, the other would make a 91. The next test, the one who might have made the 91 will make the 94. And that's how I lived. I couldn't wait for them to get to my world history class. Because I just knew—That was my favorite subject. I just knew—And that's when they switched and we ended up at Fort Johnson. And, then, those girls weren't a part of—Most of them were sent to the old James Island.

MBR: Oh.

DH: But that class was a superb. All African American boys and girls. But they were like, they just everything—They were super. They were super. But as far as dialect, that didn't bother me. Because maybe that's—See, that's my background. I'm used to that.

MBR: So, in the classroom, it would just be—

DH: Yes. I mean, I heard what they were saying. And we could communicate.

MBR: And keep moving.

DH: Yeah.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: That was not an issue for me. That was—Now, when I retired the third or the fourth time, third time, I ended up working at Baptist Hill. Now that was experience for me. Because I encountered students who were reading on a third-grade level and they were in tenth grade.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: I had three classes and two of them were in that situation. The third class was an advanced class, 15. They were like this. They were that sponge. Whatever you gave them, they just absorbed it, absorbed it and asked for more. That was a

tremendous—But those first two classes, I—It was an adjustment. Because I had never been accustomed to teaching kids who couldn't read.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: I, I—

MBR: I like hearing about the sponge.

DH: Yes, yes.

MBR: Yes.

DH: They just absorbed—No, no, that was not an issue at James Island. I mean at Fort—Gresham Meggett.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: At Gresham Meggett. And they—We didn't have discipline problems like—Well, I didn't have discipline problems at Fort Johnson either. But one day I came, one morning—I didn't have to necessary be in school at 8 a.m. or whatever that first bell. Because I didn't have a homeroom. Department chairs didn't have homerooms. So, I'd kind of sometimes come up. I pulled into the schoolyard one morning and I saw a firetruck outside the building. But, you know, that was not uncommon. Because sometimes, you know, they'd come just to be around.

MBR: Do drills.

DH: I parked my car. I walk into the building. I thought I smelled something. And I walked up, you know, signed in. Walked on down the hall. Kind of in front of my classroom there was one of the assistant principals and a teacher from my department. My room had burned. During the weekend, a student or some students took, like, a wheel of kind and put some kind of flammable material on it. And they threw it through the window. I had just collected about 40 posters, schoolwide posters, because the—It was African American History/Black History Month. And the kids all over the school, black and white, they had, you know, turned in posters—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . as part of the activity. I had not yet evaluated those posters. They were just there, about 40 or more, what have you. Guess what? Not one poster was damaged. It was still sitting there. The light fixture like this was hanging from the ceiling—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . the heat was so intense. I had a bookcase by the window and that's where I had all of my extra AP—I tried to collect them over the years.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: AP books. And what else? Oh, my clock. You couldn't read—You couldn't tell time, but the clock was still working. You could hear it ticking and what not. And they kept saying, "Ms. Hamilton, you know this wasn't meant for you, right?" I said, "Hm-hmmm [affirmative], sure." And I had two, a boy and girl, I knew were a little bit disturbed by me earlier, I would not have put it past those two. But it turned out not to be them. What happened is that some boys, Caucasian boys, they were—We had an assistant principal who was equally despised by both black and white students. He was something. He was standing outside my—He was hugging me. "You know it's not meant for you, right?" "Sure." But we found out the boy—His office was next to my classroom. What they weren't thinking—They were going by the windows. They didn't realize that the office was actually a classroom that had been subdivided. And there were two assistant principals in there. This particular principal had a window. They thought they were hitting the principal's office.

So, it really wasn't meant for me. So, for the rest of the school year, I had to float a— And then they put me in a trailer, I think. Then they spent all that money, thousands of dollars, to redo my classroom. They replaced all my books. They gave me money to buy more books. They total redid the whole classroom. And, then, the next year, they tore it all down and put a hallway through it. Use of public money. But because they had the insurance, they had to use the insurance money. So, that's, you know— So, I—And the students did—It really wasn't me, it was this assistant principal that they—And they—And that—And then I came up to the school that summer to pick up something. And I walked into the office and the secretary, who actually was in that first class with me, when we integrate when we opened Fort Johnson. She was one of my psychology students, little devil, Lynn. She is now the school secretary. Lynn said, "Ms. Hamilton, you see that young man at the counter over there?" She said, "That's the one who burnt your classroom." They thought they were getting the principal, Dr. Sheley [phonetic 01:26:25] They thought they were getting Dr. Sheley's office.

MBR: Well, it was an awful thing to happen. I'm glad the outcome—

DH: Yeah, yes, yes. But, I mean—And what's good, too—

MBR: Yes.

DH: . . . the fire occurred during the weekend—

MBR: Right.

DH: . . . probably Sunday. But what's even better, the fire department didn't know about it. No one knew about it. The fire put itself out.

MBR: Wow.

DH: And what happened when Randy, who taught a couple of doors down me—He was an early person. When he came in the building he smelled whatever. And then he came by my room, because he would have to pass my room to get to his. He discovered the activity.

MBR: Oh, my gosh. What? That's some story. Well, I—Is there, is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have? I guess that's the thing.

DH: Right.

MBR: Is there something you want to—

DH: No.

MBR: . . . end with?

DH: You know, with the students, I made up my mind when I realized I was going to be assigned to this new school and I'm going to have these new—I simply said to myself, "I will be in charge." That, really that's what I said. And, of course, I made assignments—I used to make my assignments weekly. But I got, you know, the weeks came by so fast. So, what I'd do, I'd make out a monthly calendar. And the beginning of each month, a student gets—And then I don't like accepting excuses. "Oh, I was absent when you made that assignment." "You have your calendar. This could help you, so that if you are absent, you won't have to fall behind your student, you know, classmates. You know exactly what we're going to cover. You know what, when the tests are going to be. If you have a major project, you know when it's going to be."

MBR: No. It sounds like you had a great teaching career.

DH: Yes, I did. And I had one last story. I had Douglas. I thought I was going to have to kill Douglas, though. I didn't think we were going to last. Douglas came to my class in ninth grade and I thought—But anyway, we survived. His father was a police officer, too. Douglas ended up in my class again the next year, another subject. And Douglas is never absent. He's present every day. But this one day, Douglas was absent. And he—It was the day a major project was due. You know, I made adjustments for something, might have been not a major project. And Mr. Hyatt had made it a school

rule that—Because my rule was “If you’re absent, then it’s your job to still get that project to me.” You could mail it. Just make sure it’s postmarked the day it’s due.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Have a parent to bring it, a grandparent, a reliable neighbor, a reliable friend. Okay. And, you know what, students got their work in on time. They didn’t give me excuses. Mr. Hyatt made a school-wide policy that if a student is absent the teacher must accept their work the next day. So, I said, “Okay.” I’m going along with it. Well, Douglas was absent, which was unusual for him. School day has ended. I’m still in the building at my desk. Douglas walks in with his project. I said, “Douglas, you realize you could have brought this the next day. Mr. Hyatt says you have a right.” Douglas looked me in the eye and said, “Ms. Hamilton, that’s not your rule.” See, he knew from the year before. He brought his—Then he ended up taking a third class because I ended up teaching an advanced law class because I had these kids who wanted to do mock trial. And it was just too much to get them already without, you know, after school.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: I said, I told them, I said, “Okay, if you all want a class, Mr. Hyatt says you have to have 15 students.” And they didn’t have quite 15 of them. They said, “Okay.” So, they went out and found other people to sign up for the class, so we could have the class. Douglas signed, because he liked one of the girls in there. They actually got married. He and Mary got married, that’s right.

MBR: Douglas had a success story.

DH: He has a success story, yes. But I thought—But he was going through some things with—I think he lost his mom or something. But he was going through—But I just thought, “Douglas, I’m going to—” And, so—I said no more stories, but there was one little boy. He was difficult. And, so, I called him in for a parent conference with the mother. The mother came. And we sat down for a conference. And he started being rude to his mother.

MBR: Oh.

DH: So, I simply stopped the conference. “You will not be disrespectful in my room.” Then we went on and had the conference. Well, we ended up surviving that year. The year after he left my classroom, if he was in the cafeteria, this end of the hall, and he saw me at the other end of the hall, I would hear, “Hey, Ms. Hamilton.” That went on for a whole year. But I’ve never had any disrespect out of him. But I was not going to let—The mother’s going to accept it, that’s fine. But I will not accept it. Not in my

room. So, I mean, that's how we just set the rule. When the bell rings, we start class. When the bell rings again, we stop. We don't stop in between. Because that's when they get into trouble.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: When there's nothing for them to do. No, no, no. We stay on task the whole time. I don't know any other way to do it.

MBR: Well, I guess with having you in charge—

DH: That's it, that's it.

MBR: Wow. Again, I mean, just your career going to an historically African American college.

DH: Yes.

MBR: And one that was, had rigorous—

DH: Yes.

MBR: . . . teachers—

DH: Yes.

MBR: . . . and programs.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: To come to Meggett.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: Three years. And during a time of turmoil.

DH: That's true.

MBR: I mean, I know—

DH: Yeah, they had—

MBR: not every day.

DH: . . . more at the old James Island—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . than at the Fort Johnson campus. We didn't have that many on the—We had—It was at the old James Island where there were some, you know, racial, more racial tension and what not. We didn't have that on the Fort Johnson campus.

MBR: Hm. Which is interesting.

DH: Then—Yes. And, then, as I said, the faculty after a while—You know, the ones who weren't speaking, they start speaking. We end up going to each other's homes or—I would go to their homes. They invite us. We have, you know, social events and, you know, they start—Yeah. And after a while it just—And then there were some who treated us with respect from day one. There weren't that many who were—You know, some, I guess, they just kept inside. Just one or two really showed it, but they never said anything vulgar to our faces.

MBR: Good, good. Again, thank you very, very much. You've been—

DH: Oh, boy. And, of course, you know, we didn't, the teachers, we didn't wear any pants at Gresham Meggett. You wore—

MBR: Was there a—

DH: . . . a suit. That was just professional attire. At Gresham—When we moved to Fort Johnson, it was the same thing, too. And I remember, within the first five years, we had a young art teacher that come on board. And she decided to wear a pair of pants. "How dare you." And I remember Mrs. Jansen, the lady with the Master's, I told you—

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: . . . would walk past my door—And she would go—But, anyway, the art teacher, she really challenged the system. Wasn't much Mr. Hyatt could really do. And then they said, "Okay. You can only wear, like, a pants suit."

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: And that's when others—And the same lady, Ms. Jansen, she evolved over the years.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: She started wearing her pants, too, and what not. But it was the art teacher with it—And Jack Leron [phonetic 01:35:17] was principal for five years. So, it happened within the first five years. So, it was about the maybe third or fourth year when this art teacher came in and she had on, wore her pants, and what not. But, yes, everyone— But, you know, I wore high-heeled shoes with stockings every day. And no problem. I still do.

MBR: I was going to say.

DH: When I get—I have a business. I still do the business attire, yes.

MBR: No, no.

DH: I don't do the high-heeled shoes every day now.

MBR: Yes, that's a little rougher, as I have loafers on. No, no. Well, I can't thank you enough.

DH: Oh, I was hoping—I was telling Mrs. James, I said, "I don't have enough." You know, she was there longer and she knows—

MBR: Oh no, no, no. We thank you very much.

DH: Okay.

MBR: You were there at pivotal times periods.

DH: That's true, yeah. With the changeover. Definitely with the changeover, yeah.

MBR: And really giving us a sense of what was there.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: I'm going to ask you, just, really quick. You're father's full name?

DH: Oh, Benjamin Ezekiel Hamilton.

MBR: Okay. And where was he born?

DH: He was born, also, in West Ashley. My mom was born in Mount Pleasant.

MBR: And her first name?

DH: Her name was Queen Elizabeth. They called her Queen Elizabeth. Sometimes you may see Liz, Elizabeth Hamilton. But her name was Queen Elizabeth—

MBR: And her maiden name?

DH: . . . Hamilton. Her maiden name was Smalls.

MBR: Smalls.

DH: She was one of maybe 15 kids or something. Her dad was married twice. Had five children by the first wife. She was one of—Mom might have been the youngest of the five. And then he married a second woman and I think he had 12 by her, or 10? I don't know.

MBR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

DH: Some large—But her, all of them are deceased. All the siblings are gone, yeah. And they have children, but I really don't know them, the Mount Pleasant side. I don't know them.

MBR: That's neat.

DH: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

MBR: Now, I'm trying to think. I think that is about it.

DH: That's about it, okay.

Vivian Ingram

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on September 17, 2019 at the residence of interviewee, Vivian Ingram in Charleston, South Carolina by interviewer David Richardson.

David Richardson: Today is September 17th.

Vivian Ingram: 17th, yeah.

DR: And I am at the home of Mrs. Vivian Ingram. My name is David Richardson, and we're about to begin an interview. Say, can you tell me your full name?

VI: Vivian Gwendolyn Chisolm Ingram.

DR: And would you spell that for me, please?

VI: What, Ingram?

DR: The entire name.

VI: Okay. V-I-V-I-A-N, G-W-E-N-D-O-L-Y-N, C-H-I-S-O-L-M, I-N-G-R-A-M.

DR: Can you also share with us your date of birth and place?

VI: Sure. 3-20-36.

DR: 3-20. And where were you born?

VI: In—right here in James Island. Well, my mom said Roper Hospital. That's what she said, anyway.

DR: And we're at what address right now?

VI: Oh, I don't know what the address was at that time.

DR: No. No, your, your current address.

VI: Oh, 1474 Fortune Lane.

DR: And your parents lived within this area?

VI: Yes, on Fortune Lane.

DR: Okay. Where did you spend your childhood?

VI: Right here in Charleston. On James Island, really.

DR: Tell me about your family, your father's name.

VI: Fred Douglas Chisolm.

DR: And where was he born?

VI: I assume he was born here. James Island.

DR: Okay. And, and, of course, to the best of your knowledge, what kind of occupation did he have?

VI: He worked for the shipyard.

DR: Okay. And that's the Charleston Naval Shipyard?

VI: Charleston Naval Shipyard.

DR: And your mother, what's, what's her full name?

VI: Lillie Mae Chavous Chisolm.

DR: And she was born also—

VI: Jacksonville, Florida.

DR: Okay. And what was her occupation?

VI: Well, she was a, a home—

DR: Housewife?

VI: Housewife. Is that it now?

DR: Okay. Do you have siblings?

VI: Yes.

DR: How many siblings do you have?

VI: Well, there were seven of us, but we now have six.

DR: And can you name them, please?

VI: Sure. Lucile Chisolm, Fred Chisolm, Leon Chisolm, Arnold Chisolm, and Audrey Chisolm Magee. Arthur Lee died in a—

DR: Yeah. Yeah. Did your family put much emphasis on education?

VI: Yes.

DR: They were involved in your education directly?

VI: Yes, they were. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: And what kind of school preparation did your parents have?

VI: Mom went—finished high school in New York, and Dad, I think he went to the fifth grade.

DR: Okay. So you, you said—where did your siblings go to school?

VI: On James Island.

DR: And do you remember any of those names of the schools or where they were located?

VI: Well, went to—what is it? It's—what's the school? St. James. St. James Parochial School.

DR: Did you also attend that school?

VI: No. I went to Society Corner School, and Fred went to Society Corner. Leon went to Society Corner. Arthur, he went to Society Corner. Audrey and Arnold went to—right here.

DR: Gresham. Gresham Meggett.

VI: Gresham Meggett. Yeah, because they were the last of the Mohicans.

DR: Where was Society Corner located?

VI: On Secessionville Road.

DR: Okay. Was there a principal there?

VI: Yes. My principal at the time was Mrs. Baxter.

DR: Nan Baxter.

VI: Yes.

DR: Okay. How—about how many students, do you think? If you can recall, the size of the school at the time?

VI: The school was small. I, I don't remember.

DR: How many classes were there? Do you know?

VI: Well, we had—there were different classes in different area. Like we had a building on Fort Johnson, and it was one big building in the middle of the property, and then a small—so I really don't know how many classes there were. I think—

DR: Do you remember some of the teachers' name, then?

VI: Let's see. Oh, God. You're taking me all the way back. Ms. Middleton, who—Ethel Middleton, who married Joe—and she married a Moore. Joe and Ethel Moore because she was Joe—Ethel Middleton, and she married Professor Moore at Burke School, and...

DR: Was Ms. Blunt also? Do you remember that name?

VI: I remember the name, but not when I was there. I think she teach my [indiscernible 00:05:16]. Blunt?

DR: She taught me.

VI: She taught you?

DR: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

VI: But she wasn't there. Not at—

DR: Now, you made reference to a school on Fort Johnson.

VI: The building right near [indiscernible 00:05:30] Park. There was a building there.

DR: You talking about Cherry Beam [phonetic 00:05:33] Hall?

VI: Cherry Beam Hall. That's right. Yeah.

DR: Okay. What do you remember about Cherry Beam Hall?

VI: Well, there were classes there.

DR: Yes, there were.

VI: They had classes there.

DR: Do you know who the teacher was? Remember?

VI: Well, when I was there, I think it was Saunders, but I can't think of her first name. But she was. I couldn't think of her first name, but she was a teacher of mine.

DR: So you attended elementary school at Society Corner?

VI: Yes.

DR: After you left St. James?

VI: I went to St. James maybe one year, and then I went to Society Corner because I really didn't like it.

DR: You left Society Corner because you were not satisfied with it?

VI: No, no, no. Society Corner, I graduated from there.

DR: So which one that you did not like?

VI: We went—I went to St. James, and I left there I think after a year if I can remember correctly, and I went to Society Corner. I stayed at Society Corner until I went to Burke School.

DR: And what year did you graduate from Burke School, please?

VI: 1954.

DR: The school at Society Corner, was that an integrated school? Segregated?

VI: Segregated. It wasn't integrated, no. It was segregated. All blacks when I went to school. That's why we had to go from James Island to the city because they didn't have a black high school on James Island for us, for the blacks.

DR: Did your parents have a choice as to where they sent you to school?

VI: Well, they did, but I went to Burke. I wanted to go to Burke.

DR: What was interesting about Burke that you—

VI: Just, just—I really can't remember now. I guess I heard about it or visited the school, and that's where we—that's where the majority of us went.

DR: How did you travel?

VI: By bus. We had a bus that picked us up.

DR: Okay. How long did this, probably, took, took you all to get there? The distance of travel?

VI: I can't recall. I don't know if it was an hour. I know [indiscernible 00:07:51] Conrad drove the bus, Howard Conrad?

DR: Yes. Okay.

VI: We had different areas. Oscar Lafayette was on Sol Legare, and what's his name? Seymour from [indiscernible 00:08:08] drove a bus, also. Willie Seymour.

DR: Willie? Okay. Now, how many—there were more than one buses that picked you all up to take you to Burke?

VI: Yeah. Different areas. Yeah.

DR: Okay. First time I heard of that. Okay.

VI: Yeah. Different areas because sometimes we would go down to Island and pick those people up near First Baptist Church and that area.

DR: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. So there were approximately three different bus drivers?

VI: About three buses. Yeah. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Were there yellow school buses or just—do you remember?

VI: Oh, heavens, [indiscernible 00:08:36]. I don't remember. Really, I don't recall. But I know the buses would pick us up right here at Fortune Lane. Me and my sister got on the bus right there.

DR: And which one of your sisters was that?

VI: Lucile.

DR: Lucile?

VI: Audrey's the baby, so it wouldn't be her.

DR: So, when you went to Burke, how many classes were there in one room?

VI: One. One class.

DR: Was that the same pattern when you were at Society Corner?

VI: Yeah. Yeah, but—well, in my area, there was a big building, and you would have it partitioned off. It was partitioned off. And you'd have a class here and a class there, and then there was a smaller building on the grounds there. They had classes there. So I don't know just—

DR: Are you—go ahead.

VI: I don't know just how many of us, but I remember I was in the big—the largest building, and it was partitioned off. I don't know if there were two or three. I know there were two. It could have been three. I'm not sure. That's a long time ago.

DR: Would you say the students were enthusiastic about wanting to learn?

VI: Yes. Most definitely.

DR: Did that same kind of attitude exist when you went to Burke?

VI: Yes. Well, you're going to have some that are and some that are not.

DR: What was your experience like at Burke, that you can remember?

VI: It was good. Very good. I didn't have problems.

DR: And did you have teachers that—

VI: Teachers that were interested in us. Yes.

DR: What do you mean, the teachers were interested in you?

VI: Well, they took interest in you. Like some teachers will take interest in you to, to make you learn or to help you learn. Some teachers, they'll say, "Well, I got mine," if, if—especially if you're disrupting the class. "I got mine. If you don't have yours, that's okay, if you want to be a clown," you know. Some teachers are like that.

DR: Speaking about class disruption, did much of that go on at Burke?

VI: I don't think so. Not in my classes.

DR: So there was much more of a serious attitude about students at the time?

VI: Students, yeah. Interested in learning because there were a lot of activities. If you weren't getting your work, the activities were off limits to you, so a lot of people wanted to do a lot of other things, you know, activities and what have you.

DR: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. So you're saying that there were other things that students could be involved in?

VI: Yes. We had a cosmetology area. The guys would go into—what does Brad do? Bricklaying.

DR: Shop?

VI: Shop. Carpentry and all those things. Yes.

DR: That, that was an option then?

VI: Oh, yes. They, they had that on Burke campus. Yeah. A lot of the guys got their trade right from Burke. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: So what year you said you graduated from Burke?

VI: 1954.

DR: And when you graduated, what, what did you do after that?

VI: I went to college.

DR: And where was that?

VI: Johnson C. Smith.

DR: Okay. Now, isn't Johnson C. Smith—

VI: In Charlotte.

DR: ...yes, connected to St. James Presbyterian?

VI: It is. Yeah. Hm-hmm [affirmative]. But I was a member of St. James. I grew up in St. James. You know, my mom took us by the hand, and we went to church with Mom.

DR: Okay. Was your father also a member of St. James?

VI: No. First Baptist, always.

DR: So the children went to church with Mom, with Mom?

VI: My family did. My family. Yes. Mom—Dad would drop us off, and then go on to church. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Do you think there was a pattern on James Island where families would—father would be in one church and the mother in the other?

VI: Well, yes. I think so. Yes. In my family, it was that way, and I found that to be in a lot of other families.

DR: Yes. It was. Yeah. Yeah.

VI: Yes, because father went somewhere, and because I—in my mom's case, before they were married, Dad was a Baptist, and she was Presbyterian. So some people change

and go with their parents—I mean, the father and mother go together, and some just don't. They worship, you know—

DR: So, while you were at Burke, you were aware of the, of the segregation that existed in the community?

VI: Oh, yes. Most definitely.

DR: Had the civil rights movement started yet? Do you remember?

VI: I don't recall. It might have.

DR: Were you politically active at all during that time?

VI: No. No.

DR: What about—did St. James Church—

VI: At Smith?

DR: Yes.

VI: No. I didn't get into all of that. No.

DR: So, basically, the time that you went to Smith, the civil right movement hadn't really—

VI: It might have—

DR: But you were not—

VI: ...but I didn't get into it. No. I, you know, coming from James Island, I was, was known to have a low key— [cell phone ring]

DR: Sorry.

VI: No. I never got involved in—never got involved. Uh-uh [negative].

DR: But you were quite aware of the segregation—segregated environment that we lived in at the time?

VI: Oh, yeah. That I grew up in, of course. There were certain things you just couldn't do. The movies. You couldn't go and sit upstairs. You had to sit in a certain spot, up or down. You just couldn't.

DR: And your father was working at the Naval shipyard at this time?

VI: He was at the shipyard. My dad was a military person.

DR: Oh, so after he returned—

VI: After he came from—Dad went, went into military when Arthur Lee was—in 1943. I think he spent about three years, and there were five of us when he went to the military. Five children. When he came home, they had two more kids. That's right. He was a Navy man.

DR: So I asked you earlier about the names of some of the other men in the community, and if I remember that your father and those gentlemen were all—worked at the Naval shipyard after they came—because they were vets.

VI: Yeah. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Talking about Abraham Richardson?

VI: Yeah. Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Morris Smalls?

VI: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

DR: George Lafayette?

VI: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. They were all there.

DR: You've—after you graduated from college, what did you do?

VI: I went to New York.

DR: And what'd you do when you got to New York?

VI: Well, I worked for the phone company.

DR: That was Bell South, then?

VI: NYNEX.

DR: NYNEX?

VI: NYNEX. Telesector Resources. That's our new name.

- DR: So what kind of work did you do there?
- VI: Management.
- DR: Okay. So when you—you retired from that job also?
- VI: I sure did. Thirty-six years.
- DR: Thirty-six years.
- VI: Well, I—30 years. They gave us six years on your age and six on your service, for an incentive to go out.
- DR: How was that experience?
- VI: Beautiful.
- DR: Do you think it would have been as pleasant here if you—
- VI: No. Never. Never. Uh-uh [negative]. See, in New York, even—my daughter is an RN. Her daughter is an RN. They have unions. There's a difference. They have unions.
- DR: And what—how did, how did that affect you?
- VI: Very good because, you know, you couldn't just—if a black person—sometimes, you're the last hired and first fired.
- DR: Some of that existed there too?
- VI: It does. Of course. Of course. Yeah.
- DR: So how would the union make the difference?
- VI: The union—you have to have—the union will not tolerate things like that. They never do.
- DR: And if you'd lived in the south, you don't, you don't think—
- VI: I don't think—well, I might have taught school. I might have—I wanted to be going—be a librarian, but then when I went to New York, I figured this is better for me. And, and I remember my sister, my baby sister said to me one time, she said that her husband, a PhD—and I was making more than

him. Hmm. And I—these people that are on strike now, General Motors, I heard them when they say they make \$260 a week.

DR: Anything else you'd like to say?

VI: That's it.

Willie James

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on July 30, 2019 at the home of Mrs. James, Charleston County, South Carolina. Velma Fann was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Velma Fann: Good morning, I am Velma Fann with New South Associates and today is July the 30th. And I am speaking with Mrs. Willie James, one of those instructors both at Meggett and at Fort Johnson. Thank you very much. Mrs. James, can you spell your first name and last name? Your full name for us, please.

Willie S. James: You said spell?

VF: Yes, ma'am.

WJ: Willie, W-I-L-L-I-E.

VF: Okay.

WJ: I have to have that S in the middle there—

VF: Okay.

WF: Period. James, J-A-M-E-S.

VF: Thank you. And, the date of your birth, as much as you'd like to share, and location, where you were born.

WF: Okay. April the first, 1934.

VF: Okay. And where were you born?

WJ: Orangeburg, South Carolina.

VF: And where did you spend your childhood?

WJ: In Orangeburg.

VF: In Orangeburg? Can you tell us a little bit about your family, how many siblings you may have had, your parents, their education, their occupation?

WJ: Okay. Mother was a teacher. And my father was a long-distance truck driver. I had six sisters and brothers. All of us went to college and graduated. The majority of us were teachers, ended up being teachers. My youngest brother, you know how the youngsters are, decided that he would not be a teacher, so he decided that he would wait to see whether or not he, because he played football, and he decided that he would wait to see whether or not he was going to get, because he was very good, get a scholarship and surely enough he got a scholarship to Michigan State University, and from there he was drafted by the Denver Broncos, so he played a year, for a year, with, you know, professional football. And, then he got injured, and he was no longer able to play, professional ball. But the rest of us were teachers. I had a sister who taught school in, and she's still living there, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Another sister who, whose husband was in the service, and, service, and she travelled all around, and when they, when he retired, she went into teaching. And she lives in Alexandria, Virginia. And, we had another sister, who lived in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She's deceased now. But she lived in Spartanburg, and she was a teacher also. And, I can't talk without talking about my daughter because I'm so proud of her. My daughter is now, is an electrical engineer, in Alex—well, in Washington, D.C., but she lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

VF: Great. Now, it seems education was pretty important to your family.

WJ: Oh yes it was. My mother would, would never let us go out there in the world without a good education. Yeah.

VF: And that's—

WJ: South Carolina State College.

VF: Oh, Okay.

WJ: That's where went. Now, my one sister, well yeah, the majority of us did. We, they scattered later. Right, but, you know for further education at different schools.

VF: So, was becoming a teacher, was that your first choice, career choice?

WJ: Had no other choice because my mother said we were going to be teachers. She said we were going to be teachers, so that, what other choice did we have? And especially at, at, you know, my time, when I was living. 34, you know, okay.

VF: Yes. And where, and tell me again, where did you attend college?

WJ: Where did I attend—

VF: Yes ma'am.

WJ: South Carolina State. South Carolina State in Orangeburg. We couldn't go any further, with all the children that we had, you know, my mother and father had, and they had to pay for their education. Where else could we go?

VF: So when did you come to Meggett?

WJ: I'm sorry?

VF: What year did you come to Meggett? And how did that happen? How were you recruited?

WJ: Well, I taught—the first school I taught at was Allston High School in Summerville, South Carolina, not too far from here, and I stayed there for about six years. And then, I decided that I would, you know what, get married, and so I got married and came, my husband was from Charleston, and so came here to Charleston. And, I stayed at Gresham Meggett for about seven years. I stayed at Allston High School six years, and, and then I stayed at W. Gresham Meggett seven years, and probably would have stayed there longer than that, but unfortunately the school closed without our knowledge.

VF: So we talk about Meggett. When you first arrived at Meggett, what was your impression, of the building, of the community, of the students?

WJ: The students were just fabulous. They knew what they had to do. They knew that in order to become somebody they had to go to school and, and because they understood that, they tried to get as much education as they possibly could. On that letter that I showed you a few minutes ago, you will notice what they said, and that was absolutely the truth on that letter, that what they said. They knew that, the importance of an education at Gresham Meggett, the students say Gresham Meggett, and they, they became doctors and lawyers and nurses and, you know, teachers. In fact that, so that lets you know that they knew that it was very important to—and we, we instilled that within them. And, of course, they tried to follow what we said, and they did, and they are out there. I'm so proud of them right now because they come

to visit me a lot, some of them. Not all of them, but some, come to visit me a lot, and we sit down to talk just as we are doing now. And, they tell me about what they're doing now, and the reason I'm saying now is simply because they've been out—I always tell them, you've been out just as long as I have been. 34, again. Are you wondering why I'm saying 34?

VF: What is 34? Tell us about 34.

WJ: I gave you my birth date.

VF: Uh-huh. [affirmative]

WJ: And I gave you the April the first, 1934.

VF: Oh.

WJ: So, immediately, you were supposed to check that out and see how old I am.

VF: Do the math, right.

WJ: You were supposed to immediately figure that out.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: But anyway, that's why—would you care for me to tell you about it? You can check it out yourselves.

VF: We, we can check it ourselves—

WJ: Okay, good.

VF: Yes, okay.

WJ: Very good. All right, so anyway, and, and I keep, you know, and my students do not believe, I say how, how you do not believe my age when I taught you? And, no, no, no, but at the same time, I, no, no, no, you would, nobody would ever believe that you are the age that you are.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: And I say, well thank goodness for that.

VF: Now you taught English—

WJ: Yes.

VF: Is that correct?

WJ: Yes.

VF: You, and, and, and help me understand this. Sometimes people in the community may come from a Gullah background—

WJ: Uh-huh [affirmative]

VF: And speaking differently.

WJ: Uh-huh. [affirmative]

VF: Was that in your classroom, and how did you address it or did you feel the need to address it as an English teacher? Or tell me how that, that worked for you?

WJ: Well, you know, when I came down to, when I went to Gresham Meggett, I had to get accustomed to the choice of words, choice of phrases, that kind of thing, because I really did not understand them at first. I made it known to them that I did not understand what they were saying. For example, one day a student said, Miss James, Miss James, may I get a, well what did he say, may I get a, I can't remember, what he said now, but anyway, it meant a sheet of paper. I said, what was that? And he said it again. And I said, well, I said you mean a sheet of paper. So that's how I dealt with that. Every time they said something that I did not understand, I let them know that I didn't understand, and I said this is what we're going to be saying, you know. That's a sheet of paper, and not whatever it is that you were telling me. And this went on and on. I had no problems really with it because, and I don't think they had any either.

A lot of people would become angry if you tried to correct them, you know, or, or something of that nature. But, they did not. They understood, I think, and the next time they wanted—oh a leaf, a sheet of paper, they said leaf. Miss James, may I get a leaf? I said, excuse me. May I get a liff, a leaf? I said, a leaf? And then, somebody, another student in the class, Miss James, he means a sheet of paper. I said, oh, okay, from now on, you're going to say a sheet of paper, and not a leaf. And it went on like that. They had no problem, I had no problems correcting them. And, I never had any problems with correcting my students. No, never did.

VF: Now, you taught English. Did you teach literature, did you—

WJ: Oh yes, I, you know, I, both of them were in the same, you know, so what I did was English, grammar, and from there, and, and you know, English grammar was

like, I don't know something that even when I went over to Fort Johnson, English grammar was something that was like put on the back burner. Most of the time was concentrating on literature. But that was not my thing. I felt that they needed grammar as well as, because they needed grammar for writing and for speaking, and so I concentrated on grammar and literature. But most people concentrated on literature.

VF: From what I'm hearing and, and reading, Meggett seemed to have been a very nurturing environment for the students.

WJ: Oh, definitely. It most definitely was. My students will tell you right now, if you could talk with them or some of them, they would tell you that I would not allow them to say well I can't do this, that or the other—that's, that wasn't, I wasn't—my mother told us no, we are not going to say, I can't. And I do the same thing with me along the way, I told my students we can't, no we are not going to say it. I can't do that, I can't—yes, you can. And so, that's what they grew up with and they talk about it right now. I felt that they had to do that. And I think it helped them along the way. Definitely. And I helped them along the way because, because of what they've become. Because of what they've done with their lives. That tells me that they paid attention to, you know, what we were saying, and used it as well. So, I'm very proud of all of them, of my students. I was the chairperson of the English Department. And of course, we all got together. What we did not understand, the teachers I'm saying, we helped each other, you know, because some people were just like me, did not know what, what a student meant, when he said leaf, so we had meetings and so forth, as I said, I was the chairperson of the English Department.

VF: And I understand you have your Master's degree? Did you have a Master's degree at the time?

WJ: You said—

VF: Your, your education—

WJ: Okay, oh, my—okay. There was no doubt in my home that we were going to spend time going to renew our certificates, teaching certificate, during the summer, or whatever, my mother always said, told us, we are not waste, going, not going to waste time like that, we are going to go on and get master's degrees. And that's what we all did, went on and got master's degrees, and instead of going to summer school, you know, to renew our certificates, we went to summer school to work on our master's degree. So within two or three summers, we all had master's degrees. So that's when we were transferred to Fort Johnson High School. I, there were two of us, with a man's whose name was Mr. McCray [phonetic]. He and I were the only teachers over at Fort Johnson with master's degrees.

VF: Wow. Let's, let's talk about that. So, when did you learn that Gresham Meggett, thank you, was closing? When did you, when did you get this news? How was the community informed?

WJ: We were so upset. Because we got the information about the closing during the summer, after we had closed school, you know, for the summer, and we were all out there, waiting for the next year to come, and we got the message that the school, the Gresham Meggett, was no longer going to be in existence, and we were going to be transferred to another school. We knew Fort Johnson was being built, but we had no idea that we were going to be the ones to go there. Ones to go there, you know, help make it an integrated school, you see. So when we heard about it, a lot of people wanted to get out and march because we did not know anything about it. I was very upset, myself, and I'm sure other teachers were as well, were upset, because the, the, the relationship that we had with our students, certainly if we knew that we were going to another school, we would have gotten them together and would have tried to encourage them to do the best that you can in this new setting. You know that you can do it, and we, we will, we would have encouraged them to no end to continue what they were doing and do even better. But you know what? They really didn't have, they had enough of that within them that, and I guess we had helped them with, and their parents, that we didn't have that to worry about, but we, we did as teachers. Because if we had known that we were going, the school was going to closed, we would have gotten our students together, we would have, you know, encouraged them to do even better than they were doing at Gresham Meggett. And they were doing the best there, you see, and, but we didn't have that opportunity to do that. And we were very upset as teachers, very much upset. I'm going to tell you, let me give you something to laugh about. We went over there, I was the only English teacher from Gresham Meggett, and Mr. McCray was the only Math teacher from Gresham Meggett, Miss Hamilton [phonetic] had just started teaching, and so she was, but she was the only teacher from Gresham Meggett who was in history, she taught History. And, so we went on and, and the school was not completed yet, you know. They had to do more completion and building and so forth on to the school to make it what they wanted it to be. The library was on the first floor there, and the library was not complete yet, but at the end of the library on, in that same hall, there was a part that they had not completed, but they could use it as a classroom. This room was right on the front hall, so that when people came in, they could see that, you know, at least school was integrated, you know because number one, I, there was a—the end of the last room in the library was one that I was placed in, it had a front, a glass front, glass front, and now that wasn't going to be my classroom, but it was a part of the library, it had a glass front, and it was a place that I had to be in temporarily. And so I was in that class with the glass front. That was all right with me. But let me tell you what happened. At that time, I had a class of ninth grade English students, but they were, what do you call the top—

VF: AP? Advanced?

WJ: Advanced. That's, that's better. They were advanced ninth graders. And so I said okay great, I've taught all of the grades and so forth, it's fine by me. And so, we went in, and I told them at the very beginning, at the very beginning, I said all right, what we're going to do, the first thing we're going to do, every day, we're going to write at least—because I wanted to know where they were, their grammar, whether or not they could write and that kind of thing,—and so I said okay, every morning, until we, I feel that you are ready to go elsewhere, we will take about ten or fifteen minutes to write at least a one paragraph on a subject that I will give you to write about.

So they looked at me, and, so they started, and I think one of the first subjects I told them that they were going to write—I did it, because I just wanted to see what they were going to say, how knowledgeable they were, that kind of thing you know, we only do things like that to, to see where they are, you know, on this page and so forth. And so I said, all right, the first subject that we are going to use is, to err is human, to forgive divine. Well when I—and I wrote it on the board. So they, the students, ninth graders, started laughing. And I said, what's wrong? And so they said, oh nothing, and they looked at each other and started laughing. And by the way, all these were little white kids. And I said, what is wrong? Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing. And they started, they were, they kept laughing.

So the next day they came in, and they started talking among themselves, you all guess what, momma said or daddy said that, it was the correct pronunciation of the word. So I heard them, you know as they were talking, and I said, correct what? Correct pronunciation of that word. I said, what word? They said to, they said it was supposed to be to air, we thought it was supposed to be air, to air is human, to forgive divine. I said well people have been saying that for years, I said don't worry about it, people have been saying it for years, but that's the incorrect pronunciation of that word. And they said well yeah, momma told me that or daddy told us that, so that's why I told the other kids that. So I looked at him, I said, oh, you didn't think I knew what I was doing or something? And that did, that happened many times. Many times, you know, I would give them a, a name something, or it was a different pronunciation, from I guess what they were accustomed to. And, but anything, anyway, things went well.

VF: So you, you left Meggett. You went to Fort Johnson—

WJ: Yes.

VF: You had a master's degree—

WJ: Master.

VF: ...you were chairman of your department—

WJ: Chair.

VF: ...What happened at Fort Johnson? Where were you placed?

WJ: I was—

VF: Who was the chair of the department?

WJ: Just as I was [indiscernible] 0:25:10 just as I said, I had ninth graders, very first year and so forth, and placed with ninth graders. And, I mean, that didn't bother me, I was a teacher, I and that's, I've always been interested in teaching and I didn't have to have a particular level. Some students, while I'm tutoring here, have been students who were placed in, placed in, classes where in people considered them as not knowing anything, you know, dummies like, excuse me I don't like to use that word—

VF: Yeah, remedial courses or something.

WJ: Remedial, that's right. And so, I didn't, I never worried about that because I could teach any level of student. So I never worried about that, but anyway, ninth grade, and then as time went on, they realized that I knew what I was doing, and ended up teaching twelfth graders, eleven, twelfth graders, the rest of the time I was there.

VF: Now were you ever chair of the department at Fort Johnson?

WJ: No. No, never was the chair. Never was the chair. Right. And that didn't bother me either. Because I was a teacher, and I didn't have to be the chairperson of the department in order to do that. And, I knew what I was doing, and the principals, whenever we had to have an evaluation or something of that nature, they would come into the class and they would say, wow, I didn't learn this when I was in school, what, you know this is the grammar part, I didn't, I didn't understand that because what I taught, I taught it this way, said there are certain, grammatical things that you should know, such as double negatives, such as, oh, something like that, I can't remember all of those, but it, like, double negatives, or the use of, or improper use of certain words and things of that nature, and that's what I taught them. I wish I had known that, I would have gotten some out to show you what I was talking about. But anyway, that's what—And they, my students started, learning that, I'm talking about, I'm over at Fort Johnson now, they started, and when they went to college, this college English teacher would ask them, well where did you go to school? These are the kids that don't know anything about double negatives and things of that nature, said where did you go so they said we went to Fort Johnson High School and we had a teacher

named Miss James and she's the only one who taught us that kind of a thing. The teacher said well we need a lot of other James' because that's what you all need to know.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] So the transition for your students.

WJ: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: Did you, did you see any difference when they, when they got to Fort Johnson, were they still blooming, were they still raising their hands to ask the questions? How was that transition for them?

WJ: We had to, I, I did, well yeah all three of us, because we would sometimes get together and, and talk about the students and what they were doing and so forth. We did not have the opportunity to encourage them and let them see that. You have knowledge of certain things and you must use that regardless to where you go, you know. And so, mine that I, my students that I had, I encouraged them to do that, and they did it. Because they knew that, I, I was always serious about education, and I would always tell them this is what you have to do, this is what you should not do, and that kind of thing, and of course, they knew that when they came to me, this is what they had to do and I told them, so not only with me, but with other teachers as well. And what happened is we would tell them, don't feel neglected if you hold your hand up and you're not called on, don't feel neglected, you know, if you have your hand up, you must know the answer. You know, a lot of kids, oh, she, I had my hand up and she didn't call on me. Well, see what I did to my students, I go if you knew the answer and you had your hand up and you were not called on, that's all right. Because you might not have been able to show that in that class, but later in life, you will be able to show it. So that's what, that's how I, I handled that. Yeah. And, I guess I'll say Mr. McCray and Miss Hamilton did the same thing.

The sad part about Miss Hamilton was—you see Mr. McCray and I were experienced teachers. I had a master's degree as I said, and Mr. McCray I'm not sure, yeah, I think he did, but Miss Hamilton did not. And we tried to do as much as we possibly could since we did not have the opportunity to encourage the children, and tell them what to expect in going into a situation like that. We took that opportunity when, like lunch time or something like that. The students would come to us and they would, you know, tell us what happened in class or something of that nature, and we encouraged them, that's okay, you know, you have this for nine months. And then, after that, you're going to somebody else, to another school where other kids may be. So that's how we handled that. That lasts only—and right now, with my students that have children, I tell them right now, you only have nine months there, you can do that. And they believe that, and they started doing it. Yeah. So anyway, that's how that was.

VF: Did you notice any difference when you, when you went to Fort Johnson? Maybe the books or the curriculum? Was there a big difference between what you had to work with at Meggett and what you had to work with at Fort Johnson?

WJ: Books. Well you know, when we were at Meggett, we used books that were given to us to the best of our knowledge to teach the children, and we, while we were getting our master's degrees, and so forth like that, Mr. McCray and I, we were taught certain things not about black and white or you know that kind of thing, it was education, that's what we focused on, education. And so when we saw the books at Fort Johnson, to me, I don't remember, ever focusing, putting a lot of focus on what was in that book, [indiscernible] 0:33:34 that kind of thing. If we, if that happened, I really didn't pay that much attention to it. I was there to teach school regardless to who was in the book or what color we were or what, I was there to teach. And, so that's what I did.

VF: What's a, a fond memory, at Meggett—what's a fond memory at Meggett, and a fond memory at Fort Johnson?

WJ: For, okay, at Meggett, our students were students who wanted an education. They knew how important it was, it didn't matter whether or not you came from an educated family, your education would be in that, in school, about, you were taught by persons who had been taught, you know that kind of thing. So because of that, they focused on definitely becoming educated, definitely intelligence.

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That, that was I think, I think that was a difference in Fort Johnson and Gresham Meggett. Our, the students at Gresham Meggett, were students who respected teachers, they wanted an education, they spent the time, they didn't spend time on other things, but just on education. The majority of them were the ones that I had, that, and the ones that I knew that were around there.

For instance, there was a young man, and he was a football player. And of course, you know, they're always put a whole lot of emphasis on football and that kind of thing, and he was, he was in my class his senior year. And when I was a chairperson of the department, I said one thing that we would do each year, and that is have an English Fair. And what we did, at that time, we allowed students to make posters and so forth, and we would line them, you know put them on the walls, and all down the hallway and so forth, to let others see what we were doing and that kind of thing, and thank you and that's our job. Well this young man who was a football player, we called him Mitch, I don't know whether we're supposed to give names or not, but you know what, he would love to hear his name being called so that's all right, Mitch, but anyway he was a football player, and he had beautiful handwriting, I have never seen a young man with the beautiful handwriting like that. And he helped me every step of the way. He and another one of his friends, there were two football players, and they helped me with everything, and so they thought that they were going to get away

with a lot of things because they were helping me. So we met the Saturday before the display, you know, was on, before everything was going to be opened up for people to see.

And so, Mitch is the one who did all of the writing of the captions that we needed and all of that, he had beautiful handwriting, oh. So, when we were, had music in there, had food, and we were eating, a little snack you know, because I, I said well if they're going to help me then I have to help them a little bit, so this is what we did. And so while we were doing that, I said okay, you persons were here, I'm going to check you off as far as, but you have to bring your project to me here, you know, I'm going to be sitting right here at the desk. And so everyone else who's helping brought their project to me so that I could check them off, except Mitch and the other young man. So I asked them they had helped me, oh wow, I said okay this is beautiful, I really love it. This is wonderful, we are really going to have something to show the school on Monday. This was on a Saturday. I said, all right now you, but I don't have your project yet, and I don't have yours yet. And they started looking at one another. Where's your project? These are two boys now. This is how boys were at that time, and, and girls were too I think in some situations. And this, well where's your project? Well, I don't have a project. The other boy said well I don't have a project either. So I said, okay, did I understand you to say you don't have a project? Yeah ma'am, well we helped you Miss James, I said listen, let me tell you something, Monday is the deadline for the project. If you don't have your project on Monday, you fail.

Well, they didn't believe that. After they had helped me so much, you know, and put everything on the walls and all of the beautiful writing and all of that with the captions and stuff, but we helped you Miss James. I said listen, you're here for an education, not to put posters on the walls, you were helping me, so therefore, you must have your project, I want to see what you think is very important, I want to see how you well you understand it and so forth, so I said you must have it here Monday.

They came in Monday, no project. So, I, do you think I argued with them or told them off or that kind of thing? No, I didn't do that. I told them that the project was, you know, due, it was a part of their grade, and so that, hey, that's the way that I did my teaching. I told you, and now you have got to pay attention, you have got to put the emphasis on that, I put it on that, so you got to do it too. So, when they got their report cards, when they got their report cards, they had Fs and they were, these two football players were so upset, they didn't know what in the world to do. I sat there and I was like, yeah I said, well I warned you, I told you that if you didn't have your project, because that was a major part of your grade, and wow they were angry for days. But you know what, that was a lesson, and especially for Mitch. He was a fantastic football player. And I don't know whether he could play the next semester or not after he got that F, and especially in English, but he never forgot that, and right now whenever he sees students that I am teaching my, my little students that I tutor,

he does this from the time, that time, from the time that he got out of college until, he still does it. You all do what this lady told you to do, because if you don't, you're going to fail.

I remember when I was at Fort Johnson, and somebody knocked on the door, and this time, and you know what, I'm jumping from one thing to another, that was one of the best lessons Mitch has ever had, because he, he sit down to other, well, teachers in way, to other students that he come into, that he comes in contact with, that I teach. He will tell them, do what she says to do, because, he says, number one, I was angry about it, but that helped me in my life, he said, because I would have expected people to give me, give me wherever I went, and I'm glad that she stopped me right then and there and I was angry, but that was a lesson for me. He became a part of SLED, what else, he played professional football with the law enforcement part. Oh he was, he went high in that. It was simply, and he told me it was simply because I did not expect people to give me, I knew that I had to get out there and do my own thing. And, this is what it is. And he does this right now, and he's, I call him the old man. Listen, the poor, I call him, you're an old man now. Yes ma'am. And he calls me every week. A week does not pass that he does not call me.

And a lot of my children, black and white, stop by here, and talk with me, Miss James how are you doing, I was just passing by and I couldn't pass without—I came back Saturday from my daughter in Virginia, and I was, I have to use, sometimes a wheelchair, so I thought well you know if I do have to have it, then I will, my daughter will order it for me. So I was in a wheelchair when I came back to Charleston. And, so this man was helping me, and he had helped a lady before me, but he, he, he thought that he was finished with her and so he took me through baggage. And then he had to go and help the other lady. So I said, oh, that's all right, that's fine, I'll wait here. While I was sitting there, this young lady came up and oh she was just kissing me on this, this was Saturday, this is a couple of days ago. It was just, she was just kissing me on my side of my face, and said oh Miss James, Miss James, I haven't seen you in ages, I just don't know what—and I turned around and I said, I didn't recognize her at first. She was a white girl. She was kissing me. And everybody was just looking, say what, what is that girl doing. But we had a lovely time, we were just hugging each other because I recognized her face, you know, and so forth. But this was so long ago, this is when we first went over to Fort Johnson, and she was one of Fort Johnson, the students that I had.

And she says, Miss James, I have never forgotten you. You were the person that I, you know, paid attention to the most. And right now, I think of you all the time. And she, I had sayings that I used to use, and like, is like one's attitude with his blah blah blah, you know, and so she said I remember those, those sayings that you had, that you had on the wall, and she said one at that particular, that was Saturday past, a couple of days ago, and she was just kissing me on my side, and you know what she

did. She said what are you sitting here for? I said well this young man, he said oh, she said oh that's who he sent me over here for, to help. And she said, okay, come on let's go. I said what are you going to do? I'm going to get your bags and help you to the car. I said my bags, I said my bags, I said my bags are heavy. She said that's all right, I can get them. She went over to the baggage, and you know how the, they have those circle things that she got my bags off that, took me out to the car, and put the bags in the car. If I never speak another word, this is what she did. And she was just kissing me all along the way, on this side, this kissing. When we, I, I got ready to get in the car, she helped me in the car, kissed me before she closed the door, and said, I said well you know where I live, right? She said yes ma'am. I said well come by to see me sometime. She said I certainly will. I'm going to do that Miss James, because before I used to, she's gotten, as she got older, you know, she had other things to do, but she would stop by after I found out who she was, but she said she was coming, and that was Saturday as I said. She said she was coming over to visit me. My students do this all the time.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: Great students. They do that all of the time. And I, I don't like to say anything, because when I know, when I was on the school board, the people, the other people on the school board asked me do you have to say black and white? I said yeah, because that's what it is, you know. We are black and white. Black right here, white right here, said what, what difference does it make, you know. And, and, and I said that to say this, that I'm saying a white girl came and was kissing me all over, you know what I mean, on my face and so forth. And I, I said, I thought that was just so good, because they knew that I was very serious about what I was doing with them. I did not [indiscernible] 0:48:17, and it paid off for them. Every one that I have been talking with and visit me, not recently, but all along the way, Miss James, I'll never forget, never forget. That saying, and they would say one of the sayings that I used to say or one, one of the sayings I had on the wall, or whatever the case may be. That's right. So I was very happy, and I'm very proud of my students, and I think that they are very proud to have been a part for, or for me to have been a part of their lives. I don't think that I can think of any that have not really made something out of their lives.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: That's right.

VF: Would you say that the desegregation was a success and if so, in which ways?

WJ: Uh, generally, generally, do I think that?

VF: Yes, ma'am.

WJ: You know I think that it was good in some ways, but not too good in others simply because, and it, and this is going to be the case now, because people are different. How many little white girls going to come up to me and kiss me, how many out there? Let's see if we had 20 out there, maybe 8 or 10 would come and kiss, and the rest of them would not have done it. And it's because of the rearing that they've had. Some might have said, oh no, you would never do that to a black lady, why did you go and kiss her, as though she would become black herself. Oh, I shouldn't be saying these kinds of things her, but anyway, that's what I got from that and I'm telling you, you know, what I, am. I think that it was a help to some, and you know what I think? I think that it is getting even better now. I think the situation is getting better now. At first, it wasn't that good. But I think it's getting a little better now because you can see, and on my, my daughter's job, I ask her all the time, I said, do you, do you have friends? Do you have people that you go out to lunch with during the day, and you know, and she names without any problem, yeah, so-and-so and this one, and I know so-and-so is either black or white, fine. So I think that it has helped in a lot, in a lot of ways.

My daughter, I think I told you, she is an electrical engineer, right yeah, and it's not because she is that, it's because people realize that I can do the same thing that you can do, you know. I can do the same thing that you, you can do. So, just give me the opportunity and I will do it. But you know what I think is happening, I think it's been better, it has gotten better, but there's still some people out there that cannot accept it. That's my feeling that I have. There are still people out there who can—but not nearly as many people, so I think when we think about it, nothing stays the same, but you're not going to find 100 percent of any group, of any, any, 100 percent, you're not going to have that, so if we accept the fact that we're not going to get 100 percent, I think our lives would be much better, go on with your life, and look at the other people then let them do what they want to do and you do what you want to do, and that's it. And, but I think you need to focus on the fact that if it's not getting you anywhere, and when I said that, I mean it's not, are you, are you getting what you want out of life? Why, have you figured out why? Did this girl help you, did that girl help you, did this white girl help you? If that's the case, what's wrong, you know what I mean? So that's, that's the way that I think. I, I think I, if you listen to me, you see that I'm a little bit different from—because I, it doesn't bother me. And that's what I try to teach my daughter. And I think it has worked quite well with her.

VF: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience teaching at Fort Johnson or Meggett?

WJ: One of the best things that ever happened to me was to teach at Fort Johnson [indiscernible] 0:53:33, and you know the reason I'm saying this is that when I see my students out there, doctors and lawyers and this and that and the other, that makes me feel very good. I taught that kid, and look at where he is now, look at what she

is, she's doing now. One of my students right now, she says she's my daughter. She lives in Columbia, and she has retired from a good job with DSS, and now she's in real estate, and she's doing much better in real estate than she did at DSS. But she is, and she's not, and see the thing that I like, she's not afraid to get out there and do what you want to do, do what you expect, do what people expect of you, do what your education has the direction it has pointed you in and you have gone in that direction. You know? I, I just think that it's one of the best things that could have happened out there. I'm really good, I am really good. And I love it, and I pray for my students to do the same thing, even right now, all those children that I tutor, I point them in that direction as well.

And they believed in me, they would not—I was supposed to be on the program for this, but because my husband died, I wasn't able to do it, but I was supposed to. And that, how long ago was that, oh my goodness. But they still wanted me to be, I said what, make a program, I hardly remember anything. No, no, no, Miss James, we must have, you have to do it. And not too long ago, a couple of years ago, the class of '67, I don't have anything, you know. Well I have some things they sent just like this—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ...but I think I put them away or something so, but, because this was just the other day here, and I still had it out—

VF: Yes.

WJ: I said I was going to show you all this.

VF: And let's see the cover of this book here so we can—oh yeah, that's really nice. And they, they gave you this letter? I, would you like to read it or I can?

WJ: You can read it.

VF: Okay.

WJ: Help yourself. [indiscernible] 0:56:27

VF: Okay. So it says Dear Mrs. James, This is a gift for you. From W. Gresham Meggett High, High Class of 1967. We send this with love and appreciation for all that you have done for us. We would not have made it this far without you and the teachers at W. Gresham Meggett High School. You taught us discipline, perseverance, self-motivation, and these traits of life guided us along the way. The members of W. Gresham Meggett High class of 1967 thank you. And may God bless you and your family. Sincerely, the members of W.G.M. Class of '67.

WJ: And when I, and when the others have their, you know, reunions and so forth like that, they always send me whatever they have. If I don't get there, they will send me copies like this. This, and the letter. And whatever else the, there was the program. I, I don't know whether I have it right here or not. The program, everything, they send. All with—And that's why, I think, I said, you see, they had to be taught things like this. It wasn't just something they just [indiscernible] 0:57:42 something like that, we had to teach them, you know. And, I'm not saying that I did it by myself, I'm not saying that, but I am saying that if you have an example of something and they, and they are still sticking with me, then I feel good as I must have done something pretty good for them. Must have. That's right, you look like, when you do that you look like a girl, a young lady that I taught. You do.

VF: Uh-huh. [affirmative]

WJ: Yeah, so, that's it.

VF: That's good. Just a, maybe one other question about Fort Johnson. Your transition—

WJ: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: So, when you, you were not the chairman of the English department there. Who were you working under? Who was it?

WJ: At Fort Johnson?

VF: Yes, ma'am.

WJ: Of course, it wasn't that I was the only English teacher, another English teacher.

VF: Okay, all right. Was she younger than you, or?

WJ: She [indiscernible] 0:58:41 now let me see. You know, we never talked about age or things like that. We never talked, but I think that—

VF: Master's degree? Was she as qualified as you?

WJ: No, she didn't have a Master's degree. Nobody else had a Master's degree until about four or five years later, then they started getting degrees. No, just Mr. McCray and I were the only ones over there who had, who had Master's degrees.

VF: I would think that you must have been an inspiration. A black woman with a Master's degree. You're an inspiration to me.

WJ: Oh.

VF: You know, that, that to me, is wow.

WJ: Yeah, when teachers said, to interview one day, who, you know, and, and what happened is we weren't people who were okay I'm going to Fort Johnson now. We weren't teachers there who ignored each other or something, we talked. Because we were English teachers. You knew something perhaps that I didn't know. They would send their students to me, all of the time, for grammar. Anything about grammar, oh they'd send them right to me. Oh yeah, yeah. But and we never talked about that, and, and I never felt that I was better because I knew, well. But anyway, what happened was, the, I'm trying to think, okay. I, I don't know—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ...I'm trying to think. Do you have another question?

VF: No, we're good. Thank you for—

WJ: You have another question.

VF: ...for your work.

WJ: I know, when I remember, we, we, we talked about things. I know one teacher came in one day and she said, guess what Willie, so I said what, and she said, well I did a, did a mess up job of something just now. I said what, what was it? So she said some of my students said that, she had some seniors also in English, and she said, I was just asking them were they going to college, and where they were going to college, and she said majority of them said that they were going to South Carolina State. So, I said, oh, what do you mean you messed up? Says, that was a good suggestion. Oh, no, no, that's not what I did, she said I, I, no, you can't go to South Carolina State, because that's not a good school, no you can't go to that, I'm telling you the truth, this is what you told me. No, no, no, you can't go to South Carolina State because that's not a good school, you need to go somewhere else because you are smart.

So I said, well, why are you consider the fact that you messed up? She said because I just felt that South Carolina State was not a good school. I said let me tell you something, honey, by this time we had more black teachers over there then, couple more, and the principal, and assistant principal and so forth. I said can I tell you something? I said all of the teachers over here that you know, black teachers, all the black principals or assistant principals, we all graduated from South Carolina State. She said, I can't believe it, she said I cannot believe it, all of you graduated from

South Carolina State. I said, yes, that's right. So then she went to the head of the department, she said oh my God, she said I really messed up, and she, she said that she told her, and the head of the department said look, don't worry about it, when Willie and the rest of them went to South Carolina State College, they said that was the top black college in the state, and that's why you, that's why they're here right now, because it was the, the best black school, college. And she said, phew I feel a little bit better now. I said, oh, I could tell you some stories that happened that you wouldn't believe, I'm serious. I said oh please, I said, you know the most important thing is, your ability to get to, [indiscernible] 1:03:31, oh I hope that doesn't—

Jenna Tran: You're good.

WJ: I hope that doesn't go on there—but anyway, I said, the, the most important thing is helping the students, you know, educating them, helping them so they can help themselves. That's what I, I've always thought about things like that. I, I don't know why, I never—I, I, I just never thought of somebody being better than I am. My mother taught us that, all of us teachers, as I said. She taught us that. And so, we never felt that way. So that's probably why it didn't bother me if somebody said something like that. I said South Carolina State is where we went, that's right. So, I, I just never. I, I guess I've not been the kind of person who focuses a lot on integration, all this stuff, I never focused on a lot on that, because I, I was more interested in educating my children, [indiscernible] 1:04:53 them, getting them out in the world so that they could be somebody, that because that's what I was taught. So I didn't focus a lot on things like that. Never did. And still don't.

VF: Any words to new teachers out there in the world?

WJ: You know, recently, articles have come out in the newspaper about how our children are not doing as well as they should and they wonder whether or not they're really being educated. You probably have not seen it, but a lot of articles have, have come out of the paper recently and have come out in South Carolina, the education, that they are not educating their children the way that they should. And one time I said you know what I need to do, I need to come out of retirement and go back. That's what I said, to myself. I didn't say it to anybody else, I said it to myself. I said, because I know that I can do better. I said, or maybe if I go back in the classroom, if I don't do that, maybe I can get some of the younger teachers and give them some ideas of how to handle the situation or something of that nature. That's, that's what I've been thinking about ever since those articles came out. I've been thinking, and I said no, at your age, you think you're going back to—I said you think you're going back to teach, but I, I can. I do it here at my home, I, and my, and, oh, let me tell you, my students that are children, they, I get them out of special ed. I go, and, and I, I think, I, I just don't feel threatened by anything like that. And tell them, tell the children's parents, I said okay, you said the teacher put them in special ed, yes. Okay,

well we're going up and get them out. You think we can get him out ourselves? I said, of course.

I have been on the, what's that, after I retired, I was on the school board here for four years, District 10 school board for four years, and I feel that I needed to spend more time with my children, but anyway, they—I decided that no, you do, don't try to go back into the classroom, you know. Even though they are talking about the students and they're not getting enough education, they are, and they're—and see what I did also, I didn't just focus on book learning, because I think the other type of learning that you have, the experiences and so forth, are the ones that are going to get you through, because that's what I learned over the years, that I've got persons who used their education, but they used experience also. They were the ones who, you know, made something out of themselves, who experienced certain things and, they were the ones who were successful. And so, that's what I would like to go back out there and tell, tell the students. But that is what something that I really considered recently, and that is going back into the classroom at my age. Because when I see the children come to me, and the things that they don't have and they need, they are not being taught—I said, I can see why they're saying the students are not educated. And, and, and I agree with them 100 percent. They are not being taught what they should be taught, educated the way that they should be educated.

I don't think it's going [indiscernible] 1:09:20 And I would tell anybody that, that I see, and I will go to the newspaper and tell them this is the way that I feel because—let, let me tell you, I'm, and I'm going back to, started not to do it, but I'm going back and tell you this. The parents ask me, you think you can get my son out of special ed? Yes. Oh, I said you just get an appointment with your doctor, not, with your teacher, and I'll go with you. Oh, [indiscernible] 1:09:53 I said yes. I have done this, I bet, more than 25 times with my students. They would get, the, the parents would get the appointment, and they'd pick me up and we'd go to the school. Several things have happened, and I, and I can still smile a lot, and yet, and real upset, that's just the way that I am I guess. And the way that I was taught. And, and I see that I can get ahead better doing this.

I remember I went to one class, and the teacher, the teacher walked in, and she spoke with, well this happened in a lot of cases, spoke with the mother, or the mother and father, and didn't even ask well who do you have with you, you know, or something. And, they'd stop and started talking, so I said excuse me, never tell you who I am. And, I would tell them that—one time I'll never forget, I laughed about this myself. I said, I, I retired after 35 years, and I said, perhaps that's longer than you've been on this earth. 25, 35 years. I said, that's probably longer than you've been on this—but let me tell you about me. And I told about that I was on the school board, over here, oh over here, yes. And then when I started telling them who I was and they stopped talking about the student and started talking about me.

I said well wait a minute, no that's not why I'm here, I'm here to get this child out of special ed. Oh, no, no he can't get out of special ed. Yes, he can. I said, the mother and father signed him in, and we are here to sign him out. Well, I need to sign, go and send for somebody else. Well, send for whoever you need, but we are not leaving here until we sign this student out. You know? And that's what we—and I did that on numerous occasions. I remember once, this boy—and he's a college graduate right now, but he was in second grade. I'm serious, second grade, and I, and the teacher put him in special ed because he couldn't read something, or couldn't pronounce a word or something of this nature, so the parents said, Miss James I don't know what we going to, I said you're going, first thing you're going to do is you're going to get him out of special ed, and the next thing you're going to do is I'll go to him and, and you know, see that he gets what he needs.

So, we went up to the school and, I, the, the teacher, no the principal, tried to ignore me except that time because they knew that I was on the school board, and so we went there and so we, I told them that we came there to get the young man out of special ed. So anyway, and so I was doing all the talking. So they said, well wait a minute, I thought, somebody trying to be smart, I thought that was the mother and that was the father, because I was doing all the talking. I said, yeah, you're right. You're absolutely right, that's the mother and this is the father, but I'm the tutor. And I'm up here to get this young man out. And I'm going to show you that he is not a special ed kid. I said, so we need to sign him out, and that's what we are going to do before we leave here. And, we signed him out and I started tutoring him.

The mother called me from her job, this is about two weeks after we signed him out. She called him, called me, from, to tell me that, from her job, that the teacher just called her and said the young man had made the highest score in the class on a test. And I said, what? She said, yes Miss James, she says I had to call and tell you because the teacher just called and told me. And from that point on, he was the, one of the smartest children in that class. And now he's a college graduate, he's doing very well. Suppose say he had that label on him, special education. Now, do you think he would have been out of college, and doing well? No. And it's, and I have done that, I've gotten, and especially boys, I've gotten them out of special ed. How, how do you think that you're going to get them out? I'm up here to help the parents, I said and they are here to sign the paper, and so that's why I'm here, to see that they sign the paper, and do the right thing. Well they were so shocked, they didn't know what in the world to do. But that's what I did, and I've done that, that's why I stay with tutoring children. And my friends, are you still doing that? Yes, I am. Miss James, you, you can be, and these are friends, Willie, you can be going out with us to lunch, or going to the movie with us, or something—I don't have time for that, I've got to teach my children. That's what I told, they're all like, oh Lord, you can't get rid of teaching. I said as long as they need me, I'm going to be there, as long as I can help

them. And anyways, and, and, and the way that my students are doing now, yeah, I'll be here forever. I'll be here until, until my last days, if they do as well as they're doing now. I'm serious. I am very very serious. That's right. I'm talking to a [indiscernible] 1:16:13—

VF: Thank you so much.

WJ: People say, you talk so much Miss James. I say yes I do because I have so much to say. You know. But anyway, if that's enough that's good.

VF: Thank you. Thank you very much.

WJ: If that's enough for the interview, I'm talking about. But anyway, I enjoyed being at Fort Johnson also—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ...because that was a lesson also. It wasn't to me, because I didn't go through a whole lot of negative things. I, I did not. And I'll have to be very frank with you, I did not go through and was simply because I think people recognize the fact that I probably knew what I was doing or something, parents came there and we would talk. And I think, there was a saying about, some people can't look others in the eyes, you know what I mean—

VF: Hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ...and talk. Well I wasn't like that because my mother taught us, look people in the eyes and tell them what you have to say or whatever the case may be and so that's what we did, my, my sisters and brothers. That's what we did. So, anyway, I've never had any problems. You know what, when I was at Fort Johnson High School, parents would come up, and the principal would call me in. Miss James, so-and-so is down here, or Mrs. so-and-so or Mr. and Mrs. down, I said okay I'll be around, right there in a minute. And what I did when I, at all, all times, you know so, I had, all of my students had folders. You see, that's why I can't go without a folder, because they had—and I put all of their papers in there, so that I have proof of what they did and what. And I'll never forget, this man came and it was graduation time. I didn't even know who he was, I had never seen him before, and he came because his son was in, a senior, and it, it was time for graduation. And he wasn't going to graduate because he hadn't done his work.

The father came and he had on his bedroom shoes or something, and I just came up here because we have all of our invitations out and the family is coming, and this and that, and, here, I saw his report card and he is failing English. I said, yes. So he's, well

what, what am I going to do, I've set the family up. I said, I don't know. I don't know what you're going to do, I said, because it's my first time seeing you. If I never speak another—this is my first time seeing you, I said, if you had come earlier, this is not the, this isn't the first time that he failed, he's been failing all along. And the principal was sitting right there, and this, and the principal was sort of smiling to himself. And so, I said, I've never seen you before. I said, you should have been up here earlier so that you would know that your son was failing, and you could have told him something to do, or you could have talked with me, or I could have given him some special—but he did not do anything and I don't have anywhere that I can go in and get some grades to pull out of a bag or something, and add to that. I said, I don't have that, so your son has to repeat this grade. Well, I, all the things are out in the family, and I said I'm sorry I don't have, that's the only, when I tried to help him, he, during the time that he was supposed to get the help, he didn't want it. He didn't do it. So now there's nothing else that I can say.

And the principal laughed and then he said, okay Miss James, well I've got another meeting that I have to attend right now, so this meet, this meeting is, oh well I'm going to let it, Mr. whatever his name is decide what he's going to do because just as you said, you don't have a bag to pull it—I said that's exactly right. I'm serious. That's the, that's the kind of person—and anybody, my students white or black, they know that this is the kind of person that I am. I don't give grades, you have to make it. How, because if you go, if I give you because, oh she's cute, oh oh she's, uh-uh [negative] no, no, no, no, no, I didn't do that. And, because when you got there in the world, and you don't know what, let's say, a noun is, you don't know that the difference between singular and plural, you know things like that, and you're, what's, I, see I'm going to hold myself responsible, responsible for that. Because I, I will say I did not make him do that. Another, let me tell you another thing that happened. I know you all have to go, but I'm going to do this anyway.

The English teachers at Fort Johnson were on the same hall, you know, and some over here, some over here in the rooms and so forth. So this, the, the principal asked me this time, Miss James, would you take this class, right here, these children who are in special ed, and I said sure. But I don't think I want you to do that. I said, of course, I said I don't mind, I love teaching. So anyway, he said, I said, just go on, you go on, and I'm going to teach these children. It was special ed. And so I taught them, and they, they started doing so well and I, I mean they did better than some of the general students. And so, when the next year came in, and I, and they passed, and the next kid, next year came in, and the teacher right next to me, English teacher right next to me, got the same students that I had, but my, in special ed, I recommended them for general. And so, when she, the teacher next to me, saw that these children over there, she said Miss James, she left her class to come to me, Miss James, I said yes, I thought these children were in special ed last year. I said they were. I said, but I did not teach them that way. I said, I don't, I don't believe in teaching special ed, unless

I'm sure. And I said, these children were not special ed, and so I taught them on a general level. Oh, and I taught, listen, oh this is funny. I told, I told, her I said okay look, the, the students, I'm going back to the teacher, what the teacher said, but I, I said okay, let me tell you all something, I'm talking to the students now. I said, this may, this has a label, this class has a label on it because it's special ed, but I'm not going to teach you all special ed. You are going to be taught on a general level.

One student, after they left the class, one student went down to the principal and told the principal that I said I wasn't going to teach them on the special ed level, I was going to teach the on a general level. The teacher said, the principal said, you don't want to do that? No, because I'm special ed. All right, so back to the teacher, so the next year that this teacher had all of the students that I had, and she said, Miss James is there, is there, is there a mistake here? I said what do you mean a mistake, mistake? So she said, they've got these children in the general English class. I said, oh yeah, that's where they're supposed to be. But I thought last year you had them in special ed? I said, I did. [indiscernible] 1:24:33 I said but I taught them and I told them that I was going to teach them on a general level. And I said, don't you see what has happened to them? You see? And so she's like, I, I just can't believe it. And so then the next time they're taking tests and so forth, they made higher grades than the students who had been in general. She had a class of general, and, well all of them are general at that time, but, some of the children had been general the year before, and some of them were with me. That's right. Do you need me?

So anyway, she said, that's what she said. She said, well I just can't believe, and the students that I taught that were special ed, this is at Fort Johnson High School, now, special ed they did better than, and I taught them on the general level, they did better than the students who were general the year, this year before. Oh, I could tell you some things, I tell you. But I, I love teaching. I love, and I still love helping people. It's just like right now, my family says, you have company all of the time. You are not tired? At your age? I said no, I'm not. No, I'm not. I'm not. And I probably will never ever be tired of people. I love people, students as well as grown-ups, you know, younger children and stuff, and I'll always, always come help them, as much as I possibly can. And that's why I thought about going back into the classroom at my age. You all have not said anything about it. So, when you all get together, get the, get my age, okay? That's right. Oh, teaching was really something for me. It was really [indiscernible] 1:26:51 ,but anyway. I would, you know, when we first went over to Fort Johnson, we were accustomed to walking in the office, good morning, and they, over at, over at Gresham Meggett, everybody, good morning, how are you Miss James, what did you do this weekend, blah, blah, we would just be talking, you know, things like that.

But when I went, when I first went to Fort Johnson, we walked in there, and they'd say, good morning, and people looking as though, looking at us as though we were crazy.

They said nothing. So we said wait a minute, what's wrong here? We are accustomed to talking and conversation, and people saying hello. And no one, oh for the longest, a good while, over that entire year, people did not say, but do you think we got all upset and started cussing and carrying on, because they didn't do it? No. I went on down to my classroom and smiled to myself. You know, because that, that was good, that was what you were supposed to do, but it wasn't anything that made you, you know, where you work, or made you happy or sad, well it didn't do it for me. So that was some, one thing that we talked about a lot, but we just laughed about it. We didn't get very upset about it, you know. Somebody's not speaking—

VF: Yeah.

WJ: We'd go, good morning, people looked and turned their head and go on the other way. That still did not bother me, I, well, I'm stupid I guess. And my mother taught us that, I think, that you don't need, you don't need a good morning or a hello or so forth to survive. That's, you know, you don't need it. You don't need it. So that's, what it was, that's what it was. So anyway, my students, and as I told you, majority of them from Gresham Meggett are just like that. And if they were to write a letter, the letter would include a lot of the things that they said here. Because that's what they were taught. And that's why they were able to write a letter like this—

VF: Yeah.

WJ: ...because that's what they were taught, you know, this is how they were treated.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: I was not only the chairperson of the English department, I was over plays, dramatic club, plays, and the children would just run to me when they heard that we were having a play, Miss James can I be in the play? That's right. Because we had some wonderful—and then one, I said last thing before, and then, before we left Gresham Meggett, and a lot of people don't believe this now, but before we left W. Gresham Meggett, we started getting student teachers, well a few, and I had a young man, from, I think it was from College of Charleston, and he was my student teacher. Don't forget his name, Fox.

VF: Fox.

WJ: Last name is Fox.

JT: Terry Fox.

WJ: He was my student teacher. And he would say how in the world did you get a student teacher? And, so, he was a white guy, right?

JT: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: And people, and you know, and teachers say, how did you get him as a student teacher? I said don't ask me, all I know is that he was brought down to my class. And said this is your student teacher, the principal. That's right. And he was very, he came out here. We had a play once, and he, and I said okay you're going to help me with this. Yes, ma'am, [indiscernible] 1:31:45 I'd be glad to help you with it. And I said okay, let's get going. And so, after one night, after the play, I think it was my birthday, and they, they knew it was my birthday, April 1st—

VF: Yeah.

WJ: Yeah, that's not hard to remember. And, you know what they did? I, I was home that day, and I was waiting for my husband to come home. And, I had on a housecoat or something, and the doorbell rang. And, I went to the door, I said I have my housecoat on, I went to the right here, and we got in this house, and I opened the door, and it's the students who were in the play and Mr. Fox. Happy Birthday—

VF: Oh.

WJ: ...they started singing, and they had food with them, something to drink, you know, sodas and stuff like that.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: And they came in and we had a marvelous time, and he had, and in a robe, I'll never forget that. And he looked at me, and he just fell out laughing, oh, we had, we had a good time. And I said, well, I couldn't even, I was speechless. But he was the first one in the door, and they were singing out loud, I mean really out loud. I said wow, this is really something else. He was good, he was a good, young man. I helped him along the way, and he was very good and very, you know. I, I just knew that he was going to be somebody because of, you know, the way that he acted. Because, you know, there are just certain things that I, I knew and I saw in him. And so that was that, I could tell you some of the stories, but I'm not, that's it, I'm not—

VF: Okay. Well we thank you and appreciate you, and thank you for your time and your service.

WJ: Yeah.

VF: And all the lives you have touched.

WJ: Huh?

VF: All the lives that you have touched.

WJ: Oh yeah, yeah. You would be surprised at the number that I have not even told you about. Oh I've got the, I, somebody told me where was this, recently, just, just, oh that was when I was in Virginia. We were talking, oh no, no, I'm trying to think of who it was. No, Miss James, I want you to write a book. Who was that? Somebody recently. We were talk, I, I, no I says you got to have a book. Oh, I know who it was. You know who it was? Do you know Linda? Linda Johnson? The council woman from here who was trying to get this going—

JT: Oh-oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, Miss Johnson.

WJ: Yeah, Anna Johnson.

VF: Uh-huh. [affirmative] Yes, Anna.

WJ: I taught her too. And she has, oh God, she talks about, Miss James, if it weren't for you, I don't know what I would have done—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: People did not believe in me. She said, can you imagine me, I said of course I can imagine you at being a council, a councilwoman. And, so anyway, she said, this is fine, oh yeah we were talking about this, she said this is fine. I want you to have the interview, Miss James, you must have the interview. They cannot have it if they [indiscernible] 1:35:06 God, and then so she said but you know what I want you to do? Miss James, you have so much experience with people, with situations and stuff, you need to write a book. Well I had thought about writing a book before anyway, but so many things happened, you know in our life and so, I didn't have—I have some stuff written down right now in a book, that's why I carry a book like this all the time—

VF: Okay.

WJ: ...because I have some stuff written down, subjects and so forth—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ...that I would put in a book if I did. But she told me this recently when we were talking on the telephone when I was in Alexandria, Virginia, with my daughter, and she called me and we were talking, Anna, and she said all this is fine, she said, but I

want you to write a book. I'm serious. That's right. So I said, well I've been thinking about it, Anna, she said I want to see, and I tell them, you know I tell them all the time, I said, you know what, after you all have gotten grown, you think that you can just tell, boss, tell me what to do. I'm talking, ever since you all have gotten grown, you all just declare that you can just tell me anything that you want me to do, anything that I should be doing. My daughter is the same way. She says, I said wait a minute who's the boss in here, momma, [indiscernible] 1:36:29 you're the boss, but I am the strong boss because you're going to do this, you're going to do that, and you're going to do the other. Well, I, you know what, I trust them simply because I taught them—

VF: Right, right.

WJ: Is that something? I trust them—

VF: Yeah.

WJ: ...because I taught them. And they always come up with something good. I am just so proud of my students and, I, I never worried about my, my daughter. Oh no, I never worried about her [indiscernible] 1:36:59, please let me tell you this. But you all have to go, you, you can go—

JT: Oh no, no. It's as long as you like to tell stories.

WJ: My, my daughter, I had her tested when she was in, she was in, what, kindergarten. And so, she, I had her tested for two schools here, and one was a Catholic school. She passed both of her 90 something, high 90s, and so we were trying to decide which one she was going to go to, because my husband was a teacher and I was, and we were not able to pick her up this, that, and another, and so we said well we just doing it, and so she, what happened was, she, we decided that she would go to the Catholic school, okay. So, throughout the entire education thing she got, until she going to really from high school, she went to Catholic school. And it was an experience that didn't, no that I'm not even going into that one, but it has another one, but anyhow she graduated from Bishop England. I don't know whether they call it Bishop England now, but Bishop England High School, and went throughout, from first grade through twelfth. And, in twelfth grade, you know, I don't know whether you all have experiences or not, but in high school in particular, there are some teachers that, oh no, you got to, no you got to do this for that, her though, she's tough—

VF: She's tough.

WJ: Oh yeah, she, yeah, oh, she's tough, you got to do this, and so that was one, there was one of the teachers over at Bishop England that was tough, an English teacher,

and so they were doing the research paper and so was I. I had seniors, we were doing a research paper—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ...at the same time. And, Tia [phonetic] came home one time, and she brought a grade home with some cards, research cards that they had to do. And so, a C. I think it was a C or C minus or something. I said, Tia, what is this? I said, this is the first time you've ever had a C. From first through twelfth grade here.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: Momma, I don't know what she's talking about, blah, blah. I said all right, get me an appointment. Momma, please don't go out there and tell her, because she's one of those tough ladies that, she might fail me. I said oh, please, I don't want to hear anything like that. I said, just get me an appointment. So I got, she got the appointment and I went there to, to speak with her. So, I, I went to the door. And she was a tough lady. She went, I went to the door, and she was at her desk doing something. And she ignored me at first. And so, I said hello. Oh, hello. What is it? What you want? I said, I came to talk with you about my daughter. Oh, what's her name? So I told her. Well, what about her? I said, well she came home with a C minus, a C or something, you know, on some cards that she was doing, and I said and I want to know why.

So she said, because she didn't do the work. I said, oh yes she did. I said yes she did. I said now let me tell you something about me. I said, it is ironical that both of us are doing the same, teaching the same thing at the same time. And I said I wouldn't dare allow my child to come out here not doing the right thing. And I'm teaching the same thing as you are. I said, oh no. She got, well, I said I want to know what she did wrong, because, and so she said, oh by the way, did I hear you say you were a teacher? I said, yes. I said, and you also heard me say that we both were doing the research paper at the same time. And she, you could see her—

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

WJ: ... going down So I said, so I want to know what my daughter, I would never, ever [indiscernible] 1:41:24—where do you teach? I said Fort Johnson High School. And, and at that time, people, who taught at, at Fort Johnson High School, and especially if you were black, you said, Fort Johnson, I said yes that's where I am. Oh, well, and what did you say you're teaching? I said, English, twelfth grade English, and we are doing the same thing, teaching the same thing now, and that is a research paper, and I said that's enough of that because I've told you all of this. Now, I want to know what's wrong with my child's cards. And she could not tell me. And that was the last C

she had. Now I knew she wasn't going to get an A because teachers, some teachers don't like for you to question them, but from that point on, she got B plusses.

VF: B plusses, couldn't get her that A, huh?

WJ: I knew she wasn't going to get an A. As she was, I knew she wasn't. But I, oh I could tell you so many experiences that I've had. Like, but you know, it still does not destroy anything in me, still. It didn't, and he, and, and I don't think there ever was anything that happened and destroyed me or made me feel different or bad, or low or high, or whatever the case may be. That's just the kind of person I am. That's right. That's the kind I am.

VF: Thank you.

WJ: Well, this is very good.

VF: Appreciate it.

Ronald Middleton

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 19, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. David Richardson was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

David Richardson: My name is David Richardson. And I'm here with Mr. Middleton. We are at the James Island, I mean St. James Educational Building on the premise of St. James Presbyterian Church. Can you, please, sir, give us your full name?

Ronald Middleton: My name is Ronald Middleton, Senior.

DR: And where do you reside now?

RM: I live at 1481 Fortune Lane, Charleston, South Carolina 29412.

DR: And what is your date of birth?

RM: September 3, 1945.

DR: And where were you born?

RM: Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: And is that—What part of Charleston were you born?

RM: James Island.

DR: And that's where your family lives.

RM: Lives and reside there.

DR: So, you spent your childhood on James Island?

RM: Yes.

DR: Is there a particular section of James Island where you . . .

RM: Yes. It was called [indistinct 00:14:44]

DR: Okay. Tell me about your family. What was your father's name?

RM: My father was Herbert Middleton, Senior.

DR: And what was his occupation, sir?

RM: He spent—He fought in the second World War. He spent 20-some years in the Navy. He retired in his 60s. And he was an employee of the Charleston Naval Shipyard for I don't know how many years, but for many years.

DR: And your mother. What was your mother's name?

RM: My mother was Elizabeth Chisolm Middleton. Her occupation was—She worked at the Naval—Not at the Naval, but at the tobacco plant in Charleston. You had a cigar factory there at which she worked.

DR: You have siblings?

RM: Yes. I have four siblings.

DR: What are their names?

RM: Ronald H. Middleton, Junior. Carmen Middleton. Ina Middleton. Reginald Middleton.

DR: Did your family emphasize the importance of an education when you were coming up?

RM: Yes.

DR: And what are some of the things that you remember hearing from your parents that made you convinced that they wanted you to get an education?

RM: Well, it was the parents telling me that by being educated the sky was the limit. And that it was so important. Now there's things that—I have the equivalent of an Associate degree. I came about these things on my job and continued my education.

DR: Now, where did you go to school?

RM: I went to W. Gresham Meggett High School. And it was located on Grimball Road.

DR: What about elementary school, sir?

RM: I went to elementary school there, too. But I first started out in first grade on the little building that was called—Oh, I had it in . . .

DR: What road was it on.

RM: It was on [indistinct 00:17:22] section [indistinct 00:17:24] Road.

DR: You talking about Society Corner?

RM: Yes. That's where I—

DR: And you started out at Society Corner?

RM: Right.

DR: Okay. What years were they? Do you remember?

RM: Yeah. I was approximately six years old. I had to walk to school a mile-and-a-half, two miles.

DR: And, from there, where did you go to school?

RM: W. Gresham Meggett.

DR: And where was that located?

RM: On Grimball and Pruitt [phonetic 00:17:50].

DR: So, distance after you transferred to Gresham Meggett, the distance to cover to get to school was longer or shorter?

RM: It was shorter, a couple of blocks.

DR: Okay. So, you were right down road from the school.

RM: Yes. And, at the time, I could see—Because a lot of people did farming then you—

DR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

RM: The trees or the wood hadn't growed up. So, I could see W. Gresham Meggett from my home. It was that close.

DR: Where did your parents go to school?

RM: Avery.

DR: Oak [phonetic 00:18:25]

RM: Yes.

DR: And where was Avery located?

RM: In Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: Where did your siblings go to school?

RM: My sibling went to James Island High. And that was on Fort Johnson Road.

DR: So, when did you graduate from Gresham Meggett?

RM: 1963.

DR: That was before they—It was still an all-black school.

RM: Yes. '63.

DR: Now what did you observe different at Gresham Meggett from what you observed that the white schools were like.

RM: Well, right now, the whites had better educational tools than we had.

DR: What do you mean when you say that?

RM: When I say that—There is, the majority of our books, even though we had to pay for it, was used like hand me downs. You understand what I'm saying?

DR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

RM: And when I observed these things, even when I went into the military. It was supposed to be that way because we were supposed to be second-class people. And we didn't get—Case in point. I married a lovely woman from Anderson, South Carolina. She's

black. But in certain things they were ahead of us with the equipment they had. But one thing that my wife and them never—They never even thought that in—And I'm not off base or anything. They never even thought or knew anything about black soldiers. You hear me?

DR: So, are you saying the history was not taught in her school about blacks?

RM: No. And it was very limited in our school.

DR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative]. Were your parents active in ya'll's education?

RM: Well, yes. But I have—I see at my age right now—I see these one or two teachers and I shake their hand because if you had a problem or teacher sent a note home, you was almost guilty before that note came. But and then but I recognize other things, you know [indistinct 00:21:15]

DR: Why do you say was almost guilty [indistinct 00:21:17]

RM: I said almost—

DR: I know, but what did that mean?

RM: What that mean is, you—The teachers back then, they took care. They took—They were interested, or they wanted you to succeed.

DR: So, you felt that the teachers at that Gresham Meggett cared about you getting an education?

RM: Yes, yes. 199%.

DR: What convinced you about that?

RM: Because of the way they taught. The way they tried to instill this motivation inside of you. And the thing about it, it prepared me for my life when I went out. Now, I was not educated in a greatest school. But soon I hit the Army. It was like a brick wall. What? I started looking around. And I started looking at these supernatural human beings. And they were less than me.

DR: Who is that supernatural human beings referring to?

RM: The whites.

DR: What do you mean that they were less than you?

RM: Well, I'm saying that I could out-perform them. It was a myth.

DR: But you told me earlier that equipment and information that ya'll received at Gresham Meggett was second hand and not up to par with what the whites received.

RM: Yeah. But the idea was the training. The training from my parents, my teachers and all. They prepared me to say that I was a human being and I could compete with anyone. And the idea of that was great because my grandmother and all of them, which I knew them less, they came under more scrutiny than I did.

DR: All right, now, when did you attend Gresham Meggett? Do you remember?

RM: Yes. I would—Okay, we want to go back to 10, 9 years old. So, when we moved from Society Corner. Now Gresham Meggett—I think over—Was it '55?

DR: '52.

RM: '52.

DR: Yeah.

RM: Okay. So, I was in the third grade. At '52, I probably was in the third grade.

DR: Who were some of your teachers that you remember?

RM: Oh yeah, Miss Blunt. You smiled. Miss Baxter. I can name, you know, those were the main two.

DR: And who was the principal then?

RM: Not Leroy. He still was it. Yeah, he was.

DR: What do you remember about Mr. Anderson?

RM: Well, he was strict. And the idea, he wanted you to succeed. And in today's world, there wouldn't be [indistinct 00:29:03] as a great principal. Because he wanted [indistinct 00:29:06] children and everything else, and their parents. I don't know if they agreed. I'm just telling you the truth. And the fact is—But I think that, in my heart, I saw this big tall man. And I wanted to do what is right. And to be like him and some of the teachers. That's all.

DR: Did he ever have the occasion to whip you?

RM: No. So, this was all hearsay. Okay [indistinct 00:29:39] got out of there quick.

DR: Do you remember Lash LaRue?

RM: Yeah. The Whip. I heard. But I was—

DR: You never seen it?

RM: Yes, when I—I saw it, right there. That big long whip.

DR: Okay.

RM: And as a child, you know, you were terrified of it, right?

DR: Do you believe the community was supportive of the school as a whole?

RM: Yeah. Because, the fact is that in this area for the whole community, this was something great for us. To have our school where, when we became a certain age, we didn't have to go to [indistinct 00:30:26]

DR: So, Gresham Meggett was the first black high school on the island.

RM: Yes. Yeah, the fact is that you could graduate all the way up to 12th grade.

DR: Did you participate in any sports?

RM: No and not [indistinct 00:30:44] But I played sports, you know what I mean. I played sports, but not for the school.

DR: No.

RM: Like, I was good in baseball. And we didn't have a baseball team. Or I can outrun just about anybody round the school. And a young man came up to me eight years ago and told me that. But we didn't have a track team.

DR: Now, when you transferred from Society Corner to Gresham Meggett, how many students, classes were in the same room?

RM: Well, there were only one for my grade. And I know what you saying. But being in elementary school, we were not really that active in everything that was going on down the hall in other classrooms, if you understand me. We went to that one class. We went to the lunch room. We went out to play, and that was it.

DR: Now this is at Gresham Meggett or this is at—

RM: No.

DR: . . . Society Corner.

RM: No. Now Society Corner we had all kind of school [indistinct 00:32:05] wooden structure. We even had a wood stove.

DR: Do you remember whether there were one or two class in the same room at the same teacher have to—

RM: Yeah. Because Society Corner didn't have that much room. Didn't even have a bathroom. If you want me to be honest with you, you know, in the early '50s. We talking '51, '50.

DR: So, when you transferred to Gresham Meggett, there were more than one class in a room, within a teacher's room, or just one class?

RM: In my elementary part, there were one class. But you gotta remember, I was in either the 4th or 5th grade, to tell you the truth. Okay?

DR: And you mentioned Miss Blunt?

RM: Yeah.

DR: You mentioned Miss Baxter?

RM: Yes.

DR: Who was the principal at Society Corner at the time?

RM: At the time, I believe that it was either Miss Blunt or Miss Baxter, you know? You know, listen, and you know these things. What would a 6th grader really knows about the carrying on of the school? They would see the teachers. All A, B, C's. How to talk. How to walk. How to read silently. You know?

DR: How to do what? Read silently?

RM: Yeah.

DR: What do you mean by that?

RM: Well, for hours, or for an hour, we would have our little book, right? And we had to read four or five pages. But they didn't want the whole class saying, reading this like that. They now, "We want you to read this." And we were taught to read silently. Okay?

DR: With your eyes and not your mouth?

RM: Not with your mouth. You exactly right.

DR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative]. Did your parents attend the PTA?

RM: Yes. They [indistinct 00:34:20]

DR: Both parents or just one?

RM: Well, daddy was always off because he was in the Navy, still in the Navy, okay? And he didn't come home till mostly every two years or three years. His ship was gone. But he got lucky in that he was based in Charleston. But it's just like what it is mostly war ships today. They're gone six month. Then they come back and another crew takes over. And, you know what I mean? Then, the sailors would be on land for six months. The ship would come back to port, and then a new crew would take it out.

DR: Let me direct your attention to the furniture that you had at the elementary school, compared to when you moved to Gresham Meggett. Was there a difference?

RM: A big difference. The furniture we had was all new, and I would say clean. It wasn't no hand me down like what we had there. And, the thing about it, we had no central air condition, but we had heat. Central heat. And that was better than trying to get, people trying to stoke a stove.

DR: Oh, central heat was at the Gresham Meggett.

RM: Yes.

DR: And there was internal heating system.

RM: Right.

DR: And not a fire that students have to make.

RM: Right. A 100%.

DR: So, the school was more comfortable?

RM: It was. The books were ragged, you know.

DR: The books were still ragged?

RM: The books were ragged because it seemed like they were—You know, I wouldn't know the difference as a 10 and 5-year-old. But I don't think I ever received a new book.

DR: Okay. While you were at Gresham Meggett, it was at the time when the civil right movement got started?

RM: Yes.

DR: What do you remember about that?

RM: Well, the most thing I remember about it is upper classroom, or a classmate that had—Not classmate, but people from the school that had graduated, or they was still there. And we were very interested in the civil right movement. This wasn't a teacher thing. This was a community thing. And my first civil right leader was David Richardson. I could say David Richardson, Junior or David Richardson. That's all I can think.

DR: What do you mean when you say he was your civil rights leader? What do you remember?

RM: Well, what I remember, going down to my lodge hall. We would stoke a fire. And I would join the NAACP. And we would sit down and my upper classmen, or one of my friends that had graduate, was telling us about the civil right movement. And one thing that was installed in me and I know it, was that I was just as good as anyone else.

DR: So, you participated in the movement yourself?

RM: Yes.

DR: What was the goal and objective?

RM: The goal and objective was to have a better life. To have more education. And to walk as proud as we could. And the thing about it, be an American citizen. I wanted to have the same thing all these other white citizen had. [indistinct 00:38:08] to put that in me.

DR: So, there were no—Before you graduated, or by the time you graduated from Gresham Meggett, there were no white students attending there? It was still a segregated school?

RM: Yes.

DR: Did you want to go to the white school?

RM: No. Because, the fact that I was entangled in—Or I feel like I was just as good or better as anyone. And I respect the teachers. I respect my upper classroom. I was really in a comfort [indistinct 00:38:50]. The reason I was in a comfort [indistinct 00:38:52] is the fact that I started attending these civil right movement. And they would tell me the fact, whatever the rest of this country had I was entitled to it, too.

DR: So, the goal of the civil rights movement was to get equal access and be treated equally?

RM: Amen. That's a 199%.

DR: Was that goal achieved, do you think?

RM: No. It wasn't. But it was a beginning.

DR: And you hope that'll happen.

RM: Right now, we have taken a back step. And the worst thing that bothers me now—Listen, no one in James Island or South Carolina have seen the combat that I have seen. My record proves it. I bust people every day. And when they see me they go out of their way. They ain't never heard a gun fire. And lying about all the combat you've been in. But let me get back to this. My biggest problem is having Russia interfere in my election. When I walked out on that battlefield after the battle and I pick up an AK-47 that had killed so many in my unit. It had Made in Russia. And, in my heart, in my heart, this guy that is the President, he was put there as a puppet for Putin. Now, being a combat soldier, I feel that way and ain't nobody can change me from that.

DR: Let's go back to the difference in the teachers that you had. You stated earlier that you had confidence in your teachers.

RM: Right.

DR: Now, you also stated that your books were secondhand books.

RM: Right, right.

DR: And you also stated, from you went in the military, you recognized that you were equal to the white students, even though you didn't go to the same school.

RM: Right.

DR: How to you square that? How do you get from that point, where you have second class books, or used books, but still felt that you measure up to them after you got out of school?

RM: Well, first of all, it was confidence. And it was really when we were put to the test. I could out do them.

DR: So, that have to be related back to your education.

RM: Yes.

DR: And your teachers.

RM: It was back to my education, the teachers, how they taught me to have self-respect and everything else. I can tell you some episode, but I'll be jumping ahead.

DR: So, even though your books were secondhand books, your making up the difference was because of what your teachers did?

RM: Teachers did it. Yeah. And the way I was pushed into—And another thing I would say, we still had—I had relatives that was living from the 18th century. And they would sit down and tell us [indistinct 00:42:24] things like how the black soldiers—How they served. How they were dressed and everything else. And in some areas of South Carolina, like where my wife come from—

DR: Hm-hmmm [affirmative].

RM: . . . they knew nothing about black soldiers. Until my children were 10 years ahead. What my old relatives have told me about then. And then they made the movie "Glory" about 10 years after I was married. She said, "Oh, you told me that there were all these black solders here." And "Glory" put Charleston right there. Was black soldiers under Sherman. I'm a nut behind history now.

Isaac Moore Jr.

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on February 23, 2019 at W. Gresham Meggett School (Septima P. Clark Academy), James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. David Richardson is the interviewer; Terri Gillett was the technical assistant.

David Richardson: My name is David Richardson. And I am sitting here with Mr-

Isaac Moore: Isaac Moore Junior.

DR: And where do you live now, Mr. Moore?

IM: Currently, I live in North Charleston, 4614 Drifters Way in North Charleston.

DR: And what is your date of birth?

IM: August 2, 1950.

DR: Okay. And where were you born?

IM: James Island, Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: And who were your parents?

IM: Parents was Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Moore Senior and Mary Moore.

DR: Where were they from?

IM: As far as I know they're from Charleston also.

DR: What part of Charleston?

IM: James Island.

DR: Both parents were?

IM: Both parents.

DR: Any particular part of James Island?

IM: Bee Field. We called it B Field, which is an area that's right off of Folly Road I guess about a quarter mile in length where a lot of people live at on James Island.

DR: Tell me what was the occupation of Isaac Moore Senior.

IM: Isaac Moore, he worked at a fertilizer plant called [indistinct 00:01:11] Fertilizer Mill in North Charleston until he retired after 41 years.

DR: Was that the plant that used to process fish into fertilizer?

IM: Yes. Yes. Yes. That was the plant. He worked there. He was a driver, then he worked some in the warehouse.

DR: Okay. And what did your mother do?

IM: My mother mostly was a homemaker working on the green, doing housework and things like that.

DR: Do you have any siblings?

IM: Yes. I have three.

DR: Three siblings? Can you share with us their names?

IM: The names are Mary Alice Filton, her married name, Janice Elaine Howard, and Sheila Milliner.

DR: Are they still residents of Charleston?

IM: Yes. They come back every now and then.

DR: So what other locations are they currently-

IM: The two younger sisters, Sheila and Janice, live in Atlanta, Georgia. And my eldest sister, she lives in Columbus, Ohio.

DR: Did your family – back to redirecting attention to your parents, did they emphasize in your house the value of education?

IM: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Very much so. Matter of fact, we did a lot of reading in our house and things like that.

DR: Who was the main push or encourager among your parents?

IM: Mostly my mother. My mother was very active in things that were going on. Matter of fact, I remember one time she even took us to a march downtown. She was very active in things like that.

DR: So where did you go to high school?

IM: High school, I was at W. Gresham Meggett in high school on the island. James Island.

DR: And also the elementary school here?

IM: Elementary school was at Kings – I guess we call it Kings Highway. A long time ago.

DR: Off of Fort Charleston.

IM: On Fort Charleston Road.

DR: Which school was Three Trees?

IM: Three Trees was one of the schools on the island. I'm not familiar with Three Trees that much. I've read about it, but I'm not familiar with Three Trees.

DR: So tell me where Kings Highway Elementary School was.

IM: Where was it located?

DR: Yes.

IM: Located right down the road from – actually down here. If you just go past the light, go about three miles from here.

DR: Is it beyond St. James?

IM: Yes. Beyond St. James Presbyterian Church. About a quarter mile past there on the left-hand side.

DR: So who was the principal there?

IM: Principal, I don't remember who the principal was.

DR: Perhaps you remember some of your teachers?

IM: Yes. I remember one specific, Mrs. Grant.

DR: Mrs. Grant.

IM: Yes.

DR: Was she the Grant who was also from the island?

IM: Yes.

DR: And do you know where Ms. Grant lived?

IM: No. To tell you the truth, I didn't. I attended in my early years, up until basically seventh grade. Back then we didn't focus too much on teachers or remember who the teachers were. Most of the teachers I remember was my high school teachers.

DR: Was King Highway School a modern school or was it an old school?

IM: For us, I would say it probably was a modern school. It was in good shape.

DR: So when you attended that, it was a segregated school?

IM: No.

DR: No?

IM: No.

DR: And this was in elementary school?

IM: Elementary school.

DR: But you graduated from Gresham Meggett?

IM: Yes.

DR: What year was that?

IM: I graduated in '68 from W. Gresham Meggett.

DR: They were still segregated?

IM: Still segregated. Okay. Segregated, yeah. It was only one race at Kings Highway and W. Gresham Meggett and there was African American, black race. There were no other nationality or race that attended when I was there in high school, elementary or high school.

DR: Okay. And do you remember the name of Louie – it's one of the teachers. I was wondering whether you remember the name. I've forgotten what his last name was now. So what year did you come to Gresham Meggett?

IM: I came to Gresham in my eighth grade. That would have been eight, nine, ten, 11, 12. I graduated in '68. That would have been '64.

DR: So '64. So you were also a classmate of Elaine Chavis?

IM: Elaine Chavis. What's her maiden-

DR: Well, that is her maiden. She's Richardson now.

IM: She's a Richardson now?

DR: Yeah. From Sol Legare.

IM: Elaine Chavis. No, I don't remember her of being one of our classmates. No.

DR: Okay. So you came to Gresham Meggett in '64.

IM: Right.

DR: In what grade?

IM: That would have been eighth grade.

DR: And who were some of your teachers then?

IM: I said my teacher was Mrs. English, Mrs. James, Mr. Breland, Mr. McCray. That's all that can come back to me right now. Mr. Douglas.

DR: Okay. Mr. Douglas was then what? The football coach?

IM: I think he did football. And Mr. Walter, no, was the football coach. I don't remember exactly what Mr. Douglas taught. It could have been one of the coaches.

DR: Who was the principal there?

IM: Mr. Evans.

DR: Okay. All right.

IM: Mr. Evans. I remember him.

DR: Yeah. Okay. What was the climate at Gresham Meggett when you attended?

IM: The climate was good. Everyone knew everyone. Everyone got along well with everyone. I don't think we had too many problems at all at the school.

DR: Do you believe the parents and the teachers had a close supportive relationship?

IM: Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely. I think they were very, very close. Whenever a student got in trouble, you could almost guarantee that the teacher would call the parent and let the parent know. Today they send notes and everything, but it was on hand back then most of the time.

DR: And the parents would respond?

IM: Oh, the parents would respond positively, and if you want to say negatively for the child. The child would be punished for disobeying or being disobedient in class.

DR: I'm going to ask you a question and I want to see what your reaction is going to be. You grew up in – I heard you describing just now what Bee Field community was like.

IM: Right.

DR: I assume that you knew most all of the families, everybody that lived there?

IM: Yes.

DR: So the communities were then sort of a small tight knitted community?

IM: Yes. Very tight.

DR: The term I want to ask you is everybody knew who the "teef" was.

IM: The "teef? "

DR: Yeah. You know what that means?

IM: Well, as far as I know, we didn't have too many "teefs", if you would call it that, back in those days.

DR: But you know what that means?

IM: Yes, I know what it means. Someone who stole from someone else.

DR: But when you said everybody knew who it was, meaning there was no doubt in the community who-

IM: Oh, yes. If someone was identified as a thief, there wasn't any doubt who that person was.

DR: Everybody knew who that person was. Okay.

IM: Yes. Because the community was so small.

DR: Right. Right. Right. Tell me what the climate at Gresham Meggett was in terms of teacher-student relationship.

IM: Oh, it was basically a one-on-one type thing with students. The classes weren't very large. I guess they would average probably no more than about 25. So the teachers had time to get to know the student, and the student know the teacher. And whenever a student would get out of hand, the teacher would definitely respond in one form or another.

DR: So what would be those responses or choices?

IM: Some of the choices were – back then it was corporal punishment we call spanking. It was allowed very much back then, so it wasn't a problem. It wasn't anything to get spanked by the teacher.

DR: Was the principal at the time you were here who was Mr-

IM: Evans.

DR: ...Evans. Was he known to administer corporal punishment?

IM: To my knowledge, yes.

DR: Did you ever suffer from that?

IM: No. No. No. According to my past history and everyone who knew me, I didn't get in trouble.

DR: You didn't get in trouble?

IM: Didn't get in trouble.

DR: Mary would know about that.

IM: Yes. Yes.

DR: Tell me, do you feel that the teachers were competent to prepare you for life after you get out of school?

IM: Yes. Yes.

DR: What do you base that on?

IM: Based on who I am now, basically. Based on my knowledge that I gained after school, where I went with my knowledge and what I did, and how I perform now.

DR: So at '69 is when you left Gresham Meggett?

IM: '68.

DR: '68. Okay. '69 was the year that they closed it.

IM: Yes.

DR: What did you do after you left in '68?

IM: I went in the Military. I went in the Military Air Force.

DR: Okay. And how long did you stay there?

IM: 22 years.

DR: I see. And you were triggered some of your preparation to sustain yourself there to Gresham Meggett?

IM: Right. My behavior and my ability to adjust the discipline. It was a lot to Gresham Meggett and it was a lot to just the neighborhood, the community that made sure

that we, as the children of the community, did well and wasn't disobedient and got in trouble.

DR: So you came along at a time where anybody in that neighborhood or an adult could have disciplined you if you had done something?

IM: Right. Anybody. And then again, as you might know, of others who might know, when you got home, the word got home and you got another punishment.

DR: Most of the people they had no telephone. How did-

IM: It was a word of mouth type thing. People called know someone and they'd call someone, and they'd see somebody in the street, and before you know it, it got around.

DR: It got around, huh?

IM: The grapevine.

DR: I hear that. So there was no disciplinary problem in the neighborhood or the school because of the close relationship that you had with the neighbors and your parents?

IM: Right.

DR: And then the teachers benefited from that?

IM: Right. They did.

DR: Do you recall many incidents where a student might have attempted to disrupt the classes?

IM: I don't think too many students during that time dared to disrupt any teacher while they were teaching or made a lot of noise or was disruptive in the class. I didn't see hardly any of that. The teachers were strict. They had their particular rules for their classroom, and you disobeyed the rules, they would take action.

DR: So there was also a close relationship and respect for the teachers then?

IM: Yes. Yes.

DR: And you think the teachers gave you all the best service that they could have?

IM: Yes.

DR: Now, you said you went to the Air Force?

IM: Yes, I did.

DR: And how long did you remain in the Air Force?

IM: 22 years.

DR: What did that opportunity did that provide you? Or a job?

IM: Well, I was able to further my education after I got out based on what I learned in high school and everything. I had my high school diploma. I was successful in getting that when I left. So I started college courses in the Military. I went onto – got my degree after a couple of years. I went and enlisted, then after I got my degree applied for the officer commissioner program, got commissioned as an officer.

DR: So when you came out, what position-

IM: I retired as a captain.

DR: As a captain. I see.

IM: Yes.

DR: Now, you said that it provided you an opportunity to pursue your education.

IM: Yes.

DR: What do you mean by that?

IM: Well, I had I guess that eagerness you would call it to want to achieve more than – our teachers encouraged us, to coin a phrase, to be more than you can be or as one of the Military say it. So we were always encouraged to do more. Not less. We were never discouraged saying that we couldn't do anything or we couldn't be anybody. I don't ever remember any teacher ever saying that we would be not successful.

DR: So even though you attended segregated schools, it did not affect your self-esteem or your belief in your own ability?

IM: No. It didn't.

DR: What do you attribute that to? Such as your own belief?

IM: Just the belief that the teachers had that they can do anything also. And again, they never discouraged us from doing whatever we might decide we wanted to do. If we wanted to go to the Military, they didn't discourage us, or we wanted to, say, we wanted to be a doctor or anything else. They never discouraged us from that, but encourage us and give us advice on what we needed to do. Matter of fact, in taking the SAT and other things early than we needed to. They encouraged us to do that.

DR: What did you study when you pursued your college experience?

IM: I studied mostly political science. I went into the politics, political area. I studied politics. A lot of history courses.

DR: So most of that would be a BS.

IM: I have a BA in political science. Then later on when I decided to go into the ministry, I attained a master's degree in divinity and pastoral counseling.

DR: So you now hold how many degrees?

IM: Two degrees. Two full degrees with a minor in pastoral care and counseling.

DR: That's not a doctorate degree?

IM: No. No. I don't have a doctorate.

DR: I see. So now do you have a church?

IM: Yes.

DR: And where is that church?

IM: Church is in what we call Johns Island Red Top area.

DR: Okay. And what denomination is that?

IM: Presbyterian.

DR: Very good. Okay. So you first started school at Kings Highway?

IM: Kings Highway.

DR: You're aware of the fact that St. James Presbyterian Church also had a school?

IM: Yes.

DR: There were a lot of students who eventually came out of Gresham Meggett at the early years started at St. James.

IM: Yes.

DR: Yes. Okay. Anything else that you'd like to add that we have not covered?

IM: No. I think, again, we were highly encouraged at Meggett to be the best that we can be. And I think the teachers encouraged us that. And again, there was a good relationship between the students and the teachers.

DR: During the period that you came along, where were civil rights issues?

IM: Oh, they were in the forefront. They were always there for us to see that there were problems in the system, there were problems in the United States with fair treatment. There's always been a problem there. On James Island, we didn't see that a lot, because of the segregation. We were mostly with our own race more than anything else until schools were desegregated around '69.

DR: Do you think one of the contributing factors about the absence of some of those issues on James Island goes back to the fact that so many of the families are related here?

IM: Yes and no. I think even that a lot of them weren't related, we still had the same values. The values were basically the same. The community raising the child values were the same, whether related or not. It didn't make a difference whether you were related to somebody. Discipline was accorded to any child, whether they were your relative or not.

DR: Let me ask you a side question. How many churches were there on James Island at the time? African American churches.

IM: I would say probably about five or six that I can think of, predominantly big churches, well known churches.

DR: Do you remember how many there were originally during the time you were probably in elementary school?

IM: Probably three main churches that I know of.

DR: Do you remember what they are?

IM: Yes. First Baptist Church, St. James and Payne RMUE.

DR: And there was one more.

IM: Bethel on-

DR: Yes. So there was about four.

IM: ...Central Park. Yes.

DR: Now, do you know what the commonality among those four different denominations were?

IM: No.

DR: Okay. Were you aware that each one of those churches had cross family members?

IM: Yes. I was aware of that. Yes. Family members from all the churches were attending, you might see a mother at one church and a father at another church. That's how, in my family, were. My father attended First Baptist, but my mother's family history from three generational were Presbyterian. So my mother attended Presbyterian. So we would go to my mother's church in the morning, and then in the evening time we would go with my father.

DR: Thank you. That's what I was trying to pull up. Even though there was four different churches, everybody's family was in that four churches.

IM: Yes.

DR: It had links.

IM: Yes. Sometimes doing that their lifetime. Yes.

DR: And well, each of them during the summer months used to have anniversaries.

IM: Anniversaries, summer programs.

DR: Either there might be a choir or it may be the usher boy.

IM: Right.

DR: And they would all-

IM: Come together.

DR: ...visit each others' churches.

IM: Yes.

DR: Yeah. Yeah. Well, Mr. Moore, it's a pleasure.

IM: Thank you.

DR: And I think some of the information that we both knew that you shared with us.
Okay?

IM: All right.

DR: Yeah. I think-

Thomas Prioleau

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on February 23, 2019 at W. Gresham Meggett School (Septima P. Clark Academy), James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed is the interviewer; Terri Gillett was the technical assistant.

Thomas Prioleau: But anyhow, back in the days, from the time that my great grandfather was around, the name was called Prioleau [PRAY-low] because it's colloquial. See? And when we came to school here, I took a class in French. And she told us how to pronounce the name. It's Prioleau [PRE-law]. "Are you sure?" They said, "Yes. It's Pri, P-R-I-O- leau." Which means before water. That's all I know.

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Mary Beth Reed: Wow. That's a good learning curve. Thank you.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Thank you for coming. This is an honor for me. I think we're on taping. I just need to say the obvious that my name is Mary Beth Reed. We're here at W. Gresham Meggett School interviewing Thomas Prioleau. I got it.

TP: Yes.

MBR: The class of 19-

TP: '57.

MBR: It is '57. Okay.

TP: Yes.

MBR: What I'd like to do in the interview is talk a little bit first about your background, about your family, who you are. Where were you born? And when? I guess that's the first.

TP: First question. Is that recording?

MBR: Yes.

TP: Does it stop? Even when we're doing this?

MBR: When we do what we're doing now, no. But that's okay. That's why we edit.

TP: I was born here on James Island. I am a great grandson of this gentleman.

MBR: James.

TP: James Prioleau. Who was a former slave from Saint Stephen, South Carolina, an area called Pineville, South Carolina. That's about 56 miles from here. And my mother's name is Florence Prioleau Gilliard. Gilliard is a married name. My father's name was Rutledge Smith. We lost him at an early age when I was between four and five. Yes.

MBR: Was he from South Carolina?

TP: Yes. He is from an area called Scott Hill. It's sort of like due east of here. He was a carpenter, a mechanic carpenter and cabinet maker. My mother became a single parent. I am the youngest of her children.

MBR: How many?

TP: I had several older brother and sisters. Presently, I am the youngest of my mother's children and the youngest of my father's children. I now have a sister who is 92 years old. She's still alive. She lives on Sol Legare. She and I are very close.

MBR: So she's 92.

TP: Yes.

MBR: So were you born on James Island?

TP: Yes.

MBR: You were?

TP: I was born 1938, February 1st. I would like to show you a treat. Of where I was born.

MBR: This is wonderful.

TP: Yes.

MBR: This is wonderful. Tape.

TP: Yes. I was going to use rubber band, but then I wasn't sure which would work out better. So.

MBR: There you go.

TP: I decided to use the tape.

MBR: Now, is this a photograph of your home where you grew up?

TP: Of my great grandfather's house. So that house there, okay? I was born – by midwife I was born in that house and later taken to the hospital to be checked out. That house is called the Big House, because of the fact that it was constructed by my great grandfather. It was the largest house on James Island during that era, and it was the strongest house. As the story goes, they used to meet there on the weekend, which was primarily Saturday. The guys used to get up under the tree, tell their stories, the guys from the surrounding areas, and they would grind their corn into flour and grits. My great grandfather, James Prioleau, traveled from Pineville with the grist mill, which is cast iron, on his shoulder. It took him several days until he reached the edge of the water of Charleston. And then he caught a ride on a paddle boat from the shores of Charleston over to the shores of James Island. And eventually, they would wind up on Taylor Island, which is across the water from Sol Legare. Other ex-slaves lived over there, and that's where they had the headquarters. So then when it was time to go to work, they worked on the Grimball Plantation, they worked on the Townsend plantation, and so forth and so on.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

TP: So therefore, at the present time, the Prioleau family still own five acres of property over there on Taylor Island. One of the other things that took place at the Big House was that they met there to anyone that congregated religiously. And that was the meeting house. And when the serious hurricane came around, and the weather was treacherous, they congregated at that house because of the fact that it was strong and it was well built. Now, that house was about almost two stories.

MBR: Great. You can see it.

TP: And it was elevated. Now, the house next door to it, okay? Tell you the big name that they called that area. They called it Bic House B-I-C. Bic House.

MBR: Bic House.

TP: That was colloquial for Big House. And I wrote an ode about one of my first cousins who lived in the first house here. Okay? Because he died a couple years ago, and he was my mentor. He was my first cousin. And he taught us a lot of things in that little community. Because as you can see, there are four houses. That's his house, George Prioleau. The next house is Johnny Prioleau, my uncle. The oldest brother of my mother. And that house was the youngest brother's house. So also Prioleau. So there were four houses in that sector. And I wrote that ode for him because I was unable to attend his funeral, and I wanted to leave that to his family. It hangs about four or five feet tall from here up. I have it hanging in my den. I just finished it last year. Okay. And go ahead.

MBR: Wow. No. So how did your mom end up here on James Island?

TP: My mom was the daughter of Thomas Prioleau. See, these are the descendants of James Prioleau.

MBR: Oh, I love the chain. That's really cool.

TP: Okay?

MBR: So this was her father? Thomas?

TP: Thomas was her father. Now, Ned Roper, that's his grandmother. Great grandmother.

MBR: Okay.

TP: Lucy Roper's Ned Roper's great grandmother. A lot of these –people that you will come in contact with here will be related to him. Him and her. He met his wife in Saint Stephen. And after he had settled and built a home, he finally went back there and he got her. Okay? And they settled down and they co-habitat with them, became married and they produced their children.

MBR: All right.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Well, so let's go back to your childhood.

TP: Yes.

MBR: So your mom was a single mom.

TP: My mom became a single mom after being married to a Gilliard. When I was born, that puts about eight to ten years after she had been separated, and finally when I was a little boy she filed – the divorce was finally granted. Yes.

MBR: So when growing up, there was your mom and how many siblings in the house?

TP: Okay. There was my mom when I was a little boy.

MBR: And your mom's first name?

TP: Florence.

MBR: Florence. Okay.

TP: Florence Prioleau Gilliard.

MBR: Gilliard. Okay.

TP: Her nickname was Ida.

MBR: Ida?

TP: Yes.

MBR: Okay.

TP: And growing up, okay, there were my two older brothers, and another brother who was my elder brother who was ten years older than I am. Okay? My sister, who was the third child, she remained in Philadelphia with her father, because of the fact that she was born with polio, so therefore they thought that medically, it was better for her to live there. And she lived there all of her life, basically. And so she passed away about – she was about 80. I think she was about 84 when she passed away. Yes.

MBR: Wow. I can see. I can understand.

TP: And the two older brothers, they worked locally.

MBR: Doing?

TP: They wasn't a high school on James Island. They finished school at the school level of either sixth to eighth grade. And then they went to work.

MBR: What school did they attend?

TP: They attended Society Corner School. Yes. Because that was the only elementary and – I would say middle school, but it was all combined together on that area of James Island.

MBR: I see. So they went to Society Corner and after getting out of elementary school went to work.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Do you know what they did for a living?

TP: My second oldest brother, he worked in the field of carpentry as a, what would you say? A tradesman? An apprentice. And the older brother, he was in the craft area when he worked for a gentleman on Folly Beach and I think it was as an apprentice. He learned metallurgy. Yes. Welding sort of and the stuff of that nature. Then the two were drafted into the service. Went to the service and they served there for the tour, I think it was three or four years. They went to I think it's Korea or the one before that. And they did their tour. I think they went to Germany, and they went elsewhere, and then finally they came back to the States. And afterwards, my oldest brother, he wanted to continue his education. So therefore he went to night school and day school when the government paid for them going to school. And he attended Burke School, High School until he got his diploma. And afterwards, he went to Pittsburgh and somewhere else. I don't remember exactly. Where he learned watch repairs and jewelry making. And he continued that until he got married, and then he went to Columbia South Carolina wherein he learned to work at a shop and then how to repair jewelry and all that stuff, until he said later on that was not enough money because it wasn't frequent enough. So therefore, age, I would say, he'd be 45 or 50 when he studied for the postal service exam and he became a postman working in the post office. Very difficult for him, because he was left handed, so he had to learn that skill. Okay.

The second oldest brother, he went back to Philadelphia because his father was a carpenter, so he worked constructions intermittently between his father and the Navy Yard until he passed. And he finally retired, and then he remained there because his children were there.

Now, the oldest brother, he retired too afterwards. And he stayed in Columbia and he stayed there until he became physically incapable and he moved to the assistant living home on Secessionville Road until he passed away.

MBR: Okay.

TP: And when he passed away, he was 88 I would say. Somewhere around there.

MBR: You have good genes.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Well, it sounds like that you did mention – did your mother go to school? Did your mother and your father? I guess what I'm saying, how important was education in your family?

TP: Oh, it was important.

MBR: Okay.

TP: Between that man and this man here, very important.

MBR: James and Thomas. Okay.

TP: Yes. My mother went to grade school until she I think may have completed the fifth or sixth grade. And her teacher, the principal of the school – because in those days, the classes were small, so you only had a few teachers where one teacher would teach several subject matters. So anyhow, her teacher and principal called Mr. Hays became attached to her because of the type of person she was. Kind hearted, patient, and smart. Once he wanted to send her to school to become trained and become a teacher. However, she would have loved to do it, but Grandpa said, "I need her." Because at that point, his wife, Mary, had become somewhat ill and was sort of sickly, because she had had several children. And he needed her home to help to raise the younger children, and also to help him to run the store. He had a little country store that was located in the field next to that house.

MBR: Now, this is located where?

TP: Due west of here.

MBR: Okay.

TP: And due south.

MBR: And on James Island?

TP: Oh, yes.

MBR: Okay.

TP: Yes.

MBR: And then neighborhood, what would you call it? It's Bic Town?

TP: Bic House.

MBR: Bic House.

TP: Or Big House.

MBR: Big House.

TP: If you go-

MBR: So that's a name that people would say, "I'm going to Bic House," and – excuse me. People would know, "Bic House."

TP: Yes.

MBR: Okay.

TP: They would know. Because if you take this road, make a left, you travel around through Barn Hill, that's the section over there on the other side of the elementary school. And you will travel to a road which is now called Reverend Paris Williams Lane or Drive. You make that right and you go down until you hit the curve. When you hit the curve, James Prioleau Road will be by the area. The road that runs from that corner to Folly Road. Okay? And so my grandfather, Thomas Prioleau, was a multifaceted entrepreneur.

MBR: Store.

TP: He had the store. He had the farm. He had horse and buggy services to carry people's vegetables and stuff to the landing down in Fort Johnson.

MBR: And truck gardening kind of vegetables?

TP: They didn't have trucks back then.

MBR: No, I'm not thinking truck.

TP: Oh, like truck farms.

MBR: Yes. Vegetables. Yeah.

TP: Yes. Yes. And he had surreys which is fancy cart-driven vehicles that carried the aristocrats from their location to the landing at Charleston. He had wagons that did the same thing.

And so therefore, he was highly operative local personnels, relatives and local people. They worked for him. And so therefore, that's why Grandpa needed Grandma – I mean my mother to supervise and to work and to keep those children in line.

MBR: She was part of the family business.

TP: Yes. Yes. So that's why she wasn't able to go beyond that.

MBR: When you were growing up, where did you attend elementary school?

TP: Same place.

MBR: Same place?

TP: Yes. The major part of it, I attended Society Corner Elementary School from pre-K, kindergarten through the fifth grade. And when we reached the education level of the sixth grade, we had to walk to a lodge hall school. One room school, the sixth grade.

MBR: Lodge hall?

TP: Yes. Called Cherabene Lodge Hall. We had to go there, a one-room school to be taught in the sixth grade.

MBR: How far was that from your house? Tell me about that.

TP: Five miles. And we walked.

MBR: Did you go everyday?

TP: You had better. Five miles.

MBR: Who walked with you?

TP: My cousin and other neighboring folks. It was a community that consisted majorly of family people. And we walked through the fields. We walked down the dirt roads. We walked through the twists and turns until we arrived at school.

MBR: So that was sixth grade.

TP: That was sixth grade.

MBR: And it was in a lodge building? It wasn't in a school building, per say?

TP: They utilized it, the community rented it from the lodge. Okay? For us to go to school there because we didn't have any room at Society Corner School. Okay? And we were the top grade at that point, because the others had graduated and moved on. Okay? Now, it was fun going to school. A lot of times. We always enjoyed going to school. Sometimes we wanted to stay home and be active, though our sickness was a little rehearsed, and it was because of the fact that we wanted to stay home and play hooky, but then too, your schoolwork was sent home for you to do. And I remember one occasion is that I was home, everybody else was at school. My mom was over in the field working to help to support the family, and the sun was so beautiful. And I was sitting in the – you see where that window is? I was sitting there in the corner at that window, the sun was so nice and strong. So I said, "Well, Mom is not around. I'm going to sneak outside and I'm going to play in the dirt for a little while. Do something." And my mother came home and she caught me. And I got a whipping for that. But anyhow, it was fun. I enjoyed the life there.

MBR: Then at the lodge school, was that sixth, seventh and eighth grades then?

TP: No. At the lodge school it was only sixth grade.

MBR: It was only sixth grade?

TP: Yes.

MBR: Okay.

TP: And then after we reached the seventh grade, okay? The previous students, they left and they went onto – I don't know. Grade school. I'm not sure. Not yet. But here's what happened. The population of the school has increased to the extent when it was warranted for them to build another school. And this was where this building here and the officer then became W. Gresham Meggett Elementary School. Okay? We came in as seventh graders. And the class before us came in as eighth graders.

MBR: I see.

TP: And after they graduated, they went to Burke High School in Charleston where they commuted by bus.

MBR: So they went by bus?

TP: They went by bus. Okay? And we remained here and we were very active. I think we changed a couple of classes in the seventh grade. Okay? It was fun.

MBR: I wonder about that.

TP: We were the big honchos. Okay? In the seventh grade. But the others who were in the eighth grade, they remained here until they graduated.

MBR: I see. So that's how they transitioned it to make it work.

TP: Yes.

MBR: When you heard – I don't know if you did hear. How did the community learn that there was going to be a new school here? That this school was coming? What did the community think about it?

TP: They were pro. They were very positive about it. Because it would be amazing if you was to hear the story behind the transition and what took place. As I told you before how my great grandfather migrated here. Okay? And they even worked on the Grimball Plantation, Scobby Plantation or they worked on the Nungezer Plantation. Those are the areas of source of income. Okay? To support the families. My great grandfather, James Prioleau, worked for the Grimball Plantation, Benjamin Grimball Senior. He owned – I don't think this is a portion of this property. Maybe at one time. But on the other side where the cemetery is and the elementary school, all of that is his. And back of here. Over on the left-hand side going around the curve, all of that belonged to him all the way to the water. My great grandfather at one time gradually bought 101 to 111 acres of property in all that area that I mentioned back over there. Okay? And across Folly Road, and in an area called Hazard, and an area called Pasture, and an area called Toby. Those areas – it keeps getting away from me – consist of the properties that he owned. And he took it and he dispersed it amongst. This is his oldest daughter here.

MBR: Maria.

TP: Maria. Okay? He dispersed it to each one of them individually. Sander was the oldest son, but he returned to St. Stephen because his wife – I think suddenly became ill and she didn't like it down here. Well, okay.

MBR: But the place names are so interesting. Toby, Hazard.

TP: Toby, Hazard.

MBR: And there's one other one you mentioned.

TP: Cross Pasture.

MBR: Cross the Pasture.

TP: Pasture and Asburn [phonetic 00:00:29]. Yeah.

MBR: So those were the place names that you knew. I think it's so interesting.

TP: Yes. Yes. Because you heard of it, you know.

MBR: Well, now I'm going to talk about Gresham Meggett.

TP: Yes.

MBR: How different was it, school experience-wise, for you coming in here to what would be a new modern looking school?

TP: Yes.

MBR: Do you remember your first impressions? I don't know.

TP: It was marvelous. Because we used to have to cut wood at times. The older guys would have to cut wood at times to bring into the school and replenish the wood that had already burnt to keep us warm in these one room buildings. We always had these potbelly stoves. The one that's shaped like this. And to come here, it was the greatest treat in the world. The distance of walking was shorter.

MBR: Was it?

TP: Yes.

MBR: Oh, of course. Now that I'm thinking. Yes.

TP: From Society from our house, Bic House, some kids traveled further than that to Society Corner School.

MBR: You're right.

TP: A big walk filled with James Prioleau Road. Okay? Out to Grimball Road. And then we came – well, we would cut through different peoples' property, which were all family, to arrive here. And I remember it was fun. We used to play, laugh, joke. Yes.

MBR: And you were in the first building.

TP: We were in the first building.

MBR: Okay.

TP: It was Baxter. I think the first name was Nancy Madison. It was Nancy Madison Baxter who was the teacher and principal from the old elementary school. And she came here. And the superintendent had wanted her to let them name the school after her, and she said no because of the fact that you've achieved more than I have, so therefore, you should have it be named after you. And he still was opposed or what have you. So finally, they settled on that. So we went to the school, brand new school, brand new desks and all that stuff. Lighting. You know? It was a treat. We were the big dogs. Okay? Second in line, because as I said, the eighth graders were first. Yeah.

MBR: But still. It was still so new.

TP: Oh, yes. New smell, new.

MBR: How many of you were in a class? Remember? Or did you have like a homeroom? How did it-

TP: We had-

MBR: Well, you were still in elementary school then.

TP: We were still in elementary school.

MBR: Any switching of classes? I mean, you mentioned that-

TP: I think we switched only a couple of classes in the seventh grade. And we did the same in the eighth grade. And it was a treat, because we were like – all the relatives that went to Burke School. They were switching classes. They said, "Wow. Wow. A different teacher." But we were always positive. We wanted to succeed. We did not want to remain on that farm all the days of our life, because we saw what our parents went through and other family members. And we were sick and tired of having to work so hard. You had to work in the fields. You had to help harvest the vegetables, carry it. Oh, gosh. Hard work. And then you would have to wash the vegetables so

that it could be presentable to take to the market. It was hard work. Cold weather, hot weather. We had very little time to spare to play, unlike some kids. Some children were more blessed than we were. Their parents worked other jobs locally, other tasks, other jobs away from home.

MBR: When you came here, was it harder scholastically? I mean, what were the teachers like? Did they challenge you to grow? Like what value system did they work with?

TP: Yes. Very inspirational. Most of them. We only had a few teachers who were from the island. Either this island or Johns Island. The others were from Charleston, the city. And elementary school, when we first started we had Mrs. Chisolm, which was a local, from a local family here. And we had Mrs. Blunt. She was from the city. And you had Mrs. Bryant. She was from the city. But there were positive and strict teachers. Very influential. They'd make you learn. If you didn't learn, then they'll take whatever action necessary to help you to learn. But we had the drive and the eagerness to want to learn, want to succeed. And our parents were behind us. Key factor. Parents. Parental concern, interest, influence. Okay?

There were a lot of clichés that we were going by, because of the fact that our four parents had those clichés. One of them I'll never forget. My mother used to always say, and her brothers and the other relatives would say, "If you want sweet meat, you have to bear the pain in the head." Okay? That's the Gullah cliché. First of all, the cliché. And they would also tell you so that you could remain busy and occupied constructively, "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." And they have a name, one after the other, as we communicate and associate with the members of the community. So many times you would hear them over and over. And we would say, "Tired of hearing it. That's something you say the same thing over and over. I'm tired of it." But I'm going to say at 81, prior to reaching 81, I've lived to see those clichés become a reality.

MBR: That's a beautiful way to put it. You talk really inspiring about parents' involvement at Meggett.

TP: Oh, yes.

MBR: I mean, when we say that, is that just making sure your child's ready and at school? Or were there organizations that they met? Did they meet with teachers?

TP: Yes. The parents knew what they came up against when they were being nurturing and assisting in the family. Okay? So they wanted better things for the children. Schools there. So you go to school so that you could learn. Okay? And whenever there was a function, for example, they used to hold PTA meetings amongst the school and the teachers and the family. These were sometimes four times per year. Yeah. And they would call it a tea, on a Sunday afternoon. And especially the ladies. Not the men.

And they would sit and discuss different things about education. Yeah. That's the same thing as back to school night. Okay? When you would go and you would sit in a group, and it's an organized group. You had a secretary, you had a treasurer, you had a parliamentarian, they had a treasurer. Those were the members of the organization. Okay? Would choose who would fulfill other positions, and they'd vote upon it. They were organized. And they used to get a kick out of it. They used to be dressed up and they would go to the tea. Okay? No kids were permitted to be around. And they would sit and talk. And then it wasn't that many teachers who taught your children, so therefore you could sit and speak to them one-on-one about your child. And we would be happy to know that my mother or parent met my teacher, and what did they say about me? It was very intriguing.

MBR: No, back to school night?

TP: It wasn't back to school night. It was similar to back to school night, but just a little more different, because you had a smaller nucleus.

MBR: I got you.

TP: Okay? And I just used that as a comparative example. And for us to leave and go to Charleston, the children can either go to the city, or the parents leave and go to the city. And they meet one of our teachers in the street, in the store. That was an awesome treat for your parents to come home and say, "I saw your teacher." "You did? Which one?" And so they would tell you. "What did they say about me?" It's a heck of an educational experience. It taught us so many things. We used to look forward to come to school daily. Look forward to come, go to classes, especially when we were changing classes. We couldn't wait to get to our French class, which was based upon what was being discussed and what people were learning. We couldn't wait until we could go to our math class and see what were we going to do today? And we were eager, most of us were eager and ready to participate, because we wanted to be top of the class. Okay? Or to be with the upper class.

Now when we reached high school, well, my cousin, William, he and I were the go getters amongst our group, our community. We had others who were smarter than me, mostly, but William was very competitive because of the fact that he had older brothers and sisters who were in high school, so therefore they had more influence upon him because they communicated on different levels. Now, for example, myself, I was the only child in the house with my mom. Okay? Occasionally, my cousin who was six years older than I am – no, five years. I'm sorry. Because he's 86 and I'm 80. Okay? He used to be my role model then because we were at a closer comparative age group. Okay? Wherein my elder brother, he was five years older than him. But as I said, in my – excuse me. William, his IQ and degree of intelligence was higher than mine. He graduated I think as – well let me put it to you this way. He was the only one

out of our group who went to college and receive a high enough score that he had a full scholarship. Okay?

In high school, there were ten of us who were amongst the top ten of the class in 1957. I was number nine or number ten. William was number two or number three. And from the class of 1957, five of us went to a four-year college. Two went to – I think they also went to a four-year college, but elsewhere, and other than the state of South Carolina. And two to three went to an area trade college, which is a two-year vocational college. And a couple of them went to New York. One went to work for the phone company, and she was about the brightest. She's a high scholar, but she didn't want to go to college. The other one, another one of the top ten, she went to clerical school in New York. And a third one went also back to New York Telephone Company and retired from that.

MBR: That's pretty good odds for a small class of what? 26?

TP: 26 or 27.

MBR: Yeah.

TP: But there were numerous ones of us, because I count as many as – when we first entered, there was about 34. Okay? Several of them have passed away. But believe it or not, it's still about 22 to 20 of us that are still alive.

MBR: That's fantastic.

TP: Yes.

MBR: You were used to the school, but you went to elementary school here a little bit.

TP: Yes.

MBR: But, as you say, high school has a whole different feel to it. So you got to go to that second – when they built the new addition on, you also had that new school experience that you started, too.

TP: Yes.

MBR: You switched classes.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Were there teachers that had great meaning to you? Were there mentors that when you look back?

TP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. If I recall correctly, we watched that school being built from the front vestibule, the principal office in the front. We watched the entire development of that school. Cafeteria, all of it. All the way along and the other leg. We used to sit in English class back in the elementary section and watch those workers work as we were learning. We watched them work. H.A. Decosta, who was the contractor, built I think the entire school. I think he built his first part. My brother wound up working for him. And the elder brother, who's ten years older than me, he's worked for him and he also worked for Henry "Bubba" Smith [phonetic 00:17:50] who was also a contractor in Charleston. And those two contractors pulled together one main contractor and the other one was a sub. And to show you how much of a small world it was, I learned about that after I went to college. About them, because of the fact that I was in transient and it was a little local enough to know more he worked for because I would only come home occasionally.

MBR: Well, you mentioned earlier that your class planted the trees out front.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Which are incredible today.

TP: Yes. Right.

MBR: Was that something – did all classes plant trees?

TP: No.

MBR: Or was this a once-

TP: No.

MBR: An event. Let me put it that way.

TP: It's because of the fact that we were the ninth graders, and we took agriculture. Agriculture was a part of our curriculum. The second phase was horticulture. And when we were first assigned to the class, as much farming as we do, why do I have to learn about agriculture? You know? Needless to say, the teacher was our cousin. Yes. Our agriculture teacher name was Mr. William Richardson. He was the son of one of my mother's first cousins. Okay? My grandfather, Thomas Prioleau, married to his grandmother. Okay? Because my grandmother's name was Mary Smalls. His grandmother's name was Betsy Smalls. And there were several other sisters.

MBR: Oh, boy. The connections. I think we need to write on a big table and do the family trees.

TP: Oh, yes. It's-

MBR: Complicated.

TP: Yes. It's complicated.

MBR: But interesting.

TP: Yes. Yes. And it tells a story. This book consists of five generations up to six and going on seven generations.

MBR: Oh, my goodness. Oh, we'd love to be able to scan it if we could.

TP: What? The whole book?

MBR: Well, yeah. We'd go fast. But look. Look at this.

TP: See? See how it looks?

MBR: Amazing. So I just met the Smalls out front. There were Carol and Clyde Smalls.

TP: Okay. But this is a different family.

MBR: Okay. All right.

TP: I thought I saw Clyde. He was coming towards me and he got distracted. I haven't seen – okay. Clyde is related to – I know his grandmother. We used to call her Ms. Toad. It was Toad. I don't know. I think it was Toad Brolin. Yeah. That may have been her nickname.

MBR: But, no. This is an impressive piece of work.

TP: Yeah. They did a job on this thing. See, for example, I'll show you. And they show the history. They don't have a picture of my – see?

MBR: Right.

TP: Maria Blanche Prioleau. Mc Neil is the last name. Look at the picture. That's her. That is her picture.

MBR: That is wonderful.

TP: David will tell you a story. He gets carried away about her, because see right here?

MBR: Yeah.

TP: James and Betty Judge. Maria is the first child. And these are – Maria married Dan McNeil. And these are all the children. And then it transcended, break down, you know, who they were married to and how many offspring they had and so forth and so on.

MBR: This is great.

TP: Yeah.

MBR: No. If I could, like maybe after the interview, take a look at it, that would be great.

TP: Sure. And see Sancho? Sancho was the oldest son.

MBR: Now we have Sancho?

TP: Sancho.

MBR: Sander [phonetic 00:01:12].

TP: The same as Sander. But Sancho was the nickname.

MBR: Sancho.

TP: Sancho.

MBR: Sancho.

TP: S-A-N-C-H-O.

MBR: I see it.

TP: See? And it goes on. What's her name? Ellen Prioleau.

MBR: Ellen? No. It's great.

TP: And well, from time to time, I go back through it to find out who was who.

MBR: Yeah.

TP: Yes. Ellen Prioleau. She was born. I mean, she married a Moore. Okay?

MBR: There's a Mr. Wilder here.

TP: Yeah. And then near the back, there's that handsome fellow. That's my grandfather.

MBR: That's your grandfather?

TP: Yes.

MBR: So this is James?

TP: No. That's Thomas.

MBR: Thomas. Excuse me.

TP: That's Thomas.

MBR: That's right. Thomas.

TP: Okay. James was great grandfather.

MBR: Great grandfather was James.

TP: Yeah. Now, my uncle who lived in this house, his name was Joseph. Okay? He and my grandfather, he looked like his dad. See?

MBR: He did.

TP: Yeah. Joseph, look how he has a small face just like the-

MBR: He does. He has a small face.

TP: Yes. Yes. Yes. Now see, these two houses here are built alike. Same style. And that's my Uncle Jacob, that's his house. Okay? He owns that car. He's the only one that had a car for a long time. Johnny never had a car. He was the oldest, but he never had a car. But he made equitable money. They farmed, they worked at the Navy yard. The two of them. And then he went to the Navy yard later. And then I have an aunt – we had an aunt who was my mother's youngest sister. She died about three years ago at 9-9. At 99.

MBR: Really. You have a lot of-

TP: And they went to school at Society Corner. Okay? And there were three young ladies who went to school together and they were friends in school, and they were friends out of school, all of their life basically. My aunt, which was my mom's baby sister, she was the oldest. There is a lady who's still living now, and she is a Moore. She is, I think, going on 103.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

TP: She lives on Scott Hill, which is an extension of Grimball Road on the other side of Folly Road. When my aunt was sick in the nursing home, she was still driving. And she said that, "I drive fast, too." I said, "You do?" I said, "You're not supposed to." She said, "Hey, I can handle it." She gave up her license I think about three – four years ago.

MBR: It's hard.

TP: Yeah.

MBR: It's hard giving that up.

TP: And she told her daughter that she would quit driving if she was to come home and live with her or something. I can't remember.

MBR: They worked it out. Yeah.

TP: Yeah. But she still drove well and she had a nice car. And they did a nice write up on her at age, I think, 100 or 101. The News Inquirer or Post Inquirer.

MBR: Well, you get to be 100 and you should have your own news.

TP: Yes. And she was still gardening. She planted her okras, tomatoes and whatever. And then she would say "it's keeping me alive. It's therapy food. Yes.

MBR: Well, I'm going to bring it back. No. This is good. I want to look at it. Your family history is just fantastic.

TP: Yes.

MBR: I wanted to ask you a couple questions. You came in here as elementary school. You go to high school here. I didn't find out, did you play sports or anything? Were there proms here?

TP: Oh, yes.

MBR: And all that?

TP: Oh, yes.

MBR: You had the whole trimmings, so to speak?

TP: Oh, yes. The whole magilla of high school took place here. As I said, we were the example setters. We were pace runners.

MBR: Okay. Neat.

TP: And on that note, we were so dedicated and so enthusiastic and so motivated to achieve until we were told by numerous persons from the grades behind us that, "You guys set the bar high." I said, "Really?" He said, "Man, you all were something else. You all set the bar very high." And we did. We weren't playing. We wanted to make it.

MBR: That's great. Well, when-

TP: Go ahead.

MBR: No. I'm trying to get a feel for the larger context. So you have obviously come into a new school the opportunity that many had offered. It was great. At the same time, you have the country going through trying to figure out racism, trying to figure out race.

TP: Yes. Yes.

MBR: And you had kids in Charleston, some of them becoming what they called the first children integrating.

TP: Yes.

MBR: What was your perception at that time as kids? Did you learn or know about that greater world that was going on and what was going on? Or was it more heads down and do your work? You know what I mean? When you're in high school, you listen to the radio a little bit more. What do you think?

TP: We didn't focus upon things of that nature, because we were separated. And our concern was to excel. Okay? We didn't think about the fact that we were going to one day possibly come together. You know? We wanted to excel. Okay? And move on. We were given the older textbooks. Some textbooks were torn, ragged, pages

missing, dirty. But we were given the leftovers. There were times when we didn't have the appropriate writing materials. Okay?

The chalk and the chalkboard was old, dilapidated. You went by, it would screech as the teachers write on the board. Okay? We were considered a second class in that we didn't need. The only time that we got new books was when the old books were so dilapidated they were thrown away. For example, "Winky," the First Reader and primer. Those books were basically new. "Jack and Jill." Those books were soft cover. We would get them, like I say, amazingly enough. When we got to the first reader, second reader that happened, those were the hardcovers. And then those books were the ones that we would be getting as used books, because of the fact that the new ones . Okay? Even at that, we had to preserve it. We had to cover them even with brown papers, newspaper, whatever.

MBR: You covered your book?

TP: Covered the book. Preserve it. See, we were taught very interesting and very important stuff. Preservation. It's just like the clothing that we wore. We could not wear coming from home. Our school clothes to play in. You could not wear your church clothes to go to school. You only had a few pieces. One pair of shoes. And then later on, you got two pairs. You had a church shoe and you've got a school shoe. And then we got whatever we could find or hand-me-downs to put on our feet to work in the fields.

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But we observed and didn't pay that much attention to it, because of the structure of the home life. The domestic structure. We were guided that in order for you to succeed, you must go to school and learn. That was support. If you got a whipping in school or you were detained in school because someone in the class misbehaved, once in a while we got out of line. But not often, because of the fact that you didn't want to be whipped twice, see. And we were just determined, as those folks used to say. And the African Proverb that I never heard about until I was about in my 40's. "It takes a whole village to raise a child." We experienced that continuously through life. If you did not say, "Good morning," "Good evening," to cousin Josephine on the corner or Ms. Mary down the road, they would speak to you. "What's the matter? Did you sleep with me last night?" Or even they all go next door. "Did you sleep with me last night?" I said, "No, sir." "Well, you must did. You didn't tell me, 'Good morning,' or 'Good evening.'" "Oh, I'm sorry." See, we were disciplined. Disciplined. And it was an issue of enforcement. And to keep us out of getting into trouble, whether it involved you or not, my mother used to say to all of her children – boys, because the sister was elsewhere, "Son, when or if the fight breaks out, you run or you leave." And that kept us out of trouble. Yes.

MBR: I understand. I only have a few more questions. Are you still good?

TP: Sure.

MBR: Are you sure?

TP: Hey, you sure you have enough time to listen to me?

MBR: Well, I know, but you're hitting on all the stuff that you want to talk about and I'm well pleased.

TP: Oh, good. Good. I love this. I've felt very much at ease coming where I wanted to go. Go ahead.

MBR: So you graduated in '57.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Then went onto college.

TP: Yes.

MBR: Did you look back at Meggett as it went through the throes of, you know, becoming 1969 to becoming a vocational school? Because for the time that it operated, there were a lot of accomplishments here. You know? And as you say, your class did probably set the bar really high in terms of what you're saying.

TP: I could definitely – growth of achievement. Yes. Yeah.

MBR: Did you participate with other African American schools for high school?

TP: As a high school?

MBR: As a high school.

TP: Yes.

MBR: When I say football games, did you go places? What was the network like? Did you participate with white schools?

TP: No.

MBR: No. No, no. Okay. That's out. Okay. That's out. I thought just maybe. I thought I'd better ask.

TP: Now, you had asked the question before, because this question that you're asking now interconnects with a question you asked me earlier. And I told you the answer was the no. William Prioleau and I did not participate in any kind of sports because we didn't have the time. We had to go home and work in the fields. Although his family had more persons to work in the field than I had. We just didn't have the time. Okay? And the persons who were athletically active were those who had fewer chores. See? Their parents went to work elsewhere. Okay? Whereby they could provide for the family better. They didn't concentrate on farming as the main source of income. Okay? But we had, in this high school, setting the pace, we started ever since we were in the elementary school, we had a chorus. And therefore William and I sang in that chorus amongst other kids. Okay? We had our hands into whatever positive activities were going on. We were in it. Okay? You weren't going to leave us behind, because that's the way that we were nurtured. Okay?

Now, when we arrived into high school, we had the chorus, we had the dramatic club, we had the New Farmers of America Group, we had – what else did we have? We had the oratorical contest – group.

MBR: Like a debate club kind of thing?

TP: No. Oratorical. Speak.

MBR: Really? Speaking?

TP: Yeah. A speaking contest just like the – they call it spelling bees. Just like that.

MBR: Right. Right.

TP: And extracurricular activity or – not cultural-wise. Enrichment-wise, we had talent shows. Oh, yes. Talent shows. Some of the guys who were up there had comedian skills. They were comedians. Then you had some of the girls who they formed like – not a duet. A trio. And then you had the individual vocalists who sang. And guess what?

MBR: All right. Winning?

TP: I was the top. Oh, I was a great singer. Serious. As they would say today, I used to rock the house.

MBR: That's great.

TP: Because of the fact that I lived out in the country, so to entertain myself, we used the jukebox, the little piccolos may have been a mile or so away, but whenever the newest

record comes out, they would turn up the volume loud. You could hear for about a mile. So therefore and the few chances I got to listen to the radio on the weekends, I used to listen to the singers, performers and started imitating them. Now, as I said, it was a form of enrichment for me, because what helped me to enjoy and forget about the hard work that I have to perform. So therefore, I didn't know anything about a guitar, strumming a guitar, but I used to go up there and pretend. Pretend. I had two pictures, and I've looked high and low for those pictures of me in high school. And I was so popular then.

MBR: I think that's great.

TP: My brother came, because I wanted my mother to come, but my mother was so tired to come, so she would tell my brother to go by and watch your brother. Observe. And oh, man. I used to be the talk of their school and the community.

MBR: Oh, we need one of those pictures.

TP: Yes. I will find it eventually, just like I cannot find my college diploma or my high school diploma, because I had them framed along with my – what do you call it? My honor roll certificates from college. They're all in the same type of frame and I only found one of those, and they should have been in the same place.

MBR: Yeah. That happens doesn't it?

TP: Yes. You know, because I have so many boxes. We've moved several times. Anyhow.

MBR: I have one last question.

TP: What?

MBR: All right. So you worked very hard at school.

TP: Yes.

MBR: You worked very hard at home.

TP: Yes.

MBR: How was your high school romantic life? I mean, was there a social life as well? If you understand what I mean.

TP: Oh, yes. It was social.

MBR: Like when you said it is hard working and having – and I didn't know if there were dances.

TP: Oh, yes. There were dances.

MBR: And where you got to mix with the girls in the neighborhood.

TP: Yes. Yes.

MBR: And so that was probably very much – were the same chaperoned here?

TP: Oh, yes. The dances were chaperoned. They definitely were chaperoned. And we got to intermingle with the girls at high school after school, and then we dated them in the community here. We traveled miles to have a social life on feet. Okay? Many miles. We traveled.

MBR: What would a date be when you're from the country? As you say, you were on foot.

TP: What would a date be?

MBR: Yeah. What would a high school date be?

TP: Getting permission when you reach the age of about 18 to ask the parents of a young lady who was interested in you and you were interested in them for permission to come to visit them.

MBR: Just for a visit?

TP: Yeah. To visit.

MBR: There wasn't a movie involved or you know what I mean?

TP: Not back in those days. We used to go to movies, but we went to movies alone because it was like cowboy movies. We used to walk from point A to point B and so forth. And to go to the city, we didn't have transportation. We would have to get the bus and what have you, so we didn't go to the movies a lot then. It wasn't that up to speed.

MBR: I see.

TP: But it was enjoyable.

MBR: So that gives me kind of a sense of that bigger map that you're in. When you look back, and I know you came here very excited to talk about your experience, and

you've touched on a lot of things here. But the legacy. The legacy of this school and why it's important, and why you thought you need to be here today to kind of to spread the word about it. Could you talk a little bit how it shaped you and your life that your years here?

TP: Oh, yes.

MBR: Is that too much to ask?

TP: Oh, no. It's not.

MBR: Okay. I think we need to hear that.

TP: Yes. It really helped shape my life well, because as I said before, I didn't want to stay around and work on the farm or become a laborer. Okay? I was born with the potential of becoming someone who would create or invent something that was more or different. Okay? My mother saw it within me. I had two persons other. They weren't the only two, but my godmother was an older lady, like a spinster, she was sharp. She would come by. She lived across the pasture, and we lived at Big House. She would come through to go and visit whomever in the community and she would call me Bretta, instead of saying Brother, because my nickname was Brother. And she said, "Bretta." I said, "Yes, Aunt Martha." She said, "Come here, boy. Come go to the store and get me some beer and some tobacco." She loved her Burgee beer and her tobacco that she would smoke in the back. Then she would give me the stipend for doing it. She said, "Bretta." "Yes, Aunt Martha." "Oh, now one day you're going to be just like your pa." I said, "You think so?" "Yeah. That's Tom Prioleau all over. You're going to be just like your grandpa." Okay. I heard that for many years. And then I had an aunt, my father's sister, and she used to tell my cousin who was her grand – she said, "Thomas." I said, "Yes, Grandma." She said, "Thomas is going to be something. There's something in you."

Boy, this is a long one. I think I've-

MBR: No. It's good.

TP: I used to take things in order to survive, in order to entertain ourselves. We had to create a lot of play toys and stuff. Okay? So we would challenge each other in the community by creating making a car out of wires. Hanger wires, crate wires. And shape it just like a car. Put the doors on that open, sometimes make it a convertible. Have the trunk and the hood whereby you could open it. Okay? And things of this nature. We created because we didn't have the money. The family didn't have money. It's not like the children of today are spoiled, because – my wife and I was talking as we always do in the car coming here how parents today buy their kids love and care

by giving them new sneakers and new jeans, the new cellphone because they want it. No. You know? There's more. So we learned to do without it, so therefore we used what God give us and a lot when we were coming up. And we used to compete with each other to entertain.

Now, I observed the teachers. The way they dressed, the way they taught us, the way that they expect us to learn, that way they motivate us to learn to do better so that not only that they could feel good about it, they wanted to see us excel because then their job would have been completed. Okay? We often visited several of our teachers after going away to college. Oh, yes. I used to come often. Whenever I got the chance to come home. And we even visited them and associated with them even after we graduated and became professionals and became adults, had children and so forth, we saw them. Okay? And they were happy to see us return to them. Okay?

Now, just let them know that we appreciated and thank you all for what you all do for us and to let them know that things are going well for us. And I'll share this with you. Pardon me. When we were graduating and we found out what we were going to do, and we discussed it with the teachers and what have you, now, prior to that, coming through high school we were divided into three different groups. Tracks, academically, everybody would determine what courses we would be enrolled in in the high school. It was the general certificate, it was for vocational and clerical. This was the middle one. And there were college prep. Okay? Myself and my cousin and several others, those of us who went beyond high school. Okay? To a higher echelon. We enrolled in college prep. And the guys who wanted to go to vocational or clerical, that's the area that got their certificate in. And the others just got job certificate. Something slipped my mind. Okay. So therefore we did our best to excel to the greatest extent. They helped to prepare us in those capacities.

MBR: In each of those tracks.

TP: Yes. Those areas, tracks.

MBR: What the choices were.

TP: Yes. And we pursued it, even throughout the end. Even after we graduated. There are several entrepreneurs who are in our class who are still alive now. Several that passed away. Okay? Now, I was most financially deprived, economically deprived who went away to college, and I was able to go to college because I was so determined, because I didn't want my cousin, William, to leave me. He was smarter than me, he made the high score on the SATs.

MBR: SATs?

TP: You know? So my cousin and my teacher had already finished the South Carolina State College and they were working. I didn't have any means of supporting me financially to go. So therefore, I was worried, upset, and my mother was upset because of it. So then my mother spoke to her brother's son, George, who had graduated already. He was an educational mentor in the community down at the Bic House. And she lived in that house. He was the only child who is still alive. He had an older brother who died accidentally. So my mother spoke to him and he referred my mother to my cousin, William, who was the agriculture teacher. She said, "William." He said, "Yes, Cousin Ida ." "Where could-" [Audio cut out] ["Could you please help my son to go to college and find him a job?" "Yes" cousin answered.]

MBR: So proud of yourself. I can only imagine everybody who helped make that a reality for you-

TP: Right.

MBR: ...must have felt the same way. I don't know what your godmother said?

TP: Yes.

MBR: You're going to be someone?

TP: Yes. But in closing up, yes. I have utilized my nurturing of the community, my parents, and exposure, and experience in the world. And needless to say, the school and the teachers. And what I vision after I left school and I traveled places in the world, and communicating, working with and teaching many children whereby it of course helped me to do many things.

David Richardson

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 18, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant

Mary Beth Reed: Hi, this is Mary Beth Reed with New South Associates. It's March 19. I'm in St. James Presbyterian Church on Secessionville Road and I have the honor of interviewing David Richardson about his time at Gresham Meggett. And because I know him a little bit now because he's also worked with me, we're probably going to hear things farther afield as well. So, David, first thing, could I have you say your name and spell it out, please?

David Richardson: I didn't learn to spell in school, but anyway, I'll try. My name is David Backman Richardson. That's D-A-V-I-D, B-A-C-K-M-A-N—

MBR: Man.

DR: ...R-I-C-H-A-R-D-S-O-N.

MBR: Okay. Now that we've got the housekeeping over with, can you tell me a little bit about where you were born, when you were born, and about your family life as a child? Your parents' names, what they did, just kind of—I'm here for the long haul here.

DR: I was very blessed. My biological parents that I knew did not raise me. There was Thomas and Susie Backman. My mother's maiden name was Brown. And my adopted parents was my dad's oldest brother and sister-in-law. They lived right next to each other. My mother had totally eight children. I was the fourth born and the third boy. And Harriet was my adopted mother, Harriet Richardson. And they were very close friends and also sister-in-laws.

I am told and verified by both women that when my mother got pregnant for the fourth time, she said to Harriet, her sister-in-law and best friend, "If I have another boy, I'm going to give him to you." Well, here I am. And Dave and Harriet did not have any children. So I was very blessed. And also they were very well comfortable in life on the island, okay. I have six—had six brothers and one older sister. My father had other children. But I grew up here on James Island.

MBR: What road did you grow up on, David?

DR: I spent most of my life on Folly Road, and—but I was born on Variella [phonetic] Drive in a house that my parents then lived in that was my granduncle's house. And that house is still there today. I'm the last of my mother's children that was born home and delivered by a midwife. And that midwife was my great grandmother. And her name was Alice MacNeil Chavis.

MBR: Alice MacNeil Chavis?

DR: Yes.

MBR: Okay.

DR: Yes. Okay. My early years, I remember starting about four years of age when Dave decided he was going build his second house, which was a two-story house. He was a very successful entrepreneur, a carpenter, a contractor. He had nightclubs. He was the first to purchase and own shrimp trawlers as an African-American that was recognized. This was like in the late '40s and early '50s, which is the only reason why I became a shrimper myself.

Because he lost those two boats on Kiawah in a storm. That was—one of them was operated by my biological father. He was missing for about three days. And when he finally arrived, because they had to come from Kiawah via Johns Island at the time, they had to do it by walking. But the house that I was raised in was a two-story house. And it was built in '45. And at the time it was one of three African-American-owned houses on the island that was constructed with indoor plumbing, hot and running water.

And some of us have heard about the Green Book. It was not listed, but it served that purpose. A lot of the relatives and people traveling through would stay with us as guests overnight, sometime weeks at a time because of the convenience. Everybody else around us still had outdoor privies [inaudible] [00:09:07].

MBR: Wow. Your adoptive parents, did they stress education?

DR: Absolutely.

MBR: And were you—so they wanted you to go to school and—

DR: Matter of fact, interesting that you ask that. From the time I had any consciousness of what schooling was all about, my dad always said, “You going to be a doctor.” So I’d walk around, people ask me, “Well, you know, what you going to do when you grow up?” “I’m going to be a doctor.” I didn’t know what a doctor was like. And I kept that notion until I went off to go to college in 1961. And just that the courses that I had at Gresham Meggett was not sufficient enough and I didn’t have enough science to sustain myself in—going into medicine. Yeah.

MBR: So you grew up as a single child then?

DR: I grew up as an only child.

MBR: An only child.

DR: Yes.

MBR: And they made their living through shrimping, so—

DR: No. Dave was a carpenter.

MBR: Okay.

DR: And he built houses, and his clients were primarily folks with money, which was white people. And he had such a reputation that it was not uncommon for a prospective customer to wait two or three years for him to get to them because he always had a back load of work. And very bright person. And I recall many times after I got old enough to go on the jobs with him, he would go to visit a site and the owner would say, “Well, Dave, I would like to add a room onto this house” and sort of walk it off.

Then he would use his rule to determine the dimension, go to the truck on a piece of brown paper bag and start sketching out what the floor plan would be, figure out what the lumber—amount of lumber, and he would give the person at that point an estimate of what the cost of construction. And he was well entrusted because he was very honest person. Said, “Well, you go ahead and do the job and just give me a bill.” I heard that many times. Yeah.

MBR: Well, had he gone to school?

DR: No. He had about a third grade education. But the thing that impressed me about him so much is that Harriet grew up on the McLeod plantation and she was her parents' oldest child, and she probably took the advantage of marrying Dave to get away from the hard work on—because her mother had a number of other children, too, that she helped her raise. She used to tell me that she got up on a—when she was eight, she would get on a stool to wash dishes and take care—cook for her siblings.

So she was a very attractive woman. And Dave was a very successful young man, had 25—when he was 25—He was born in 1900. He thought he was born in 1904. But when he was 25, he bought a new Model T Ford, and he and Harriet drove that to New York. Took them almost a month to get there [indistinct] [00:12:35]. He said he paid for it cash, so—and he also had a very successful nightclub.

So he always knew—had an edge on how to make money. So his—my influence—he influenced my life a lot in terms of my direction and things that I did. He was always pushing me to do things very early. Like at 15 I was captain of a shrimp boat. But my early years at Gresham Meggett I could not have the time to play sports because I always had something to do.

MBR: Did you enter early on? Where did you go to elementary school?

DR: Interestingly, I started school right here, St. James Presbyterian.

MBR: You did?

DR: Yes.

MBR: Talk to me about that.

DR: Well, about maybe five years ago now, there's a lady by the name of—her last name was [indistinct] [00:13:39]. I'm trying to remember her first name. I'll remember in a minute, but she was my dad's first cousin. And she was a teacher. And she told me before she passed, said, "David, you know, I'm the first person that took you to school." She was a woman who knew how to drive and she brought me to school here. She was also my teacher. And that piece I didn't know because of my age.

But then later on I left this school and went ahead in public school. It was right up the road here near where—the Presbyterian church on the corner at Folly Road and Fort Johnson. And it was—the school building was an old lodge that just was a big open room. And it had two class in that room. My first teacher whose name was Janie Chisholm [phonetic]—who was from this island. Her house was not too far from where Gresham Meggett High School is up here. And so when I went to Cherry Beam [phonetic] one year—I used to ride my bicycle to the school. And then the schools

got consolidated. And that's when I transferred to Gresham Meggett. That was first as a elementary, and then eventually they kept adding. I think about a year or two later they add another wing and then made it into the high school.

MBR: So you went from really partially going to elementary school all the way up to 12th grade.

DR: Absolutely.

MBR: Okay. Do you remember going from—I'm not going to say it right—Cherry Beam?

DR: Cherry Beam.

MBR: I'm trying—to W. Gresham Meggett. Do you remember any feelings or impressions you had of its modern look, the newness of it?

DR: Yes, Cherry Beam was a wood building that had—you'd look through the walls and look outside. And it had a potbelly stove in the middle. So in the morning whoever came in early would go outside and get wood and start the fire. And take turn to get warm. The desks at the time—there's a difference between that kind of furniture and the one at Gresham Meggett because the one at Gresham Meggett was new desks. The one in Cherry Beam Hall, the desk was—which seemed it sort of was on a metal frame. The back of the desk was a top for the student who sat behind. And the front part of it was a chair for the student who was in the front. And I think the top was able to raise a little bit and put stuff up under it. That was the kind of seating that we had at the time.

MBR: So W. Gresham Meggett, did you ride your bike there or did you take a bus? How did you get there?

DR: No. Because Gresham Meggett was the first year when—when they consolidated all these other schools, they also—there was three school buses for the entire island for the black students. The white school, they would pass us, but there must have been something about like maybe six or seven of them. And of course many of the bus drivers did several trips back and forth.

There were three persons that drove a bus. One of them was Eugene Wilder. We call him Pooney [phonetic]. The other was this lady, she was a short lady off of—that lived on Cutbridge [phonetic]. When you all—when you go back Riverland Drive, you're going to pass her house. Arlene [indistinct] [00:17:40], she was—There was one other bus driver. I don't remember who that was. But there were three buses that carried us, but they made several trips back and forth.

MBR: Can I ask you, did they just have bus stops? In other words, did they come to your house, the bus, or did you have to get to a bus?

DR: Basically there was a route where they pick you up, and usually it was on a main road, you know. So if there's—and because of the area was very rural at the time, there were roads that were unpaved or some distance away from the road. But the buses ran Sol Legare [phonetic] Road, Fort Johnson, and Riverland Drive, and I think also Central Park. And then later on I drove a school bus myself before I graduated from high school. And I had the Fort Johnson route. Kids were not hard. They were not difficult. I couldn't drive a bus now. I couldn't drive a bus—

MBR: It was a full-size bus?

DR: Yes.

MBR: It was. Okay. All right. And was it a bus in good shape?

DR: Yes. Those buses at that time were new. But then subsequently over the years, especially when I started driving, we would sometimes get a bus that might have—was not new, you know, obviously was being recycled from what white kids might have had. So we always got the seconds, you know. That's the way it was at the time.

MBR: Well, all right. So I learned about your parents. Even as—in grammar school or elementary school, were your parents involved with your education?

DR: My dad was very much involved. And I guess I developed pretty consistent study habits because I was expected to do my work, but I also had to do various chores after school, sometimes me riding—because my dad had a shrimp boat then and it was at the end of Folly Beach. So there were times when I had to ride all the way down to Folly to go pump the boat out because they're wooden boats and they leak sometimes. Yeah.

MBR: Well, coming to Gresham Meggett then, as an elementary school, so you're in the unique position—Most people go in elementary school, then middle or—and then a high school. But you had this continual. So that gives you a little bit different perspective. When it was just a elementary school, did you know most of the kids in your class? What were the classes like? Do you remember? Elementary school per se, everything from lunch to recess, what did a day look like? Do you remember?

DR: First of all, the change from the time at Cherry Beam to Gresham Meggett, instead of one teacher having two classes in one room, it was only set of kids, one grade in a room with one teacher. And understandably that you had a collection of students from different sections of the island that would be in the same grade. So therefore it's

natural that the classes would be a little larger, and it was difficult sometimes when you were in a class with a teacher with two classes because she has to teach both [indistinct] [00:21:01].

And it's just some—sometime is distraction, because while she's giving instructions to the other class, they got to hear what they are. And meantime, you might be left to do some homework or to go work on the task that she gave you. So, you know, it's a matter of being able to concentrate and block that [indistinct] [00:21:23], and I didn't do that well. Still can't do it well now.

MBR: Well, I think one person showed me their—actually their elementary school records I guess which you can pull up still, which is pretty amazing. Well, the modern look, what did you think? I mean at Meggett.

DR: The school—this room that we in now sort of reminds me of it because it was the first time concrete construction. And that school was made out of concrete block. Bright paint. Each classroom and my elementary classroom my elementary years, I think I might have been like in sixth or seventh grade, I remember Ms. Baxter who was a principal for the independent school, Society Corner, which was right down the road from where we are now. And she made a pretty good impression on me.

And that is, she had on the—made out of construction paper on bulletin board, a painting of a large treasure chest like pirates have. And it was like crack open some. And what was visible were things like a house, a car, different things that people basically would want and expect to have in life. And then the lock was partially open and the key in the hands of someone that had reading on it. Reading unlocks the key, treasure chest to life, I always remember that. And so I—from that, I, you know, probably developed my reading interest, and that same theme really turned out to be true.

MBR: That was my next question. Do you think if you had to characterize what made—I'm trying to think the best way to say this—that Gresham's guiding philosophy—What was his philosophy? You know, if you look back on it, I think you just gave us a key to it, you know, just not reading but—

DR: Well, you know, some of the people that I've spoken to since we started this process, reiterated what is a known factor and characteristic, and that is that teachers were dedicated. They were young. They had not developed bad habits yet because some of them were just out of college. But Mrs. Matago [phonetic] that was at a meeting that we had on the 24th, she and another Mrs. Matago, unrelated, were dancers. One of them was tall, and one of them was short. But more importantly, they were highly dedicated and they were just out of college, maybe a year or two.

So the principal that we had who was Leroy Anderson that influenced the school that I—my undergrad school that I selected, was also very young and very intelligent. So the teachers would try each other's method that was successful in teaching the children. And they were not unabashed to the point where they would not try another method. And one of the teachers told me not long ago that they would have these brain discussion—what's the word I'm looking for? It's when you in a group and you—

MBR: Like assembly?

DR: No. When a group of people begin to discuss certain issues and they try to—

MBR: Like a discussion group or something?

DR: Yeah. But it's another word. I just—

JT: Brainstorm?

DR: Yes, brainstorm. Look at that smart [crosstalk] [00:25:28]. When they would brainstorm in the faculty meetings, the—not only was it a current invited principal—and I think this is a very key thing that the children graduating left here with, unaware of what there was—those factors were, is that they were free to discuss different concepts and ideas. The principal encouraged that and they developed—they had sort of a friendship among them, so it was like—among the teachers it was like a family. And their dedication towards the children, they went the extra way and distance to be able to find information to teach them that would supplement what was deficient in the books.

So we knew that—I asked one person, I said, “Do you think the teachers care about”—He said, “Yeah, absolutely.” I said, “Why do you say that?” He said, “Well, they showed the kind of affection and they were never critical of us, and they would quickly communicate with our parents if we didn't do what we were expected to do.” So you had what is missing in the school systems now I think, a three-component. One, the willingness of the students to learn, respect the teachers in one. The parents respect the teachers and also were very supportive of them. And then you had the leadership in the school where the teachers felt that they were all part of a—like a group, like a team. And that's what I thought prevailed at Gresham Meggett even after I left, you know, until they closed it.

MBR: Until they closed it.

DR: Yes.

MBR: That was a really good summary. For the teachers there, were there any particularly mentors for you that—

DR: I'm thinking of—

MBR: You mentioned the principal name, Mr. Anderson.

DR: Yeah. And David Mack.

MBR: David Mack.

DR: Yeah. David Mack was the superintendent that was at our first meeting.

MBR: Oh, yes.

DR: His son was a member of the legislature.

MBR: Yes.

DR: Interesting thing about David Mack, in 1960...I graduated in '61—'61, when we had May Day approaching, we'd have this parade. And he had just bought a new—a Fairlane Ford. And he sent for me one day. So I went to the class and I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "I want my car in the parade, but I want you to drive it." So I said, "Mr. Mack, why you choose me to drive your car?" He said, "Well, I see you driving your daddy's car and you have a bunch of boys in it. You don't horse around. You go and do what you need to do. So I think you're reliable."

Well, the other side of that that I learned later on, David Mack's father was a contractor, and his dad and mine were very close friends, too. So there was that kind of a link. And see those guy—at that time, some of the old "craftsmen," and I'm talking about where they were painters, where they were plumbers, electricians, or carpenters, I knew many of them because my dad would have them to do subcontracting work for him. And there was a group of people, since he always want to have his work that's done reliable and first quality, so the people that he had that he would hire, the subcontractors had the same standards.

And so, you know, many of the old guys I knew because I was—when he first adopted me, he was 40 years of age, so, you know, he was a seasoned man. And he was raised by his grandfather who was 40 when he was born, you know, so I benefited from that stream of wisdom. And I listened to him because I respected him.

MBR: I like that.

DR: But he always supported my interest in school, always supported my interest in school. He was the one that said, "You going to go to college." When I graduated from here, they delivered me to the Greyhound bus station here in Charleston— and I had never ridden a Greyhound before—and my suitcase and everything and sent me to Nashville. Two summers before, I drove with a friend of his to New York. He wanted to have another driver. I was about 16 then. So I drove with him to New York. And that was a good experience.

MBR: All right. I'm going to pick that up in a minute. We talked about your parents' involvement with school and that your father was involved and kept up with you. Folks have talked to us about that you received secondhand books at Meggett that had been used previously. Was there a want in any other direction in terms of—

DR: Yeah.

MBR: ...[indistinct] [00:30:33] school supplies and that sort of thing?

DR: I remember interviewing Ned Roper who was after me. And he wanted to be a chemist. When he got admitted—I think he said he went to State—South Carolina State college. David Mack was a chemistry teacher, and who else was a chemistry teacher? What Roper shared with me was that they only had one Bunsen burner in his chemistry class, and it was obvious that we knew that the white school had all the supplies that they needed. He said that deficiency, impact on him not being able to study chemistry when he went to State. He had to choose something else.

I know that my biology course here was not strong enough. I took biology at Fisk. I had no calculus or—I had a course in geometry, but that was the extent of it. If I had some of the additional courses, I probably would have studied medicine. I just did not have my science—What they call it now? STEM? STEM courses.

MBR: Right.

DR: They didn't have sufficient strength in STEM courses. So I chose to study prelaw, became a history major. And my professor, head of the department, was also the person who taught John Hope Franklin. He was John Hope Franklin mentor. And so I was fortunate to be influenced by a great mind. And many of my—at that—when I graduated, three of my classmates were admitted to Harvard Law School. And at the time, I was admitted to Howard.

MBR: Maybe not having a STEM education didn't work out so badly for you.

DR: I don't know about that.

MBR: We've talked about language because there is—Gullah Geechee, there is a dialect, the language itself. And children would come to school with that language, and teachers would come with, what I've heard different ways of saying it, proper English, standard English, whatever. How did that work out in the classroom? How did these two languages, two people using two different languages, how did they make it all work? Because they obviously did.

DR: I loved my teachers because at the time, I was not aware of it. But after I went away to school, then learning the distinction in the speech—For example, at Fisk I didn't talk much my first year because of my sensitivity of not speaking probably instantaneously correct English. I had to take a—what's that word—

MBR: Remedial?

DR: Remedial, thank you. Mind getting a little slow sometime. Remedial English. And many of my close friends were West Indians. My roommate was from St. Thomas. And several of my other friends were either from Barbados or Jamaica. So after my freshman year, I became a little more talkative because my association with those guys and that their speech pattern was very similar to mine and even our vocabulary. So that gave me a—quite a comfort level there.

Some of my other classmates from high school, after completing their education over the years, basically made an effort to lose their identity as a Gullah person. And because of the environment that they was transferred to, they became very sensitive about their speech and instead of just learning how to speak correct English, they basically tried to get rid of their accent completely. But I didn't.

Matter of fact, I had a special experience my junior year. I rode a Greyhound back and forth. It took 18 hours to get to Nashville on a Greyhound. It was 24 on a train, and I could not afford to fly at the time. This was like 1961. So it was about '62, '63, on my way back to Fisk. And I was getting ready to board a bus in Chattanooga, and I was probably almost—maybe about the 10th person getting on the bus. And I'd always sit about midways instead of all the way to the back. And this was before open accommodation, okay?

And so when I got on the bus, there was some—like the first seat at the door, there was this black person sitting there. So I passed him and went back about maybe four or five seats and sat down. So by the time—you know, the bus wasn't completely full. It's just half full of people. So the driver got on the bus and he looked at this guy and said, "Boy, you can't sit there." So—and the guy said, "Excuse me, sir?" And he heard that accent, right? And he was Nigerian. He said, "Boy, you not from here." He says, "No. I am Nigerian." So the driver said, "Oh." And he went and sat in his seat, okay, and didn't say nothing. It didn't bother him.

I never forgot that. So the message that I picked up from that is, if you're not an African-American, you got treated differently. And that was also confirmed because of those same friends of mine that was from the West Indies. I was the only African-American who was a member of the foreign student association. Because we had exchange students, we had students from Greece, we had students from Kenya, the Congo, and then the West—Caribbean islands. For Thanksgiving, they—because of the short holiday, they couldn't go home. So some of the, I guess, wealthy people in Nashville with their paternalistic attitude, would sometime invite them to a dinner.

So this one winter I didn't go home, and they said, "Dave, come on. You come go with us, man." Said, "Where y'all going?" Said, "Well, you know, these folks invited us to this dinner and"—I said, "But listen, that's for Caribbean guys, not me." He said, "Don't worry. We cover you." So we go to the affair, and one of the hosts came, started having a conversation with me. And she says, "And you?" She asked me my name and I told her. And she says, "Well, what island are you from?" I said, "James Island, ma'am." So in the meantime, she says, "What part of Jamaica is that?" So when she asked that question, I know things getting a little tight, right? Because I had never been to Jamaica.

So one of my buddies walked in and said, "Oh, that's not too far from Montego Bay," and I slipped away [indistinct] [00:38:24]. You know, but those were some of the lessons that I had. But Fisk was a—

MBR: That's a good one.

DR: Now, the reason why I went to Fisk was because of Leroy Anderson the principal. He was a graduate, and it were his recommendation that got me into Fisk. Not only because of my grades, but I learned later on, he says, "Fisk may not need David, but David needs Fisk." And that was one of the key factors that got me admitted. Great experience, the best that I could've had. The school's small, family-like, just like being on this island almost. And even if I—[indistinct] [00:39:05] classmates, 50-some years, same closeness.

MBR: It was a good decision.

DR: Yes.

MBR: The years spent at Meggett, especially as a senior—excuse me, junior and senior, how aware were you of cultural changes, of where we were as a country in terms of race relations, that maybe desegregation was on the horizon? Far out but still on the horizon. Did your folks talk about things like that at home or—

DR: No. And let me give you an example. My dad, I told you he was a contractor. Have you ever been to Folly since you've been here?

MBR: Say it again?

DR: Folly Beach. Have you ever been to Folly Beach?

MBR: Yes.

DR: You know where the pier is? Well, the parking lot for the pier was where the amusement park was. Across the street from the amusement park was a guy who had owned that and had a two-story house. My dad did all of his—He had other houses. Some of the other buildings are still there. He did all the [indistinct] [00:40:09] for him and repair work up there. Well, every—you know what Decoration Day is? Ever heard of that?

MBR: Uh-uh [negative].

DR: You heard of Decoration Day? This young lady here says she hear about Decoration Day. Decoration Day—and I'm just going to repeat it because of what we doing—Decoration Day was usually the 31st of May. And it was started by African-Americans in Charleston. It was in honor of the 54th Regiment, Massachusetts regiment, soldiers that fell in battle. They were interned at the cemetery in Beaufort.

So every Decoration Day, we would go down to Beaufort for that weekend or a couple of days, okay. Well, the guy that owned the amusement park would disassemble all of his stuff, take it down this—for the African-American that gather. Decoration Day has become Memorial weekend, okay? Became it. But it's a precursor to Memorial Day, okay. And Earl Johnson was his name. Earl [indistinct] [00:41:16] would give me a ball of them—ticket. You know those tickets that you use, red white, and blue that got the numbers on them?

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Tickets like that. There would be a whole ball of ticket. Of course I'd never be able to use it all. But during the summer months, when he came—had his equipment brought back and reassembled, well, I had free access to go and ride on anything that I wanted to ride on, okay. But to get to your point, so one day my dad was doing some construction work, some carpentry work. I said, "I'll be right back. I'm going over on the carousel." He said, "Okay." So I got over on the carousel. I must be about 10, about 12—11 or 12.

And I remember there was a young lady that was in a bikini suit, and I looked at her and I said, "Wow, look at that." And the guy who was running the operation grabbed

my arm and twisted. He said, "Boy, you're not supposed to be looking at no white girls, okay?" "Get your hand off of me." So he turned me loose because he know my role and relations. So I went back across the street and I told my dad. He never said anything. Never said anything. Next day I said, "Daddy, I'm going to go ride the carousel or the Ferris wheel. He said, "Well, wait a minute before you go. Help me do this." And he never let me go back over again. And that was a quiet way of him saying, you need to stay close to me, okay.

But in the meantime, you know, you grow older, you begin to realize, you know, hormone starts growing, you look at other people and you say, hey, man, that's dangerous, you know. And at Folly Beach at the time, many of the women that worked near Center Street were from Sangaree. And so they were cousins, okay. The maid that Earl Johnson had was my dad's—she was my grandmother's first cousin, my paternal grandmother's first cousin. So anyway, my freedom to walk around in Sangaree—I mean Folly Beach, was because of the fact that I had cousins that worked, okay. And one of my cousins drove the garbage truck, and at the time cars still ran on the beach. And so my dad never really worried about me because most folks knew me who were, you know, folks that were part of the local economy or resident, said, "That's little Dave" because they knew my dad very well, okay.

And he used to tell me also that Heyward that wrote the play Porgy and Bess, that Heyward had a house down on Folly Beach and that he did the maintenance of it. I heard it many times, but I never had—never went to that house with him. It was only about probably five years ago I located it and realized where the house was. Because I read the book, Folly Beach, and—which was a fiction of Heyward's wife coming back to life, okay. But Porgy, the figure in the opera, whose gravestone is down at the end of this road, he [indistinct] [00:45:06] say that Porgy was our cousin and he knew Porgy. And in the—where the courtyard where Porgy and Bess hung out, he showed me where that was. And, you know, Porgy was a real person, okay. And Porgy's last name was Smalls. My grandmother's last name—great grandmother's last name was Smalls. And she is a descendent from that family I'm told. So everybody over on this island is always related.

MBR: Yes.

DR: But Gresham Meggett.

MBR: Well, Gresham Meggett but also, you know, the feeling like when you were in high school, did you—you didn't play sports or—

DR: No.

MBR: ...debate club or any—with any white schools?

DR: No.

MBR: Am I correct? It was just—

DR: No, not then.

MBR: ...totally segregated, yes.

DR: Separate, yes.

MBR: So were you aware of the discrepancies between the school systems?

DR: Of course.

MBR: Well, of course, but what do you mean?

DR: And here's another reason why. The kind of skill that my dad had, some of the most expensive and old houses in Charleston, he worked on those houses. And I had a chance to go in and—[indistinct] [00:46:23] old but you realize that they also magnificent. And it's about money, you know. And at some point in time when you look and see a kid who works in the field, just is partially clad, and on the other hand you go to town and watch the street.

And at 14 I got a driver's license. I used to take my—drive my mom to wherever she wanted to go or needed to go. And then because of Dave's position and comfort level, I was a little more privileged than a lot of other folks on the island. Like I didn't go to no fields. You know, I spent my time on a boat, on a shrimp boat. And we fed a lot of people, you know, because by being shrimpers, we always had bycatch, and it was a lot sometimes, you know. So many of the people on the island were our cousins, so we fed, you know—instead of throwing that stuff back overboard, last drag, bring it and exchange it for maybe a bushel of vegetables and fish. So barter system was very much in [indistinct] [00:47:30], you know.

MBR: Well, how did you and Mr. Anderson, for instance—because it seems like he must have taken a personal interest—some personal interest for you, to be able to come with "Dave might—Dave needs Fisk," to figure that out. Was he a mentor? Was he—he was a principal. Was the principal also the guidance counselor or—

DR: No.

MBR: Did he help kids get into the colleges?

DR: No. I would venture to guess no, because at some later time after I completed my education and came back, there are some things that I did that basically it was the right thing to do and almost like paid him back, okay. Because I had become politically active and—up until probably about 10 years ago, I was very, very active politically. But, you know, there's a term that I heard since I was a child, that elderly people would say, "That child, they've got something in them." Or if you lack certain kind of a aptitude, they may say, "He just ain't got in him," okay.

And it's basically the character nature. And folks who—and yourself—who've dealt with people over a period of time, you're almost instantly able to spot certain kinds of implied ability that a person may have or an interest. As well as, you know, you look at the family background and what could be expected. And my dad was relatively very comfortable, you know, on the island. So that and the fact that there was a relationship between David Mack's father and him, so, you know—And I was a very responsible kid. He always pushed me to do things ahead of my brothers who were older than me.

So when my brother Thomas and Bob started running a shrimp boat, I did, too, even though I was about two or three years younger than they were. And at that age, it made—that's a significant difference, but he always pushed me over—build my self-confidence into doing things.

MBR: Did you mention—I think you mentioned before that you drove the bus.

DR: I did.

MBR: Was that a privilege or responsibility? You understand what I mean?

DR: Responsibility.

MBR: Responsibility, okay.

DR: Yes. The school board, I think when they started switching down to students, they recognized that the availability of adults became more difficult, but you had the students who was in the school and there, so it was less of a hassle. And so they started offering the opportunity for students to drive a bus. And so I, you know, it was the school that trained. Interesting in this case, the state trooper who was a instructor, he was also a member of our—a close member of our—not a member, but a friend of the family. His name was—Oh, gosh. I've forgotten now.

MBR: So he was your instructor?

DR: He was the instructor. And the class was over on Johns Island where we were taught to drive a school bus. And the last day, after we all had taken our test and proven, he said, "Boys, I'm going to give y'all the treatment. The best driver I'm going to select that he is going to take us for a ride." And he chose me because I was a good driver. My dad, he taught me how to drive. And he was an older man, so I had to be very attentive and be correct in what I did, you know. So it was responsible.

MBR: That's something. Well, you mentioned political activity. Were you politically active as a teenager?

DR: At 18 I was, yes, basically. I started demonstrating before I went to school.

MBR: Before you went to college?

DR: College, yes.

MBR: So you're out of Meggett. That means that you were very aware of what—

DR: Very much so.

MBR: ...[crosstalk] [00:52:02] that was for civil rights?

DR: Yes. Well, yeah, because see, I grew up on Folly. I knew that at 6:00 o'clock in the afternoon, if you were not a maid or a butler with a family that was vacationing, you need to get the hell off of there, because the last bus at 6:00 o'clock, yeah, you got to get out of there, okay. Well, the other thing that I found that was strange once, is that there was a cousin of mine who was a maid for this lady that was right—the street across from where Johnson's [indistinct] [00:52:37]. And she got hungry one day. And the lady she was employed by had two pork chops in the refrigerator, so she cooked and ate one.

So when the lady came home, she says, "Anna, you seen my pork chop I had in here for my dog?" She said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "Well, they ain't but one there now." Said, "What happened to the other one?" She says, "I got hungry and I cooked and ate it." She fired her, okay. And when I heard about that, that's not fair, you know. You mean the damn dog can be fed, and what about a human being?

The other thing that I didn't forget is that, because of the bus that would transport people back and forth from Folly to city of Charleston, it was occasional when the employer, the head of the household, female head of the household would be on that bus and her maid come on after her and pass her. And she—just like she ain't never seen her. And I couldn't understand how people could, you know, be so insensitive. So to me, that was—it's just wrong, okay? Why you going to treat me like that?

And also I remember when—on Cape Street, which was a main commercial street that most everybody from the islands would go to to go shop and they'll walk down to the end of Spring where—near where the McDonald's is now. And there were times when you would encounter someone who was white on the street and someone would step off. I never did. I said, "What you going to do that for?" So when I went to Fisk, my freshman year, they—we had demonstration where we wanted to integrate a restaurant called Cross Keys. Ain't got no money in my pocket.

He said, "Hey, man, we doing down to march in front of Cross Keys." I said, "Okay. Let's go." I went. Had no idea I wasn't coming back home, okay. And it wasn't long before the paddy wagon rolled up. And I spent Thanksgiving in jail, my first time I ever been incarcerated. And my cellmate—you know the congressman from Georgia by the name of John Lewis? We were cellmates. We spent three days in jail. And of course we knew that—we figured that we going to get out. But that was the first time I came—was a jailbird.

So, yes, I was always, I guess, influenced by what's right or wrong, and that's still part of my character nature right now. Even when I—after I came back from South Carolina and completed my legal education and got [indistinct] [00:55:34], I was fortunate to get a—find work as a union organizer and that it gave me satisfaction about helping people who didn't have the power or authority to help themselves. One of the best job, but it was very stressful though, very stressful, because the industry that worked in was hotel. And 60 percent of the workers in a hotel or more are women. And many of those women are head of households, and many of the employers, supervisors were so insensitive about what their needs where. So I had some impact on some of them. Very dangerous job.

MBR: I would say so.

DR: Very dangerous job.

MBR: How did you—you obviously were a very cared-for child.

DR: Say that again.

MBR: You were a very cared-for child. You know what I mean? Your parents took care.

DR: She using one of them fancy word. Another word to say you're privileged.

MBR: Your parents—you're a very well-cared-for child. But how did they feel about you becoming politically active, or is that—had you already left home?

DR: No, I was still home.

MBR: Huh?

DR: I was still home.

MBR: You were still home, yeah.

DR: I'll tell you something. It's a great question that you've asked, because when I think back, like 90 percent plus of my father's business was done with white folks. And I listened how he communicated with them. Never condescending but respectful and responsible, okay. Where am I going with this? One of the practice in the neighborhood was, there was a gentleman by the name of Zeely [phonetic] who was an insurance—Zeely. He was an insurance collector. They used to have what they call the debit cards, you know, you pay 50 cents or a nickel every week.

Well, our house always had screens on it. The porch was always screened and, you know—That's why I don't like flies now because we never had any flies at our house. Anyway. I was on the porch playing one day, and Zeely came in and walked right on the porch and said, "Emily." And he was getting ready to leave the porch to go into the main house. I said, "Mr. Zeely, her name is Harriet and [indistinct] [00:58:08] use Mrs. Richardson." So he looked at me and he didn't like what I said. So he stopped and then he did correct himself and he called her.

That afternoon at 5:00 o'clock when he figured my daddy was home, he was back in our yard. [Indistinct] [00:58:26] "Dave," he said, "I come here to see you because your boy sassing me today." He said, "Mr. Zeely, was that true?" He said, "What did he say to you?" And when he told, he said, "Well, Mr. Zeely, sound like he might have been right." So I know who he was, because [indistinct] [00:58:45] always very polite in dealing with his customers, that right attitude. But when he said that, I mean, he stood up for what he knew was right and fair. And I always remember that. I always remember that.

Because at one point I—sometime I thought that he did not stand up as much as he should when people attempted to be disrespectful to him. See, my background as a shrimper more than anything else, I think helped to shape my character because shrimpers are very independent. And you think about each vessel is determined—the direction and how it functions, is by one man on the boat, and that's the captain. And he has freedom to go and—wherever the—it's almost like going hunting, okay.

But more importantly, there's a culture among shrimpers of mutual respect. And you're faced with reality of potential risk all the time to the point where, the weather may be as flat as it is now. It don't remain like that forever. But in about 15 or 20 minutes

weather can change, especially during June month. And what was a pleasant sea ride or fishing on the ocean can turn into terror. So you're, you know, and you can't run when you get caught in that. So the reality of the ocean teaches you not to be fearful, because it is what it is. If it's time to go, you'll know that soon enough, okay.

So that gave me the sense of independence and eliminated any kind of fear that I would have. Of course my dad pushed me. At 15 I was on a— I was a captain of a shrimp boat. On the ocean we had no radios to communicate to get advice on any— You got to use your own judgment, you know. So I started very, very early. So ain't no need to ever be afraid of dying. It ain't going to happen until it does.

MBR: So basically you had a great education at Meggett.

DR: Had a great education at Meggett.

MBR: Shrimp boating contributed to your character.

DR: Absolutely.

MBR: But your parents wanted you to go to college, so they put you onto Fisk.

DR: If I had stayed in my biological family, I would not have taken this route. My youngest brother, the two of us are the only one with a college education.

MBR: Is that Sammy?

DR: Yes.

MBR: Okay.

DR: And I am very conscious of the difference in the influence by the two households. So I know that it made a difference. My mother had the insight. And some people say that children who are adopted have a problem of separation. That may be a factor. But I know one thing, I recognize how beneficial it was for me. I know that if I had not had that experience and exposure, I would not have chosen the route that I did. So I'm always very grateful to all of them. No regrets at all from them.

So [indistinct] [01:02:11] I had two sets of parents. Because when the—when my adopted parents died earlier, I still had another set left, you know. So it's great and I appreciate it. My biological mother attended a lot of my graduations afterwards. When I graduated from college, she was there.

MBR: She was there.

DR: When I graduated from law school, she was there. And she and I got a chance to serve on a number of board and commissions here in Charleston. And—

MBR: So your biological mom, and her first name was?

DR: Harriet. She died early. She died about '64. 19—Or was it '70? Yeah.

MBR: But she was also active.

DR: Oh, she was a loving person. No, she was very quiet, but very, very loving. Very, very loving. Good with children. And she had a good influence on my sensitivity of caring for people. Very much.

MBR: All right. I'm going to bring back Charleston County. When we talk about James Island, its geography, you know, things were happening in the City of Charleston but maybe not so much here. People have talked about in the last couple days that being at Meggett was not insulated, but it was separate. Did you feel that coming up or did you have a wider sense of what was going on in Charleston? And around actually the whole civil rights movement and the changes that were in the 1960s?

DR: Millicent Brown.

MBR: Hmm?

DR: Millicent Brown, you know that name?

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Millicent father was the field secretary for the NAACP, Charleston and eventually the state. Millicent's father and my dad, Dave, adopted father, were close friends and they knew each other. A little difference in age. Millicent's father—well, at one point earlier, they lived in the city of Charleston. But they were close in communication because her grandfather was from James Island. And, you know, the island, a lot of us are kin, but there's also an unwritten or printed rule about loyalty and support because it was necessary to survive.

So there's a book that is written by Eugene Frazier that talks about the descendants of slaves of James Island. Eugene, by the way, is a cousin of mine, too. His grandmother and my grandmother were sisters, that close. So J. Arthur Brown, who was actively involved in the civil rights movement at a early stage of it, obviously is the reason why Millicent was the first to attend Charleston High School.

In the meantime, I was not discouraged from being involved in the civil rights activities. So I used to go to meetings. And there's another name, Esau—Esau Jenkins was an uneducated man from Johns Island, [indistinct] [01:05:52] and had a great impact on some of the things that I later did in life [indistinct] [01:05:59]. So eventually when I came back here after graduating from law school, there's certain things that I knew was my watch, I just had to do it, whatever the risk or the fear is. Just had to do—You ever heard of Fannie Lou Hamer?

MBR: Hamer, H-A-M-E-R?

DR: I think it's H-A-M-E-R, yeah. She was a black woman in Mississippi.

MBR: No.

DR: Get a chance, YouTube her.

MBR: Okay.

DR: And it's about—the period is about 1968 I think. And Fannie Lou was a civil rights activist and was severely beaten because she registered to vote, and kicked off the plantation that she lived on, but had the impact of changing the Democratic Party in Mississippi and the United States period. Heard her testimony, but it's a piece of history that you all should read, you know.

MBR: Thank you.

DR: You can look at it on YouTube, and it's about the confidence and the risk, and it's let people know that, you know, you do whatever you want to do, this is the way I'm going. And to be fearless like that when there's no expected—You know the Lord is going to help you. You know, you got to—you's on your own and your belief in the Creator. Fannie Lou is a person—I asked the minister here, I met him this morning, he said he's from Mississippi—I said, "You know Fannie Lou Hamer?" He said no because he's too young. He's too young, yeah. But she made a heck of an impression on me. There's some things you got to do.

It is—I equate that with the philosophy of a shrimper at the time. We had no radios, and if a boat from our river or dock didn't come in in the afternoon when it was expected, someone would go to the beach, ride the beach with a automobile and see if they see the boat. And if they see it on a hook, come back to the dock and somebody would go get them. Don't care what time of night it is or what the weather's like. Somebody got to go get them. Because it could you—you could be in that position. So I grew up with that kind of a sense of responsibility. If it's your shift, it's your watch, it's your watch. Don't look around for nobody else. It's your watch.

So, you know, it's that kind of a dedication that we all have. My brother Sammy and I, it's the same thing because, you know, we grew up in that environment. We Gullah folks had to help each other even at the risk of your own life. That's not a [indistinct] [01:08:40]. Now, if you ever get a chance to go to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, the only black Coastguard unit that ever exist in this country was near Cape Hatteras. And why they're so important is that [indistinct] [01:09:04] time, Hatteras is a graveyard of ships on the East Coast. More ships have gone down out here.

These guys in an open boat almost the kind like the whalers, you know, with oars, would row out to the ship in storms, which meant—you know, and I don't know how they kept waters out of the boat—open boat—to take a line to the ship to rescue whoever was on there. And they did that time and time again. So there's a museum that I want to go and see I hadn't seen. But, you know, it's like that. It's your task. You got to do what you got to do. You know some people just never get there [indistinct] [01:09:49]. So that's the way I was raised. You done?

MBR: Well, no. I will be in a second, but I will say thank you. No, I appreciate you sharing with us, David, and we've had a lot of fun the last—through this process. But this is also a time to think about what makes people who and what they are. And I think you've kind of given me a sense of all those things. Jenna Tran is in the room with us, our co-interviewer. Do you have anything you'd like to ask?

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Jenna Trans: You put me on the spot.

MBR: No, that's all right. Now I'm just going to ask you, is there anything I should have asked you and didn't that you'd like to say? I know this is about Meggett, but I think what I'm learning from the interviews is that Meggett prepared people for great things. And each interview tells me a different story that goes that way.

DR: One other comment that I'd like to make, observation about where we sitting right now. This church played a significant role in influencing a number of folks who were born and raised on James Island, even though they preceded Gresham Meggett. The school—and if you look at—I saw a picture earlier someplace, we used to call the Sanders School.

MBR: Say it again?

DR: Sanders.

MBR: Sanders, okay.

DR: Yes. Because the minister—a Presbyterian minister who was educated, name was Marion Sanders. Okay?

MBR: Oh, okay.

DR: And so it was the first, I think, church on the island that had leadership of a educated minister. I think he came out of Johnson [indistinct] [01:11:43]. Now the other factor is right after the Civil War, the Presbyterian Church began in some areas, South Carolina primarily, to set up schools to help educate the ex-slaves. Middleton indicated earlier the uniqueness of the Grimball community. Not only are folks sort of related, but have had the common experience from the common source, and that community survived by being collective and supportive.

This church here is a branch of the James Island Presbyterian Church at the road there. This is about more than 200 years old. But this is one of the largest congregation in the—among the Presbyterian churches in the South because it's part of the Presbyterian. But it [indistinct] [01:12:54] largest one [indistinct] [01:12:54] thousand congregation at that one point, okay.

What's significant? Well, there are a number of people [indistinct] [01:13:06] first of all, more than 200 years ago one of my grandfathers was one of the four people that started this church because everyone no longer worshipped with the James Island Presbyterian Church up there. Started out of sense of pride. And it also was a first—and it preceded these public schools, okay.

MBR: These are essentially maybe the first schools, right?

DR: Yes, that's right. So sometime people do not connect the tradition and what influence and meaning that has, because it becomes customary and usual and accepted. And so this school here, even I don't go to church like I used to, but it played a very important role in influencing people on this island, especially black community.

MBR: We're going to probably work with you later to map out all of the different schools, the pre-consolidation schools, you know, and kind of work through as we see the school system develop. But I think you're right, I mean, no one's brought up the St. James Presbyterian as a school prior to this and they probably had a very important role at that point in time.

DR: [Inaudible] [01:14:26] much. And still has an influence in the community through May Day. May Day was a activity that they had every year.

MBR: What's May Day?

DR: May Day is almost—it's a festivity. And I remember when I was a kid we all would dress in blue trousers, white shirts, and I remember we'd plait the pole. You know what plaiting the pole is?

MBR: Platinum pole? You mean a pole that you had things attached to and—

DR: Yeah. But you—

MBR: Oh, the kids went around.

DR: Yes. Okay. Yeah. And there would be a parade and all, and the parents would come and the whole community really for St. James May Day activities. And there would be food, you know, and it was always a very festive time.

MBR: A big deal.

DR: Yeah. Most of this is gone, but they still have it here. But I'll tell you something else that disappeared that I remember when I was a little boy. Emancipation Day.

JT: Juneteenth?

DR: No.

MBR: Tell me about it.

DR: No.

MBR: Tell us about it.

DR: Emancipation Day. You know what it is?

JT: Tell us how that's different from Juneteenth.

DR: Juneteenth is June—it was the 19th of June before people in Texas realized that the slaves had been emancipated. But the date of emancipation was supposed to be January 1. And the Emancipation Day started in Charleston. Used to be a big parade even when I was about eight. Every 1st of January down Charleston and it was a—it grew out of the 54th Regiment soldiers marching down the street and the population joining behind them because they liberated. Very, very interesting.

MBR: Yeah.

DR: Okay. That's gone now, too.

MBR: Do you remember that parade? Was it during your lifetime?

DR: I do remember that. And another part of that, there's a museum on Soligry. One of the daughters is still alive. She's about 97 now, Mary—Mamie Chavis. And remember the—What's her name? I interviewed her. She was one of the first who went to James Island High School. Laverne?

MBR: Lavonne. Oh, Brown. Ms. Brown?

DR: No, not her. No, no. Remember the first time I interviewed—

MBR: At the—

DR: At Gresham Meggett.

MBR: At Gresham Meggett [crosstalk] [01:17:16]—

DR: It's my cousin.

MBR: Your cousin, yes, the [indistinct] [01:17:17]?

DR: Yes, yes.

MBR: Yes, I'm sorry. Yes.

DR: Her mother is the oldest living of her grandfather's children. Grandfather's a short guy. We used to call him Demmy [phonetic].

MBR: What'd you call him?

DR: Demmy.

MBR: Demmy.

DR: Okay?

MBR: Okay.

DR: And he would beat a drum. He would beat a mean drum. And sometime he would have big bass drum way up over his head and—Or he would have—and the small ones that has a stick. And that used to be a parade on Decoration Day as well as down Sol Legare Road sometimes. Those [indistinct] [01:17:58] people [indistinct]

[01:18:02]. Those were memorable times. I got a glimpse of some of that because of Dave's age, and of course here's this old man with this little boy he's dragging around with, you know. And so—he died at 75, so I had 30-some years with him, okay.

And I was like a dry sponge because I appreciated and respected and learned everything that he would daily teach me. I became—at one point I was a carpenter, you know, that's my first skill I developed. I could have done any kind of—I still can, but I'm rusty now—any kind of building construction, yeah. [Indistinct] [01:18:43] he taught me how to survive so I'll never go hungry, even though I'm an old man now. You know.

MBR: Thank you, David. Should we close?

JT: Yeah, that would be good. Most of my questions are all like geographical. We'll get to that when we do our little tour.

DR: She didn't get a chance to—

MBR: Your adoptive parents. David?

DR: Dave.

JT: David.

MBR: But you call him Dave, and I wasn't sure—Okay. David Richardson.

DR: Dave Richardson. D-A-V-E.

MBR: D-A-V-I-D.

DR: Yeah. No.

MBR: You just don't like the way I write.

DR: Is this my name you're writing down? His name?

MBR: No, your adoptive father's name.

DR: D-A-V-E.

JT: Just Dave.

DR: She don't hear well, does she?

[Crosstalk] [01:19:34]

MBR: ...proper names.

DR: Let me tell you what happened in here. It is—and this is where may be educational and cultural divide. Dave is generally a nickname for David. Okay. So that's what you [indistinct] [01:19:49].

MBR: That's where I went, now...Your mother's name.

DR: Harriet.

MBR: And that's your adoptive mother?

JT: Don't call her Harry.

DR: No. They called her—Her name was—her nickname was Emily.

MBR: And her maiden name, do you know?

DR: Robinson.

MBR: Robertson?

DR: Robinson.

MBR: I-N-S-O-N.

DR: Yes.

MBR: Okay. Your biological parents' name.

DR: Thomas Backman.

MBR: B-A-C-K?

DR: M-A-N. And my mother's name was Susie Brown Backman.

MBR: Now—

JT: So is Dave your—so Dave and Thomas were brothers. Why did they have different last names?

DR: Good question. Good question.

MBR: That's why we needed the name—that's why—

DR: Dave was my grandmother's oldest son. She had three sons—three children before she got married to Thomas—I mean, to Richard.

JT: Okay.

MBR: Brothers.

JT: So technically half-brothers but—

DR: Yes.

MBR: I got you.

DR: What else?

MBR: I looked at Thomas Prioleau's [phonetic] family tree that he brought, and you're related to him.

DR: I am?

MBR: Is it through Susie Shevah [phonetic]?

DR: No.

MBR: Her name was in the thing though, in his family tree, that's why I was—

DR: Whose name was in the family tree?

MBR: I want to say—

DR: Chavis?

MBR: Yes.

DR: Yeah.

MBR: Yeah. That name was in his family tree. I was wondering if that was where—how you were related to him.

DR: The relationship on the side that I know was through his grandmother.

MBR: Okay.

DR: His grandmother name was Mary Smalls Prioleau.

MBR: Okay. He's going to send me his whole—he had a whole booklet, and it's—it was fierce, let me put it that way. I wanted to copy it, but he put it away real quick and then he [indistinct] [01:22:08]. And I was like, uh-oh. But I've talked with him at least twice since the interview.

DR: Good person.

MBR: Yes. And he's found more things that he wants us to look at and—but anyway—but the family tree—

DR: He's at a stage of life where he realize the importance of this being recorded.

MBR: Yes. Oh, he's so kind. Yeah. I mean—

DR: And he's written a couple of books I think.

MBR: Yes. Oh, no, he's got those. He has everything ready. We're just going to wait until someone from New South has a project down there and then they'll pick stuff up and, you know, so everything's safe.

DR: Well, I go down often past his house. I just—

MBR: You do?

DR: Yes.

MBR: He's got all sorts of stuff. And he's looking through more stuff. He's so—I don't know. I think he enjoyed being interviewed and I think he enjoyed telling his story and—so that was a good thing.

DR: Well, you know, old men like to talk about they past because that's all they can do now.

MBR: All right. Can I try something else?

DR: Okay.

MBR: Okay. So, you went to St. James Presbyterian first, then you go to Cherry Beam, trying that one out, and then Gresham Meggett—

DR: Yes.

MBR: ...all the way up. So that's—could we try and see where the site of that school is on Thursday?

DR: Oh, Thursday?

MBR: There's also—Cutbridge is another one, isn't there?

DR: What time is it? It's 3:00 o'clock. Yes.

MBR: Yeah, we have to—

DR: Yeah, you want to get—

MBR: Yeah, we learned from traffic yesterday. Who would think there was that much traffic? It's all the way—

DR: People come in here 35—

MBR: People just—

DR: New residents, 35 a day.

MBR: Oh, my gosh. I was taken aback. I mean, we ate lunch and then, you know, but we didn't get home like 7:30 after we stopped at the store. Yeah, we're like, whoa, we're too young, old.

JT: I'm so sorry for turning the heat back on.

DR: [Indistinct] [01:24:00].

MBR: I thought I was getting cold and I put my jacket on [indistinct] [01:24:04].

JT: I walked into the other room. It was very warm.

MBR: [Indistinct] [01:24:08]. Dave, that's like a fairy tale that you just told me.

DR: [Indistinct] [01:24:16].

MBR: You being given to the family next door. It's like a Grimms' Fairy Tale but it worked out beautifully. And how did—like how did Sammy—I'm sure he loved your—his parents [indistinct] [01:24:29] like that, but you were blessed. You were blessed. And I mean that in the nicest way, you know.

DR: Yeah.

MBR: And he was blessed, too. I'm not giving the wrong impression there, but—

DR: Sammy probably would not have gone to college if I hadn't.

MBR: Really.

DR: Yes. Because out of all our brothers—because see, I know my mother had appreciation for education, less emphasized by my dad. You know, he was gone, he was on a boat most of [indistinct] [01:24:58]. And the other piece that I didn't tell you was my third year at Fisk, my adopted father, because I got married my freshman year, would not pay for my education. For my fourth year, okay. I didn't get mad at him. The glass was half full. I looked at it with, look, I got three years, and it's up to me to finish. And I wasn't angry with him, okay.

Well, my biological mother, when I came home that Christmas and I had not gotten any money from him to pay my tuition, I told her and she went to the bank and gave me \$500. And my dad—my father and her says, "\$500 isn't going to stop you from graduating here," okay. So when I graduated, I also was blessed that she came to my graduation. My adopted mother is a very quiet person, didn't travel. And my dad had bowed out because of the fact that he didn't finish paying for my education. And then when I graduated from law school, my biological mother also was in attendance. My adopted mother was dead then, but my adopted father could have gone. But he says, "I can't leave my property because people might [indistinct] [01:26:36]." I'm going to see the glass half full.

MBR: Yes, I see.

DR: Half full, okay. What are the opportunity and advantages? There's a story that I didn't tell you about them [indistinct] [01:26:51].

MBR: Should I turn this off?

DR: No. They got started, my biological parents, right, my dad had gotten experience from his oldest brother having shrimp boats. That's where he cut his teeth at. But then—and this was about 1948, he was working for a white gentleman who had

several boats on Folly Beach. He had gone fishing 14 days, came in early and was asked by Dodge [phonetic]—he was the only boat in the dock—“Thomas, what’s the problem?” He said, “No problem, Mr. Dodge.” He said, “Well, why you come in here early, the other boys catching shrimp?” He said, “I’m tired. I fishing 14 days and I’m tired.” He said, “You better get that boat on back out there.”

My dad said to him, he said, “Mr. Dodge, I told you I’m tired.” He said, “You got two choices. You can either take that boat out there yourself or you can stick it up your ass.” So he got his stuff and he left. When he got home, he told my mother, and she says, “Isn’t there a boat down there for sale?” He said, “Yeah, but I ain’t got no money.” She said, “I got \$1,000 saved.”

That’s how they bought their first shrimp boat and eventually was replaced to a fleet of six. That was one of the largest fleet on the East Coast run by African-Americans. But that did not happen until my biological father died in ’64, so—at 43 from pneumonia. But after his death, she called my brothers and my sister together and said, “He wouldn’t expect us to fail. That’s not an option.” I think two years later, they bought the first new shrimp boat, kept—every other year, kept buying another boat.

I call that the thumbtack effect, okay. In all of our lives is some event that happened that get your attention. You can’t stay where you are. You got to get up. So the thumbtack effect name comes from the fact that when you’re in high school, we boys sometime would put a tack in the seat with a sheet of paper over it, okay. And whether it’s a teacher or one of the student, you sit on that tack, you ain’t going to look around and say, “Wonder who did that?” You get the hell off of that tack. So there are always experience in life that has that impact. Make you move. So the question is, what do you do with that? I say, when that happens, you look around for opportunities because it’s the Creator hands in your life. Move. Look around and see where do I go from here.

MBR: Thumbtack moment.

DR: Thumbtack effect.

Emma L. Richardson

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on February 23, 2019 at W. Gresham Meggett School (Septima P. Clark Academy), James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. David Richardson is the interviewer; Terri Gillett assisted.

Terri Gillett: So, that's on. So, we're recording audio right now.

David Richardson: David Chavis Richardson.

TG: And then—

Emma Richardson: Prophetess Emma Lorraine Richardson, Emma Lorraine Chavis Richardson.

DR: I'm going to ask you to state your full name, okay?

TG: Say that again. State your full name.

DR: First, let me identify. My name is David Richardson, and we're here at the Gresham Meggett High School in one of their classrooms. And, the day is, it's February 23, 2019, and we are very pleased to have—Would you please give us your full name and address?

ER: My name is Prophetess Emma Lorraine Chavis Richardson.

DR: And where do you reside?

ER: I reside at 1497 Woodview Lane, Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: Would mind sharing with us your date of birth and where you were born?

ER: Well, I was born on May 7, 1950, and I was born here in Charleston, South Carolina.

DR: And when you say here, any specific section or here?

ER: I live on James Island. I was born on James Island, and I lived here all my life.

DR: So, where did you spend—You said you spent most of your childhood here also?

ER: Yes.

DR: Okay. Would you state your name of your father and where he lived?

ER: My father's name is Calvin Chavis, and he lived on James Island, Sotheby Road.

DR: What kind of occupation did he have?

ER: Well, he was a man of many trades. He was a farmer. He was a truck driver. He also was a painter, and he was a maintenance man.

DR: And your mother's name?

ER: My mother's name is Mamie Ruth Chavis.

DR: And where was she born?

ER: She was born on James Island also, and she resided on Sotheby Road. And, that's where she lived her whole life.

DR: Did she have an occupation, or was she just a housewife?

ER: She was a domestic worker—

DR: Okay.

ER: ...and a house—

DR: And a house wife?

ER: Right.

DR: Do you have siblings?

ER: Yes. I have nine siblings. Well, two are deceased right now.

DR: And where do you fall in the birth of all of them?

ER: I am the seventh out of 10 children.

DR: My goodness, okay. Now, where did you go to school?

ER: I began school at the Sotheby School on Sotheby my first year. I was five years old, and then, they, the school board decided to change the school over to W. Gresham Meggett. So, this is where I came over in my second year of school, and I was here up until my 10th grade.

DR: Right. Tell us where were your parents educated.

ER: My parents, they had their education from, my mother always said, Society Corner School.

DR: Society Corner?

ER: Society Corner School.

DR: Okay.

ER: And, which is on James Island.

DR: Yes. Okay. So, before they built the Sotheby Community School, everybody from Sotheby attended the Society Corner School too there?

ER: Yes.

DR: I see. Was education highly emphasized in her your family when you were coming up?

ER: Yes. It was very much emphasized. We would always be told by my mother and father that you must get an education. You know, you've got to go to school, and it was a must.

DR: Where were your siblings educated?

ER: They were also educated here on James Island.

DR: Okay. Did you attend—You said you attended elementary school on Sotheby?

ER: Yeah, my first year.

DR: The first year?

ER: Yes.

DR: And so, that must have been about 1952?

ER: It was '55.

DR: Fifty-five?

ER: Yes.

DR: Okay. All right. And after that, where did you go?

ER: 55-'56. In '56, we were transferred over to this school, W. Gresham Meggett Elementary. W. Gresham Meggett was elementary and high school, and they mixed together.

DR: Okay. So, in '56, you begin. What grade were you in at that time?

ER: Second grade.

DR: Second grade? So, you continued to third grade here at Gresham Meggett?

ER: Yes.

DR: Okay. Which was then elementary and high school?

ER: Yes.

DR: Okay. Tell me. Were your parents active in y'all's education while you were in school?

ER: Not so much, but they wanted to make sure that we did our homework and did everything that we were supposed to do, you know, pertaining to school. Go to school, do your homework, get good grades, you know, and they always told us you were to know to do more than one thing. So, you know, my dad did a lot of stuff and taught us a lot, showed us a lot of stuff. We learned from him.

DR: Let me go back to the Sotheby School. Can you describe what that school building was like?

ER: It was—

DR: At the time, based on your memory, of course.

ER: I can remember they had about four classrooms.

DR: Okay.

ER: And, the first classroom, you know, I mainly stayed in that classroom because the older children, you know, they had the other classrooms.

DR: Who was your teacher at the time?

ER: Ms. Grayson. I don't remember what her first name was, but I remember her name was Ms. Grayson.

DR: And there were four teachers at that school at the time?

ER: Yes.

DR: So, those four teachers, some of them double up on classes then?

ER: No. Well, they had—Yeah. They had different ages, age groups, you know.

DR: Yes.

ER: Different classes.

DR: And you said, '56, you got transferred here to Gresham Meggett?

ER: Yes.

DR: The entire school? So, how did they—

ER: Yes. They closed that school down, and it became a trade school.

DR: So, how many grades above your grade also attended the Sotheby School?

ER: Well, I'm not really sure. I think it was, I believe it was sixth grade, and, from there, they brought them over here. But, they were, they closed the Sotheby School down and made it a trade school, brick mason.

DR: Do you have any idea or why they transferred y'all to Gresham Meggett?

ER: I'm not sure, but I believe it was, they were going to, there were too many—I think they were going to just close it down because Gresham Meggett had already been

established, and the kids in this area was already coming to this school, you know. So, they wanted to close that one and make it a, like I said, you know, a trade school.

DR: Was there any difference between the white or black schools that you were aware of at the time?

ER: At the time, back in that, when I was—No. I didn't think much about it.

DR: Okay.

ER: You know? I really didn't think that much about it at that time, but, when I was transferred to James Island High School, I could see there was a big difference.

DR: So, let's us focus right now, temporarily, on what was it like when you came to Gresham Meggett.

ER: Well, it was nice. I liked it. There was a lot more kids. There were—I could remember the lunch room. The lunch room was very large, you know, and we had parents of, you know, that lived around here who worked in it. And, they were really wonderful parents because, you know, they cared, as well. They knew your parents as well, you know, and they cared for you. They'd look out for you too, you know.

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DR: So, you're saying there was, like, a community among the, even the staff here?

ER: Yes.

DR: Okay. How far did you have to travel to come to school?

ER: I think it was about three miles, three or four miles.

DR: How did you get there?

ER: We had buses that would come.

DR: Okay.

ER: They would bus us from Sotheby and bring us over here and bus us back home.

DR: Do you remember how many school buses there were at the time?

ER: No, I really don't. I don't remember that.

DR: Do you remember some of those bus drivers?

ER: I remember, yeah. I remember some of them.

DR: Can you share some of those names that you might remember at this time?

ER: I remember Wilburn Gilliard. Who else?

DR: So, these were student drivers then?

ER: Yeah. They were student drivers. I know Harry Walker was one.

DR: Who was the principal when you came over to Gresham Meggett?

ER: Mr. Anderson.

DR: Anything special that you remember about him?

ER: He was very strict, and he would take you to the office if you did anything wrong. He would give you a whooping, you know. He would school you, and he would, you know, really be a parent.

DR: So, you're saying teachers were allowed then to administer corporal punishment?

ER: Yes.

DR: Okay. Do you remember some of the teachers that were here at the time?

ER: I remember Ms. Ann Richardson, Ms. Amica [phonetic 00:10:43], Ms. Spears, Ms. Counts. I don't remember all their first names though. Mr. Richardson, he was the agriculture teacher, and he was in high school.

DR: Okay. What about the teachers that were at Sotheby School?

ER: Mrs. Richardson, Ms. Grayson, Ms. Presette [phonetic] [00:11:08].

DR: So, those teachers that you just named were transferred and came with the classes from Sotheby?

ER: Yes.

DR: Was that the same case with some of the other areas you think? Do you remember?

ER: Probably so.

DR: Do you remember Ms. Greenwood?

ER: No. I don't remember her.

DR: Do you remember what the philosophy at Gresham Meggett was, what was expected of the students?

ER: No, I really don't remember. I don't even remember them talking about that.

DR: Were you ever in or participated in any scholastic activities?

ER: The only thing we did was, like, we would go outside at recess time and did the playing or whatever, but, other than that, there was nothing extra, no extracurriculars.

DR: Were your parents involved, go to PTA meetings? Were they involved in your school education?

ER: Well, not regular. Once in a while, my mom would go to the PTA meeting. It wasn't important.

DR: Were you—In 1952, there were a series of schools that were built in the South for African-Americans. Gresham Meggett was one of those schools. Were you able to notice the improvement coming from the community school to when you were moved over to Gresham Meggett? Can you describe what it was like?

ER: Like I said, it was, to me, a new school. There were bigger classes, you know.

DR: Okay.

ER: New students. You know, it just was, it was just something you had to get used to, you know, a difference because, in the school that I was at, you know, it was a smaller class, school, smaller classes, you know. The curriculum was different.

DR: How would the furniture be at the Gresham Meggett? Was there a difference between that and where you came from?

ER: They had better desks. Our desks were, you know, hard, you know, wooden chairs and stuff, but it was an improvement. It was a big improvement.

DR: Okay. And you said that they served food too?

ER: Oh, yeah. Yes. They had, also, a lunch room on Sotheby, you know.

DR: So, Gresham Meggett was initially a segregated school?

ER: Yes.

DR: And, I understand that you went to another school. You left Gresham Meggett.

ER: Yes.

DR: And what school was that?

ER: I went to James Island High School, and that was, at the time, on Camp Road.
Yeah.

DR: What grade was that for you?

ER: I went—It was my eleventh year.

DR: Eleventh year?

ER: Yeah.

DR: How as that experience?

ER: At first, I didn't really want to go.

DR: How were you selected?

ER: Well, at the time—

DR: Or were you a volunteer?

ER: Well, my mom volunteered me. They were sending out applications, you know, after they—

DR: When you say they were sending out applications, the school here?

ER: The school, yes.

DR: Okay.

ER: They were sending out applications, and, for anyone who wanted to transfer over at the time because, you know, the schools were being integrated. And, my mom pulled it out, and I was selected to go over there.

DR: What kind of preparation were you given before that transition?

ER: I wasn't given any. No preparation whatsoever. Just that my name was, you know, on the roll to go over there, and, when school started, that was where I was going.

DR: How many other students went with you from Gresham Meggett?

ER: There were many, probably about 15.

DR: Okay.

ER: About 15 or so.

DR: So, your class here at Gresham Meggett before you transferred, about what size was it?

ER: There were about 20 students in the class.

DR: So, almost more? Okay, very good. What was that experience at James Island High?

ER: Well, it was something new, and they did not, you know, associate with you. You were always—You know, they would be watching you. They didn't want you to see them looking at you. Never talked to me.

DR: And what year was this?

ER: Excuse me. This was in '66.

DR: So, no conversation?

ER: No conversation.

DR: So, you were isolated?

ER: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: How did that feel?

ER: You were in, you were, like—You were the only one in that class, you know, and that, in my case, I was the only one in my class. I had no other blacks in my class.

DR: How did it feel being isolated like that?

ER: Well, I wish that somebody would come up and talk with me, you know, or show me some kind of levels, but they didn't.

DR: So, you were there for two years?

ER: Three years.

DR: Three years?

ER: Yeah, because, when I went there, you know, I actually could have been there for two years, but I needed one more subject. And, I didn't, which I wanted to go back, and I really enjoyed my last year.

DR: So—

ER: Although, it was still just me, I had gotten accustomed to the school.

DR: So, you got adjusted to—

ER: Yes.

DR: ...being by yourself?

ER: Yes, and, you know, I just—You know, there were a lot of things I wanted to learn, you know, that I did not get here. And, the subjects were writing a term paper or doing a paper outline, reading a book and doing a book report. I didn't do those things here at W. Gresham Meggett, you know. So, writing essays. You know, so, I learned a lot here.

DR: So, how would the support from home help you in that environment?

ER: Well, I didn't really have any support from home. Well, I knew I had to do what I had to do, you know. So, I did it. I just pushed myself to do it, you know, and they were expecting great grades from me, you know.

DR: How would you say that move, transfer to James Island, affected your confidence and self-esteem?

ER: It built my confidence that I can do it, you know, and, you know, I am somebody, you know, and they're not no better than I am, you know. So, and, I just persevered, and I had the Lord on my side. I did a lot of praying. I learned to pray as an early, as a child—

DR: Yes.

ER: ...you know, because, also being alone was not something new to me. Even growing up as a child, I was, you know, alone and called by God as a child.

DR: You stated just now that there was a difference in the academic preparation?

ER: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: Was that because of the different grade that you were going to or just basically it was a complete difference in the academic preparation among the teachers?

ER: Well, it probably was both because we didn't have the same kind of books that they had here at W. Gresham, and we were just really taught. I should have known about those things earlier than before I went there, you know—

DR: Are you—

ER: ...at, like, sixth grade or so.

DR: So, you're saying that the quality of education at James Island was much higher than what you experienced at Gresham Meggett?

ER: Yes.

DR: Which was a reason for the whole civil rights movement?

ER: Right.

DR: Equal access.

ER: Right.

DR: And it was there that you got equal access?

ER: Yes.

DR: How did the teachers treat you?

ER: The teachers, you know, they did what they had to do. I mean, they did not go out of their way, you know, any specialties, to help or to communicate. If you needed help, they were there to help you because they know they needed to do that, you know, but they were just like the kids, you know.

DR: What do you mean?

ER: They did not show no favoritism or love or—I mean, they'd love, but they—

DR: They were not friendly?

ER: They were not really friendly, no. They just—You know, you were there to get your education. They were the teachers. They'd give you the work. It was up to you to ask questions or do whatever you needed to do.

DR: How was that different from what kind of experience you had at Gresham Meggett?

ER: Gresham Meggett, you know, well, I really wasn't, you know, that close to my teachers either at Gresham Meggett. So, I just did what I needed to do to get out of that class.

DR: Were you able to notice the difference in our culture and with the culture there that you were introduced to? You described the isolation—

ER: Yeah.

DR: ...that no one was friendly. Would you have experienced the same thing at Gresham Meggett?

ER: No, because I had friends at Gresham Meggett. I had friends at Gresham Meggett.

DR: So, if you were to use a few words to sum up your experience at Gresham Meggett, I mean, at James Island, how would you describe that in a sentence or two?

ER: In fact, one time, in my business English class, I wrote my experience at James Island High School, and I didn't get my paper back. And, I asked. I didn't know what to write about at first.

DR: Okay.

ER: So, that was one thing the Lord placed in my life. I wrote how I felt, you know, and I didn't get my paper back. So, I asked my teacher, Ms. Arthur. I said, "Where is my paper?" She said, "You'll see." And, that's all she said to me, "You will see."

So, I didn't know what that meant, you'll see. So, they had a newspaper, school newspaper. They had placed the article in my school newspaper.

DR: Really?

ER: And, I—

DR: How did that make you feel?

ER: It made me feel really good. You know, I didn't know it was that—

DR: So, you didn't feel betrayed though?

ER: No.

DR: Okay. All right.

ER: I didn't feel betrayed after I knew what happened to it. You know, I didn't know that they had placed it there, you know. I tried to keep the paper.

DR: What reaction were you able to notice from students, other people in the community, teachers?

ER: Well, there was no difference. Nobody acknowledged me. Nobody said to me that was a great article, you know. Nobody gave me a compliment, nobody.

DR: Not even the teachers?

ER: Not even the teachers.

DR: Now, if you were at Gresham Meggett and had written that same paper, how do you—

ER: I probably would be recognized by other people, you know, for the accomplishment.

DR: So, history still avoids its acknowledgement of our presence?

ER: Yes.

DR: How did that school prepare you for life?

ER: It was good that I went there. It, like I said, it helped me to gain more confidence in myself. It helped me when I went out to have job interviews, how to conduct

myself, how to write sentences and different things. It helped me to get my first job, you know, because I went there, got and graduated. I was able to get hired at the State Employment Service.

DR: Yeah.

ER: That helped. That was a plus there, and also, seven years later, it helped me to be employed at Sealand Service, which I was there for 22 and a half years.

DR: Sea—? What kind of work was that?

ER: That was a shipping and receiving, one of the biggest shipping and receiving company in Charleston.

DR: And you worked there for how many years?

ER: Twenty-two and a half years.

DR: So, you retired from there, or do you still work there?

ER: No. They closed down. They sold out to another company, and, I mean, I left there and I never was without a job.

DR: I hear you.

ER: I stepped out one door and into another.

DR: But you're able to see the relationship to your education and the preparation for the kind of work that you do?

ER: Oh, yes. And, I've come across one student, you know, that I met at James Island High School, and we work together at the State Employment Office. And, again, I met her again at Stiles Point.

DR: Now, was this an African American or an—

ER: No. This is a white girl.

DR: Okay.

ER: She paid attention to me though. She didn't forget me. She didn't communicate with me, but she would not—

DR: While she was at school?

ER: Right.

DR: Right.

ER: But, she paid attention.

DR: She changed? Yes.

ER: And, we worked together at the State Employment Service. You know, there was no love lost, you know. I was happy to see her, you know, because the things that they—Some kids did mean stuff, you know. They would put, like getting on the bus, they would put a glue stick or something in the way in the aisles. If you were not paying attention, you would trip up.

DR: Oh, yeah.

ER: You know, they would call us things, you know.

DR: What kind of names would they call you?

ER: Nigger.

DR: How did you respond to them when they did that?

ER: Well, I realized that I'm not a nigger, you know, and that wasn't me they were talking about. You know, so, I ignored it. Yeah, and went on about my business.

DR: But no physical confrontations?

ER: No physical confrontation. That was not what I was about.

DR: Just verbal abuse?

ER: Hm-hmm [affirmative], yes.

DR: I see. Do you share those stories with your children?

ER: I do. I do tell them.

DR: And, that helps, you think, to give them the confidence that you were able to go through—

ER: Yes.

DR: ...and experience?

ER: You've got to go through the hard stuff to get to the small stuff. Uh, whew! You know?

DR: Yes.

ER: So, I went through all that to get where I am now.

DR: What else would you want to say? Because, this is going to be preserved for future generations. What else that I might not have mentioned you would want to say at this point?

ER: Don't be afraid of the unknown because we don't know what's in you—ah, praise God—unless you try. And, when you fail, that doesn't mean that you fail. It just means that you just need to try again.

DR: Start over.

ER: Start over. Never give up.

DR: And, I have just interviewed—

ER: Prophetess Emma Lorraine Richardson.

DR: Thank you very much, Emma. You're here? Good. We just finished.

TG: Wow. That was exactly 30 minutes, right, and 25 seconds to go. So, you're done?

DR: Yeah. We're done.

TG: All right. Awesome.

DR: And, thank you, family.

Cassandra Roper and David Richardson

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education*, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 18, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed and David Richardson were the interviewers; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Remarks in brackets are those added by Ms. Roper after she reviewed the transcript. They serve to clarify and add context to her experiences growing up on James Island and attending William Gresham Meggett High School.

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Cassandra Singleton Roper: Singleton-Roper.

Mary Beth Reed: We have Cassandra Roper-Saunders. Sanders?

CSR: Uh-uh (negative.) Cassandra Singleton Roper.

MBR: Ah, Cassandra Singleton-Roper.

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

MBR: And David Richardson.

David Richardson: Backman-Richardson.

MBR: And they're going to talk about the history of St. James Presbyterian Church. I'm going to leave you guys—just really talk what your family—

CSR: Yeah.

MBR: Well, what school did you—yesterday, you told us what school you went—you went to school here. So let's start there.

CSR: Well, that's not really where the history of the church started now.

MBR: All right. How did it start?

CSR: The church started back in 1866. The church was formed, was founded in 1866. And the reason why the church was formed in 1866 is prior to that during the Civil War, there was a war between the North and the South. And African American slaves at that time worshiped in the James Island Presbyterian Church down the street on the corner of Fort Johnson and—and—this road used to be named—[Quarantine Road and it was changed to King's Highway].

DR: North Folly.

CSR: No, no.

DR: This road was—

CSR: This road's name was—road that we call now Fort Johnson Road was Quarantine Road.

DR: Okay.

CSR: And so on the corner of Folly and Quarantine Road is where the James Island Presbyterian Church was, where the African American slave worshipped sitting upstairs in the balcony, and the whites sat downstairs. But during the Civil War, the officers of the war took over the church as their headquarters. James Island Presbyterian Church was the headquarters.

DR: Were they Union officers or the Confederates?

CSR: Well, whichever one down here—Confederate.

DR: Confederate. Okay.

CSR: And it was stated that one of the soldiers started a fire in the backyard.

DR: At the church.

CSR: And as a result the fire spread and burned the church down, and the cemetery on Folly Road is where African American slaves are buried at. It's called, to this day, the Burn Church Cemetery—

DR: Correct.

CSR: ...because that's where the church burned down. So as a result of the church burning, the white parishioners worshipped at the home of Ephriam Clark. He was located at Clark's Plantation.

DR: Okay.

CSR: The black parishioners had no place to worship. They believed in their faith and they wanted to worship. So what they did was they gathered and marched down to the corner of Quarantine Road.

DR: And Secessionville.

CSR: And that's when they—the road's name was not Secession, but don't put words in my mouth. And that's when they—

DR: (inaudible 00:02:26.)

CSR: There was a big oak tree there. And under the big oak tree there were five men who were the leaders, who led this band of African American slaves down to this corner: Richard Backman, Trouman Cromwell, Lazarus Fludd, Billy McDowell and Samuel Washington. The highway was Kings Highway and Old Savannah Road was the intersection. That was the old name before it was changed to Fort Johnson and Secessionville Road.

DR: Okay.

CSR: And what they did was they started gathering under this big oak tree. And under the big oak tree what they built was what was classified back then as a brush arbor. It was just an enclosure made out of sticks and branches, and that is where they worshipped, and they even worshiped in inclement weather. It didn't bother them that—they just wanted to worship and that's where the African American first started worshiping. When the white parishioners—you know, during the war, they left the plantations and went up to high land.

African Americans stayed down here in the lower part of the land because, you know, they didn't have no place to go. So when the white parishioners came back, they said that the Northerners wrestled the slaves away from them, and that's how they started the

church, but that was not true. That was—the Northerners had nothing to do with it. The church was called “Colored Presbyterian Church.”

It was later on that the Northerners came down and they started helping the freed slaves. There was a group that was sent down from the North that was told to come down and to assist the freed slaves, and that’s how they became involved, and our first pastor was from the North. His name was Reverend Hezekiah Hambleton Hunter. He came to James Island from the Northern Presbyterian Church. He came from Brooklyn, New York specifically to work with the newly freed slaves—colored—people of color.

DR: Okay.

CSR: Because Reverend Hunter realized that the future of the Southern blacks was his future too. They should—he said, “Rise up and accept their freedom.” So that was how the church was first formed under the brush arbor. Later on, back in 1868—I’d have to look through the book here to see the year that they first established a structure, a wooden structure. As a result of worshipping on this land, the land was owned by Mr. Clark the land was first owned by Mr. Ephriam Clark, and Ephriam Clark gave them permission to worship there. Later on, he sold that [2/3 acres of land] to the newly freed blacks.

DR: How much land was it; do you know?

CSR: It was two-thirds acre. See, that’s why I needed to kind of glance back to the book to see. You’re not recording, are you? Yeah, it was a two-thirds acre that they purchased. And the building was constructed in 1868. It was called “The Colored Presbyterian Church.” The building replaced the brush arbor. The Committee of Freedmen in support to the General Assembly in 1868 states that “The Colored Presbyterian Church on James Island building was completed at a cost of \$800,” and it had a membership of 400 members at that time.

DR: And that was the original church?

CSR: That was the original church, yeah. Eighty Sunday school pupils and 89 students in the Mission School. So the school was actually called the “Mission School” at first. You’ll find all of the church on the Sea Islands had Mission Schools.

DR: Even the Baptist?

CSR: Well, the Sea Island Presbyterian churches had Mission Schools.

DR: That’s right.

CSR: No. Because the Baptist church and all of them were formed from the Presbyterian church. You know, just like now we have the schism, where they don't—one likes this and the other one doesn't like that. That's when they formed their own [(another) denomination, church)]—but all of their students came here to the Mission School. Although their parents were members of the other churches on the island, the students attended the Mission School. So we had the first Mission School on James Island. Johns Island had a Mission School.

All of the African American churches had Mission Schools. So education was what the Northerners believed that the freed Southern slaves should [have] —and, you know, it was welcome. And that's where you were talking about Miss Martha (Mattie) Gladden. She was one of the teachers, but it started with Marion A. Sanders, and his wife Ona Belle Sanders—he wasn't the founder of the Mission School. The Mission School was founded under Reverend Hezekiah Hampleton Hunter.

DR: Which was the first minister.

CSR: Yeah, the first pastor. But then the Mission School was closed at one point, and the church was seeking for a pastor, and that's when the Reverend Sanders reopened the Mission School. We had—prior to Reverend Sanders, we had Reverend Adam Frayer, who was also—he came in 1894 after the death of Reverend Hunter. And he was also the pastor at Hopewell and Aimwell Presbyterian Church on Edisto Island, so that's where you see—that's why—they had Mission Schools there too, because that's what these Northerners, you know, ministers—[came to the South to educate the newly freed slaves.]

DR: When did M.A. Sanders come?

CSR: Reverend Sanders came to [the Colored Presbyterian Church] in 1923. He was in Atlanta attending a conference in Atlanta, and he and his wife, Ona Belle Sanders—one of the elders from St. James approached him, who was—and that just goes to show you that back during those days, the elders from this church would travel to Catawba, North Carolina, to a Presbytery meeting. They would travel to Atlanta, Georgia to Presbytery meetings. And it's amazing how they got to—and nowadays, we have people who have transportation and don't want to go to the meetings, which is right across on Johns Island or right there on Edisto Island, or right up the street—you know, and it's amazing how they would—leave from James Island, go to North Carolina, go to Atlanta, Georgia, and that [shows how committed, faithful they were to the work of the church]

DR: A great inconvenience.

CSR: Yeah. And that's where they met Reverend Marion A. Sanders. And one of the elders told—asked Reverend Sanders—that the church was looking for a pastor because we were without a pastor. And there, like I said, Reverend Marion A. Sanders and his wife Ona Belle Sanders were approached by an elder from St. James who expressed an urgent need for a preacher and a teacher to reopen the much-needed Mission School to help young black children with basic curriculum. Prior to Reverend Sanders coming, the Mission School was closed because of not having a teacher or a preacher, and then after Reverend Sanders came in 1923, it was reopened.

DR: So '23 when it—

CSR: Yes they reopened it in 1923, until the public schools were integrated. And when the public schools were open, that's when—not integrated. But when they were opened, that's when they closed the Mission School for the 1960-1961 school year.

DR: Well, I attended the school.

CSR: But you attended the school.

DR: Yeah, I attended this school in the first and I think the second grade, which meant that my third-grade attendance at (indistinct 00:09:53) was the year before we got transferred to Gresham Meggett. So according to the timeline, that might have been about '53.

MBR: So it was operating from the '50s.

CSR: Yeah.

DR: Consolidation of the elementary schools was about '53 I think, because Gresham Meggett construction started in '52.

MBR: That's right. Yeah.

DR: Yeah.

CSR: Yeah. See Reverend Sanders reopened the Mission School, which was now called the Parochial School in 1924. Classes were held in the sanctuary. Having a need for more classroom space, the church purchased a small frame house from a neighbor who was across the street. And it's amazing, for \$50, they rolled that house over on rollers. They rolled that house over on rollers across the street and attached it to the opposite side of the church building.

DR: Of the church.

CSR: Yeah. And the two-room building was moved on rollers across the highway and it was used for additional classroom space at the east end of the church, and later a kitchen was added, you know, so the children would have free lunches. And the young and energetic Reverend and Mrs. Sanders, through the St. James Parochial School, built a very strong educational program for black youths and adults on James Island, and the curriculum covered grades one through eleven, while the public schools covered the first through seven grades only. So you see the church was very instrumental in the education of the children here on the island. Mrs. Sanders, who was very instrumental in teaching, she gave the girls instructions in embroidery, crocheting, garment making and general home economics, and the boys were also taught home economics.

DR: It's important when you're young because you—you see all that (indistinct 00:11:39) she had?

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.) Classes for the adults were held mainly when black—when work on the farms was slow and were made up mainly of ladies. Mrs. Sanders also taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, quilting, mattress making, and canning. And Mrs. DeVeaux who was a home demonstration agent for Charleston County was one of the teachers who taught history.

DR: Yeah. I remember all of them. You don't remember them; do you?

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CSR: No, I was not here.

DR: But I remember them.

CSR: But we had several teachers. The teachers were Mrs. Sanders, Mrs. Albertha DeVeaux, Mr. Lazarus Washington, Miss Eleanor Washington who lived down the street on the back of this property, Miss Catherine Washington, Mr. Adam Davis, Miss Hattie Belle Sanders, Miss Ona Belle Pete Davis, Mrs. Martha Gladden who taught you, Mrs. Ernestine Roper, [Miss Louise Williams, Mrs. Levola Whaley, assistant teacher, Mrs. Louise Metz.]

DR: All of those teachers, huh?

CSR: Our cousin Mrs. Ernestine Roper who lives down the street from you, yes, she taught. Mrs. Louise Williams, Miss Lavola Whaley was also a teacher.

DR: Where did they have all the spaces for those teachers?

CSR: And Louise Metz.

DR: It was over a period of time?

CSR: Over a period of time. And Fred Gibb assumed the position of director of physical education after the resignation of Mr. Adam Davis. And the cooks were Miss Cecelia Richardson, who lives down the street from—on the back road, [and Miss Louise B. Williams.]

DR: Oh, our aunt.

CSR: Yeah, our aunt. And Miss Louise B. Williams, (phonetic 00:13:01) who lived down the street.

DR: Down the street, yeah.

CSR: They were the cooks for the Parochial School. [Students who did not attend the Parochial School attended four (4) other Mission/community schools on James Island offering classes in reading, writing and arithmetic: Three Tree School, Society Corner School, Sol-Legare School and Cut Bridge School.]

DR: Absolutely. (indistinct 00:13:06) too.

CSR: Free bus transportation to the public schools started in 1951, which affected attendance at the parochial school. So it was after 1951 that the church parochial school closed its door. A free lunch program for the students in the parochial school was set up in 1926, and the enrollment grew to 500 students who would come here [five days a week.]

DR: (indistinct 00:13:34.)

CSR: And in 1927, a lot on the Folly Road was purchased from Henry and Mary Ann Richardson. Do you remember them? That was—

DR: That's where their house was.

CSR: Yeah, that's where the house was—[it was used as a manse for the preacher and his family.]

DR: Yes.

CSR: And the Synod of the South provided funds for the construction through a grant. So the Northerners really looked out for the church down here now. We couldn't say that we depended on the Southerners at all. But it was the Northerners who provided—

DR: (inaudible 00:13:59.)

CSR: Because what they would do also is, they would send—and it's amazing how they would send boxes and boxes of clothing—

DR: I remember that.

CSR: ...here to the church.

DR: Yes.

CSR: And the church distributed the content to anybody [on the Island] in the neighborhood who had a need.

DR: Yes.

CSR: They would come to the church after these boxes of clothing came and were distributed [to each household.]

DR: Especially during the preseason—holiday seasons.

CSR: Yeah, during the holiday seasons; yes.

DR: Yeah. Boxes of—

CSR: Boxes of clothing was sent from the North, you know, so it was highly appreciated.

DR: Yeah, it was. Everybody helped.

CSR: And the Sunday school [parcel of Land] was purchased on Sol Legare from Mr. Charles Howard in 1934, for building a Sunday school. Do you remember the Sunday school on Sol Legare?

DR: Yes, I did. Yeah.

CSR: That was the church school that was built, but it was built on Sol Legare.

DR: But it was an extension of this church here?

CSR: Sort of, yes. But Mr. Howard—[Parcel—was used for neighborhood Sunday School program on Sunday evenings,] for the Sol Legare, which we used to call "The Chapel." [Whereas other communities held these same Sunday programs and were held in the homes of other community leaders.]

DR: Yes.

CSR: And the first teachers there [were Mrs. Rebecca Wilder Wallace, Mrs. Henrietta Gilliard and Toby Tobias Singleton.]—

DR: So they had classes in the chapel also?

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

DR: The chapel existed before the first Sol Legare school?

CSR: Yes.

DR: Okay. Because the one right—the first school that Willie showed earlier was across from—where Tafioes was (phonetic 00:15:11.)

CSR: Yes. Up on the water where—

DR: On the water side.

CSR: You know where the Richardson house was?

DR: Right; okay.

CSR: Because the school bell is still there right now [to this day.]

DR: Where Bubba—

CSR: Where Bubba Richardson's house was; yeah.

DR: It was actually at that sight?

CSR: Yeah. If you go to Sol Legare right now, you'll see the school bell is still there.

DR: Okay.

CSR: Yeah. When you go to Sol Legare again, look at—stop at Bubba Richardson's house.

DR: It's right in the back yard, [near the creek.]

CSR: And the house is here. And right to the back near the water—

DR: Yes.

CSR: ...you can see the bell. It's still standing right there from the first schoolhouse that was on Sol Legare. And later on, the church purchased additional property. In 1940, a chapel was used for classrooms built on the west side of the church between Secessionville Road and Sanctuary, and it was amazing. Free books were supplied to the Mission School from the Northern church—is where the books for the—[students—new not used books.]

DR: Would come back to the state.

CSR: Well, it came from the North; yeah. And the amazing thing is too that when the public school was open, they would send their used books over to the St. James Parochial School, and the books were torn. They were written in.

DR: The pages were written in.

CSR: I mean, pages were torn out. But the books were written and scribbled all over, but, you know, the teachers had to work with whatever they were given.

DR: They made the best out of it.

CSR: They made the best out of it, and they—

DR: That's right.

CSR: ...taught the students well.

DR: Yes.

CSR: Because like I said, the Parochial School went up to grade 11. And it was only in the 12th grade that students would go into the city [of Charleston] and go to the school [to complete 12th grade] that was back then called—there was Burke—

DR: And Avery—Burke. It started off Avery and then eventually—yes.

CSR: And Avery, Burke. Yes, that's where they went to graduate.

DR: A long struggle.

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.) It was. This building that you see now that's called the "Head Start" building, was used [as a new Mission School building.] It was the A.B. McCoy Building. The Mission School building was built in 1951. It was named the A.B.

McCoy Building, honoring Dr. Albert B. McCoy for the special efforts he exerted in helping the church to secure funds [from the Northern Church] for its construction.

DR: So he was obviously not a local person.

CSR: No. He was not.

DR: When I heard that name, I was thinking about the McCoy's off of Fleming Road, but that's not what you're saying.

CSR: No, he's not related to them. You never could tell back then. Now, he may have left—or dropped some seeds here and there, but you know what I'm saying.

DR: But they didn't, you know, they didn't have those kinds of means.

CSR: Uh-uh (negative.) Yeah, the Colored Presbyterian church remodeled its sanctuary in 1953 to accommodate the growth in its membership, which had grown to approximately 900 members by then.

DR: And what year was this?

CSR: In 1953.

DR: Okay.

CSR: And right now, we only have like 1,200. So you can imagine back then for the small facility that they had, they had over 900 members.

DR: Yeah. The (indistinct 00:18:03) orchards.

CSR: Oh, yeah, it used to be hot in there. But they used to put the windows up. We can't put windows up now.

DR: That's true.

CSR: But they used to put the windows up.

DR: No air conditioning, no fans either.

CSR: No fan, but they [came to worship God in spite of the conditions.]

DR: Except the one in your hands.

CSR: That's all. Hm-hmm (affirmative.) If they had fans back then. Who knows?

DR: There wasn't no windows—cross breeze; yeah.

CSR: And during the week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, services were held at the [class houses, meeting house]—at the homes of persons that we called "class leaders." Sol Legare had a class leader. Remember, we used to hold it at Papa Eddie's [Edward Dandy Singleton] House across the street, the big house, [as it was called, because it was a two story house.]

DR: Oh, then Uncle (indistinct 00:18:35) used to have a class meeting there.

CSR: Yeah. Every area on the island had what was called a "Meeting House."

DR: Yes.

CSR: And on Tuesday and Thursday nights, prayer meeting and church service was held in the different communities.

DR: And they were persons private homes.

CSR: Yeah, they were in people's private homes.

DR: You know, someone might have had a—

CSR: A large area. Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

DR: And all the houses were kind of small.

CSR: Yeah. But then they started branching off. Because on Grimball, they built a hall, you know as you're going around the [corner on Riverland Drive]

DR: Which one?

CSR: On the left side. It's a house now.

DR: Down by Riverland Drive?

CSR: Yeah, Riverside Lodge is the name.

DR: Riverside's right at the fork.

CSR: At the fork in the road.

DR: But the (indistinct 00:19:16) you're talking about—there was another lodge there too.

CSR: Yeah.

DR: And there was another one on Riverland Drive near Jesse Richardson's house.

CSR: That's right.

DR: Do you remember that?

CSR: All of those were used—homes for meeting houses for services.

DR: And sometimes—depends upon the private individual, the size of their homes. Because [dead] bodies would lay in state overnight.

CSR: Yeah.

DR: And on Sol Legare which was the largest one for the—entire community. There were many funerals held there because the homes were not large enough to accommodate them.

CSR: Right. Yeah, the body was—

DR: Or for folks, you know, to go to for the wake, you know. And so, around the island, there were, in most every community—

CSR: Every community [had a Lodge Hall, Meeting House.]

DR: Because, you know, right behind the Baptist church on Dills Bluff Road, there was one right there.

CSR: Right.

DR: And, of course, there's another one someplace down the Island.

CSR: Yeah, on the left as you're going to go to Fort Johnson High School.

DR: Right.

CSR: I mean, the charter high school on the left.

DR: Yes. There was one—

CSR: Yeah, there was one there; yeah.

DR: Yeah. So every community was —like a big house for a combination of activities because of the homes themselves were not sufficient enough to accommodate people, you know.

CSR: Yeah.

DR: Those were the days.

MBR: How were the meeting houses? That was part—was a family tasked with being in charge—how were they organized? I mean, geography?

CSR: Primarily, the class leader—each area had what we called the “class leaders.” There were 10 class leaders. There was a class leader on Sol Legare. There was a class leader on Grimball. There was a class leader—what that class leader did, they were members who were assigned under that person’s spiritual—for spiritual guidance or spiritual leadership and wherever that class leader was is where there would be a meeting house. Say, for example, on Sol Legare—Papa Edward [Eddie Dandy Singleton’s] house, the big house on the water was the meeting house there because he was a class leader for the Sol Legare area on Beefield.

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DR: Are you talking about Eddie Singleton?

[There were 10 class leaders for James Island

	[Class Number	Number of Members
1.	Paul Martin, Cut Bridge	136
2.	Charles Whaley, Grimball	58
3.	Frank D. Deleston, Grimball	116
4.	Isaac Richardson, Hazard Road	55
5.	Abram Brown, Grimball	38
6.	Ezekiel Washington, Peas Hill	114
7.	James Williams, Down the Island	25
8.	Edward (Eddie) Dandy Singleton and later Toby Singleton, Sol Lagare	88
9.	Jerry Seabrook, Elsewhere	18
10.	Edward Drayton, Cut Bridge	31]

CSR: Eddie Singleton; yes.

DR: Yes.

CSR: On Beefield, there was a class leader for Beefield was—let me see. There were 10. There was Paul Martin on Cut Bridge, Charles Whaley on Grimball, Frank Deleston was also on Grimball.

DR: Yes.

CSR: Isaac Richardson was on Hazard Road [phonetic 00:21:42] which would be your area.

DR: Yes.

CSR: Yeah.

DR: (inaudible 00:21:42.)

CSR: And then we had Abram Brown who was on Grimball. And then we had Ezekiel Washington, which was over here on Beefield, and then we had James Williams, who was down the island, Toby Singleton—or Edward (Eddie) Singleton was on Sol Legare.

DR: Sol Legare.

CSR: Jerry Seabrook was over elsewhere [those not residing on James Island but attending worship or services (church)].

DR: Someplace right there.

CSR: And Edward Drayton was Cut Bridge—so each of the areas on the island had one of these 10 class leaders, and they were responsible for the spiritual leadership of the members who fell under their leadership—like say, some of them had like 136 members that they were responsible for giving guidance and leadership. And one had 58, another one had 116, another had 55, another had 38. One had 114, 25, 88, 18, and 31. So these were all people that they were responsible for giving leadership to, or families that they were responsible for giving spiritual leadership and guidance.

DR: Which I think contributed to the unity and the strength of the church. Every week, on a certain day, usually Thursday I think it used to be, or Wednesday. They used to have a prayer meeting.

CSR: Tuesday or Thursday.

DR: Tuesday or Thursday?

CSR: Tuesday or Thursday were the days for prayer—

DR: There would be prayer meetings. And the prayer meetings were not just limited in terms of attendance by members of this church.

CSR: Anybody in the community.

DR: Anybody in the community. And there were basically three churches in the community. And the family members were members of all the churches.

CSR: Right.

DR: So it's not—it was possible that the wife may be a member of St. James, and the husband may be a member of First Baptist or Payne.

CSR: Right.

DR: But it did not create any division because whenever there were anniversaries, and every year the different boards in the church like the Usher Board or the choir and what else—not the deacon. They didn't have the conferences or—

CSR: No. The deacons had their anniversaries also.

DR: Yes. But the different churches, when the anniversary for a particular organization or service, department in that church, other churches would come and participate in that.

CSR: And that's still happening up to today.

DR: Yes. Yeah. Used to be much more effective at one point.

CSR: Yeah. But like you were saying, like the meeting house on Sol Legare. In each of these areas, it was a nondenominational meeting house. Anybody, regardless of whether you're Baptist, Methodist, etcetera—

DR: Right.

CSR: ...or whatever, you attended—went on Tuesday or Thursday to a meeting—to the meeting houses to have prayer meeting on Tuesday or Wednesday nights [in your community.]

DR: Now, those prayer meetings went on a long time. Because if you've seen some of your movies prior to the Civil War's era, groups that were allowed certain days together, and at some point, they could only do it if there was a white person present.

CSR: Yes.

DR: But it was a time where they basically I think put in effect their true belief in metaphysics. Because it was the ability to pray and I guess cast off some of the immediate troubling burdens that you had to face every day and repeat every day. So it was really an opportunity to refresh, to go after tomorrow. Because, of course, in those meetings, you prayed and asking the Creator to help relieve you of whatever the burden is, and the collectiveness of the group and family members I think is what really created the effectiveness of it. That's why I said it's a chance to practice metaphysics to relieve and see a better day in the future, you know, but it was often well attended. And I remember there were times when, at a certain time of night, you'd hear talking. Because as the prayer meetings were dismissed. Of course, the groups would be going back and returning to home and many of the roads were still (inaudible 00:25:51.)

CSR: Yeah, they walked [the dirt roads. No horse and buggy. Dirt.]

DR: Still (inaudible 00:25:53.)

CSR: That's right.

DR: And so they'd be walking and having a good time talking to each other until they'd sort of gotten to their destination.

CSR: To the destination.

DR: Now, one of the things that came out of that also is the term "piece away."

CSR: Piece away.

DR: Yeah, have you heard that before?

CSR: Uh-uh (negative.)

DR: Okay. There's a practice where women often would walk, especially if they had one of them visiting the others house.

CSR: Oh, it's called "Piece the Way."

DR: Yeah.

CSR: We call it, "I'm going to walk you pieced the way [that means part of the distance.]"

DR: Piece away.

CSR: Piece the way. ["Piece the way."]

DR: Yeah, piece away. See, she put more words that there needed to be.

CSR: Yeah. No, we call it—

DR: You said, "pieced away." I call it, "piece away.

CSR: No, piece the away. Piece the way. That's for example if you come and you visit me, you may live down the street about a mile from me or wherever you live, and I said, "Well, I'll walked you piece the away." That means I walk you part of the away. Piece the away.

DR: But what happens there often, they go further than what they initially intended.

CSR: Yeah. Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

DR: So the one that is being—and closer to home or to turnaround—

CSR: Turn around and walk me back. Piece the way.

DR: Piece away.

CSR: "Well, let me walk you back piece the way."

DR: That practice may happen for more than one—

CSR: Several times in one trip. [We'd walk each other back and forth, "piece the way" multiple times in one trip.]

DR: Yes.

CSR: Yeah, piece the way.

MBR: So were prayer meetings at night, mostly?

DR: Yes.

CSR: Yeah. But you know the amazing thing about it, children—because I remember when I was a little girl.

DR: You used to go to?

CSR: I used to go to class meetings.. Us kids, we used to enjoy it because we would, [imitate the adults] you know, they had these long wooden benches back then. They didn't have no backs on the chairs like that. They would have them long wooden benches.

DR: Right.

CSR: And as the older folks were [clapping, praising, stomping foot, having a joyous time the the Lord,] we would get up on the bench and we'd be [imitating the adults] jumping on the bench, and we'd—I tell you, we were—the young kids were engaged now. They were really engaged, and so I remember those days. I can see myself at papa's house—my grandfather was one who had one of the houses on Sol Legare, and see myself on the back bench, you know, during the time that they had prayer service and when they were really engaged. And, you know, on the back bench just jumping up and imitating the adults.

DR: The adults.

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

DR: And part of the practice that has now gone out of the window is it was mandatory to seek your soul salvation to be able to join a church.

CSR: Right.

DR: There was a process.

CSR: Explain to her what "seek your soul salvation" is.

DR: It's a commitment by a young student or a potential member under the leadership of the class leader, initially, and it's where that person begins becoming focused on wanting to join a church. It sort of requires concentration, constant prayer. And one part of it is I guess is to get control of your fear. Because you've got to often go outside at night by yourself, and [stay outside for hours.]

CSR: That was the process, not often, that was the process. That was the process.

DR: It was absolutely a requirement.

CSR: That was the process.

DR: Yes, where you would go outside in a place that you have chosen for yourself to pray for a while, and by yourself, so it gives you a chance to overcome fear, I think, because you've got to stay out there.

CSR: I never did overcome fear.

DR: You didn't?

CSR: Uh-uh (negative.) Yeah, because we had to stay out there, and then you would come back, after being fearfully outside at night by yourself, and then supposedly after a period of time, you would be dreaming these dreams. You're supposed to have dreams that your class leader or a member or an adult would interpret.

DR: Would interpret.

CSR: Interpret. And that would determine whether you have completed the process to actually— [be ready to confess your faith—to become a member, join a church.]

DR: Be admitted to the church.

CSR: Be admitted into the church.

DR: Yes.

CSR: Sometimes, you'd have to go back several times out there [in the night by yourself]. And what they called—the terminology was "the wilderness." You would go back into the wilderness and the term was, "You go into the wilderness and seek." What you're going to do is you're going to seek your soul salvation to see whether God said it's time for you to officially affiliate yourself with a particular congregation or not. And what you would do after a period of this happening, you would have dreams, and you would tell your dreams to one of the church leaders, and the church leader was supposed [to direct you to someone to give you spiritual guidance.]

DR: Class Leader.

CSR: Or class—yeah, class leader would interpret your dream and say, "Well, no, it's not time yet. You didn't dream the right dream, so that means you have to go back and seek some more." [So, outside in the dark wilderness you go again.]

DR: Or continue the process.

CSR: Until they finally say, "Well, yeah, I think that you're ready. And it sounds like your dream is telling you..." Like me, for example, my dream was interpreted by the

cleaners man. It was interpreted by someone from [the Methodist Church]—not from the denomination that I was attending church with, but mine was interpreted by Reverend White from Payne Methodist Church. Because he was the man who was the cleaner's man. And he would come by each house and he pick up your clothing and take it to the cleaners and bring it back the next week. So—

DR: You're talking about John Henry Moore.

CSR: John Henry Moore; yeah. So my mother would tell me, "Well, tell, Mr. Moore your dream." And I told him my dream and he would say, "(indistinct 00:31:15) no, you're not ready yet." So the next week, I'd have to go out there in the wilderness again in the dark at night by myself again. And then the next week he came, [I told him my dream] and he said, "Well, I think you're ready. But now, your dream is telling you that you should go and talk to your Auntie Elizabeth Grant."

DR: That's where you would—

CSR: "And—she's supposed to be your spiritual leader." Auntie Elizabeth Grant! [I gasped because she was a Presbyterian.] I was very disappointed. Not about my aunt, but because of the fact that I had always attended the Baptist Church. My grandaunt who raised me was a Baptist.

DR: (indistinct 00:31:53).

CSR: She was [Rosa Pleasant Richardson Leff.] Aunt Pleasant was from Sol Legare.

DR: Huh?

CSR: Pleasant, from Sol Legare. Jerry and Pleasant Leff from Sol Legare. [They raised me from about two or three years old.]

DR: Okay.

CSR: And they were members of First Baptist [Church on Dills Bluff Road]—the only thing that I remembered about the Presbyterian Church when I was little growing up is passing by here in a cart and buggy, because we used to ride on the back of Mr. Ed Palmer's cart going to church. And I remember passing this church going down to First Baptist Church. All of my memories were of the First Baptist Church. Because us little kids [would huddle together.] First Baptist Church, they had a big wood stove, an iron stove, and we used to sit right there by the stove during the wintertime to keep warm, and they had an outdoor pool [for baptism.] And those are the only memories that I remember. I never remembered this Presbyterian Church except during the time when they had anniversaries.

DR: Right [to keep warm].

CSR: Then, all of the churches would come and [celebrate together]—

DR: Take a turn.

CSR: Because I liked the ice cream and cake that the Presbyterian Church, used to have. So I only remembered about the anniversaries. Whenever First Baptist would have an anniversary or Payne would have an anniversary [etcetera. We would accompany our parent or guardian going from church to church to celebrate.]

DR: Other churches.

CSR: Everybody would join in from other churches. You'd go to those churches. So what I remembered about St. James Presbyterian Church was the anniversary and coming and getting ice cream and cake. That was all. So when he told me that (indistinct 00:33:00), I think you're supposed to be a Presbyterian, and your leader will be your Aunt Elizabeth Grant." Man, I could cry, though. I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "Yeah, that's who you need to go talk to, and she'll tell you the process for you to join the church." I said, "You're sure I'm supposed to be a Presbyterian and not a Baptist?" He said, "Yeah, your dreams said that you're supposed to be a Presbyterian."

DR: Oh, my goodness.

MBR: About what age would you do this process?

CSR: Around 12.

MBR: Twelve?

CSR: Yeah, 12.

MBR: And is all of this a James Island Sea Island—

CSR: Traditionally. Sea Island.

DR: It's part of the developed tradition.

MBR: Okay. Part (indistinct 00:33:38) and Presbyterian, obviously, not just Presbyterian.

CSR: No, it was not a domination. No.

MBR: Yeah.

CSR: It was just a tradition to African Americans on the five Sea Islands.

MBR: Okay.

DR: They hear the same practice down at Sapelo, you know, folks, you know, just part of our culture on the islands.

CSR: Yeah. But anyway, so that's how the process went—and then I would go and talk to her, my Aunt Elizabeth, and I would tell her my dream, and she'd say, "Yeah. Well, I think so, or, well, you to got to do...." Then you've got to meet with the session, and after you meet with the session, then they'll approve you at the designated Sunday service you stand before the congregation, answer the Constitutional questions and that's how you become a member of the church. But I've been here [at St. Jame ever since. But my heart is still there; can I be honest with you. There's still a part of me that still resonates with the First Baptist Church.

DR: So did you all go to—now, I've been a member—

CSR: Because that's where I came from.

DR: Now, I've been a member of First Payne. Our brother, Thomas and I, joined about the same time, and Uncle Timothy was with us too.

CSR: Timothy Backman.

DR: Yeah, where the prayer meeting house was. Then, when I came back out of school, I joined First Baptist until they had some unrest.

CSR: Some schism in the church.

DR: Yeah, and I left. And I said, "You know, I better go back where I first started at." And that was right here. And so I joined this—our father is here in the cemetery. My mother—where is your mom buried?

CSR: My mom was buried over behind the new Library [on Grimball Road].

DR: So Green—

CSR: Greenhill.

DR: Green something.

CSR: Yeah, Evergreen Cemetery.

DR: Yeah. I understand Richard Backman is there too, and our great-grandfather. I haven't been able to find his gravestone.

CSR: Oh, really?

DR: No. Very close relationship (indistinct 00:35:12). Yeah, absolutely.

CSR: But anyway, and that's really the basic history not leading up to the current history of the church, you know. That's the background. The church started in 1866 to the present, which is 152 years. And throughout these 150-something years, we only had eight ministers with the two associate pastors between 152 years. Reverend Cornelius Leroy Campbell, Jr. was here for 23 years. He died, [December 3, 1993.]—

DR: When was that?

CSR: Yes, ...December 3rd, 1993. I remember Reverend Campbell's death like—he died December 3rd, 2018. [Just like it was yesterday].

DR: Now, how long was Shaw here?

CSR: Shaw was here for only maybe about three or four years. Yeah, we had a little—

DR: Do you remember him?

CSR: Yeah, I remember Shaw. Hm-hmm (affirmative.) Yeah. After Shaw left, then Campbell came, and Campbell was with us for 23 years. And he died suddenly. He went in the hospital and he never came back, sudden death.

DR: And he was a local boy, in a sense.

CSR: He was from Edisto Island—

DR: I think he was from Edisto.

CSR: He was from Edisto, yeah.

DR: Yeah. That's the first time I know we had a minister—

CSR: Local.

DR: Yeah, who was not the only local minister in a sense, you know. Of course, McKinley had never been a minister here, but [he is local, also from Edisto Island.]

CSR: No.

DR: ...I guess Heyward. Heyward was born—

CSR: He was from Johns Island.

DR: Yeah, that's later. This church, as I recall, had one of the largest congregations in the Southeast.

CSR: Yeah. Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

DR: And all the Presbyterian churches.

CSR: And we're still classified as that.

DR: Oh, yeah.

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.) The largest African American church. But which I'm thinking that maybe there may be one in Charlotte that may be larger, but the last that I heard a couple of weeks ago was that we're still the largest. And I'm saying that because of the fact that, you know, churches purge their membership roll every year. So it could be that maybe that other church has dropped—its membership role has dropped (indistinct 00:37:06.)

DR: Okay.

CSR: Yeah. So, in November of each year, we purge our membership.

DR: And this church does support Johnson C. Smith.

CSR: Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary; yes.

DR: Okay.

CSR: We do.

MBR: I want to thank you.

CSR: Oh, you're welcome.

MBR: We pressed you into service. You haven't eaten your lunch. But that was fascinating.

CSR: Thank you.

MBR: That was fascinating.

CSR: I probably would have been able to share more if I'd had an opportunity to glance back at the history book, you know.

MBR: Well, we're really pleased. Because when David talked to us about what was the Mission School then, to give that context, and you really did. But it was—when Sanders came back. When he came here to—almost three decades or more, the school was in existence.

CSR: Yeah. Hm-hmm (affirmative.)

MBR: That's pretty amazing, you know. So—

CSR: Well, we had it—it was open before Sanders came now.

MBR: That's what I mean. It just immediately closed before he came and then—

CSR: And then reopened when he came; yes.

MBR: That's just an incredible record of affiliation.

CSR: So, it actually opened during the year that Reverend—the first pastor came, Reverend Henry Hambleton Hunter from the North came. That's when the [Mission School started. Shortly after he arrived.]

DR: In 1866?

CSR: He came in 1866.

DR: That's interesting. My school—the school I went to—so one of the oldest African American schools that was started by General Fisk with his offsprings. Because at that point, the Confederates or (indistinct 00:38:38) had children that they acknowledged, and they wanted them to get an education, so that was one of the—several schools were started at higher education: Fisk University, Talladega, Hampton, not quite. There were a couple of others in the South. And it was—Fisk was 1866. And I didn't realize that this church was really that old, you know.

CSR: And see, back from its inception the Colored Presbyterian Church was a Mission Church. As previously stated, the Northern Presbyterian Church sent Reverend Henry Hamilton Hunter to organize the church and a school to educate the newly freed children in 1866.

MBR: So it started in '66?

CSR: So that was his—yes.

MBR: And that was into probably—the hiatus when it was closed.

CSR: Right.

MBR: But what—just the record alone is amazing.

CSR: And we were really primarily supported during that time through the Board of National Missions. Because the Board of National Missions also supplemented the pastors' salaries. Back then, you know, people didn't have any income per say.

DR: Right.

CSR: So a lot of times, the pastor's salary was supplemented with a chicken, eggs. And when you killed a pig or a hog or something like that, you know, they would share those things with the minister, realizing that they would not—didn't have the funds to pay him other than what the Northern church—the Northern church like (indistinct 00:40:09) did supply toys and clothing for distribution to the children at Christmas and other times, and that's where the pastors' anniversaries started from.

It started from the fact, during the time when—because the congregation didn't have the means to support the pastor, they said, "Well, once a year, why don't we just have a pastor's celebration on the anniversary for the pastor. And the purpose of that was just to, show your appreciation, you'd save your pennies throughout the year, and then during the time that you have the pastor's anniversary, you would give them a purse or a gift. So that's when it started, and some churches are still doing it. Whereas, that's not the purpose of it. It was originally organized for them. It was just to give—but now, there are some churches who are still holding onto that, you know, that tradition. But I'm [not in favor of it.]

DR: Is that still in practice here?

CSR: Well, last year, we changed it from pastor's anniversary to pastor's appreciation.

DR: But basically—

CSR: But basically, it's the same thing, you know, and which I—off the record, I just personally don't feel that we are in an era now where it's needed—that was started for a reason, and we're at the position now where pastors are being paid whatever their call has been approved for. The Presbyterian looks out for their pastor because now they set a minimum amount that you can pay a pastor. You can go above that, but you cannot pay them any less than that. So, in following the Presbyterian polity, I don't think that there's a need to have pastor's anniversary, but there are still some churches that hold it and, or pastor's appreciation day. I think that a love gift can be given to the pastor anytime of year. You don't have to wait until a particular time of the year.

MBR: Right.

CSR: If you want to bless your pastor with something, you can give it to him, because they too have to live more than one time during the year.

DR: She's Catholic, you know.

CSR: Oh, she is. Oh, okay.

DR: So she's got six pockets on them.

CSR: Oh, okay. But anyway.

DR: We're all the same.

MBR: Was there—when we say, "Born in the Presbyterian Church," were there any like—from Boston—was there an area that contributed more to the health of this congregation?

CSR: No. Everything came through the Board of National Missions. Wherever it was located, that's where it came through.

MBR: I got you.

CSR: Yeah. All the donations went to the Board of National Missions, and they would in turn [distribute to local churches].

DR: Is that the same thing as what is now called "Presbytery."

CSR: No. The Board of National Missions is at the top—at the General Assembly level.

DR: See, what is the Presbytery then?

CSR: The Presbytery, each—

DR: I thought it was the National Presbytery.

CSR: No, you're talking about the National Church.

DR: Okay.

CSR: There are 100 and something Presbyteries. We are in—in South Carolina, there are five Presbyteries in South Carolina. There is Trinity Presbytery, Charleston Atlantic Presbytery, [Foothills Presbytery, New Harmony Presbytery and Providence Presbytery.]

DR: That means they have regions within the Presbyteries.

CSR: Regions with X number of churches under it that forms a Presbytery.

DR: And there are five in South Carolina.

CSR: Yeah. We have—I think there are 40-something churches under our Presbytery. Trinity Presbytery had X number of churches. Providence Presbytery has X number of churches. New Harmony Presbytery has—it all depends on your region. We're in the Western region, the Northern region and the Southern region and Eastern region of the state.

DR: So, the region—a member of a particular region is located within a geographic place?

CSR: Yes.

DR: Okay.

CSR: Yeah, where Presbyterians are located; yeah.

MBR: This has been great.

CSR: Okay. Now, you all go take a break, and I'm going to take a break so I can. This has been good, but I need to go.

MBR: All right.

CSR: I appreciate you all asking me to share.

Cassandra Roper

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 18, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Remarks in brackets are those added by Ms. Roper after she reviewed the transcript. They serve to clarify and add context to her experiences growing up on James Island and attending William Gresham Meggett High School.

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Mary Beth Reed: This is Mary Beth Reed with New South, and we're here at St. James Presbyterian, and I'm honored to interview Cassandra.

CSR: Yes.

MBR: Middle name?

CSR: Singleton-Roper.

MBR: Roper. There we are. Okay. Can you tell me—can I call you "Cassandra?"

CSR: Sure. That's fine.

MBR: Can you tell me about where you were born, a little bit about your family—

CSR: Okay.

MBR: ...and your education background and what your folks did.

CSR: Okay.

MBR: Just your back story.

CSR: I lived on Sol Legare. [My mother's name is Laura Singleton Todd Wilder], I lived with my grandparents. [Edward Eddie Dandy Singleton and Elva Richardson Singleton.] Back during those days, the grandparents were the one who reared the children. My mother, who was a single mom, worked at the cigar factory in the City of Charleston. So on Sunday evenings, she would go to the City of Charleston and stay throughout the week to go to the cigar factory, Monday through Friday, and then come back on Friday, home to James Island until Saturday, [or Sunday evening].

But, in the meantime, I was raised by—in that time, I was raised—at that time, I was raised by the grandparents who lived on Sol Legare. They had a two-story house and she raised not only myself but seven other children, other siblings of the brothers and sisters of my mother. After I was about four, the houses weren't close together, but I had a grandaunt who lived about maybe a hundred yards away, and she would hear me crying at night. Because my brother, Woodrow, who was than older I, was charged with the task of taking care of me at night upstairs. The grandparents stayed and slept downstairs.

And he would get to the point where—because I was a crybaby, he would throw me underneath the bed. And as a result of him throwing me underneath the bed, I would cry louder practically most of the night. As you know, back then, they didn't have air conditioners. The windows were kept up. This was during the summer months. So [my grandaunt Rosa Leff who lived next door] would hear me crying at night.

So then, one morning, Rosa came over and she told my grandmama, she said, "Elva she said, "I hear that child crying all night long. Why don't you let me take the child?" So my Grandaunt Rosa Leff and Jerry Leff took me from my mama, Laura. Grandmama Elva and Eddie, they raised me. You know, back then, that was the way that it was done. When one couldn't take care of the child, the other [family stepped in and offered to care for them] —so as a result of her rearing me, she had grown children who lived in New York City.

So every summer, the children would send for Aunt Rosa and I to come to New York, so that's how my early years started going back and forth every summer to New York. And I attended school on—after a number of years. Then, I started public school on Sol Legare up to the third grade, or the second grade. And then we went to New York City and we stayed with one of her daughters, Florence Walker. During that time, I attended PS15—PS57 in Brooklyn, New York, which was an integrated school.

I had friends who were West Indians, who were white, who were Chinese, etcetera. You know, we would go back and forth to each other's houses, you know, ride the bus and go to each other's houses. So then it came to the point where my grandaunt

decided that it was time for us to come back home. And when we came back, she wasn't well. So she said that, maybe I should go stay with my mother, Laura, who lived down the street from her, and that's when I—my going to the public school on James Island—started. Well, not Sol Legare when I was going to school—I think I came back in the seventh or eighth grade.

MBR: Okay.

CSR: When I came back, it was the seventh or eighth grade and I went to W. Gresham Meggett. When I went to W. Gresham Meggett, it was kind of strange. I didn't suspect anything. After the first day of classes, I kept looking around and I saw no faces other than colored faces. So that evening, Mr. Mack who my home teacher, said, "Cassandra, how was your first day? What did you experience?" And I said, "Well, I don't see any white children."

When I said that, all the students in class burst out in laughter. Oh, everybody started laughing. They started laughing [over and over. They couldn't stop laughing. Mr. Mack had to quiet the class. The students were saying,] "White children. Why is she asking about white children?" And I couldn't understand. I said, "Well, what did I say wrong?" Mr. Mack pulled me aside, and said, "The white children go to a different school than the black children." I said, "Well, how do you mean, a different school?" I said, "Well, in New York City, we all went to the same school."

He said, "Well, that's not the way it is down here. They have their own school that they go to, and we have our own school that we go to, you know, a school for blacks and a separate school for whites." And I tell you, it took me awhile to be able to absorb that that there was a difference, you know, that there was a difference between black and white—and you don't go to the same school, but eventually, [it sunk in and I got used to only seeing black faces] you know. And I stayed at Gresham Meggett until the 12th grade and graduated from there in May of 1963.

MBR: 1963.

CSR: Yeah.

MBR: All right. Your grandmother's name was?

CSR: My grandmother's name was Elva Richardson Singleton.

MBR: Singleton; okay.

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.) Yeah.

MBR: And the aunt that—your grand—

CSR: Reared me.

MBR: Yes.

CSR: Rosa Richardson Leff [and Elva Richardson Singleton were sisters.]

MBR: Okay. Great. I'm just going back on—

CSR: Yeah, Rosa Richardson Leff.

MBR: And you were born what year?

CSR: February 9, 1945.

MBR: Okay. We're going direct there for that because we're going to larger topics.

CSR: Okay.

MBR: I agree with you it's a process. What you were seeing must have been difficult.

CSR: Very difficult.

MBR: Did you fit in right away with the kids that you were going to school with? Had anybody prepared you?

CSR: No.

MBR: I guess not.

CSR: No.

MBR: That you were going to go to a segregated school.

CSR: I was—not. But I don't know that they knew what type of school I was going to in New York. You know, I guess having lived here in the South for so long you just may not realize that schools were not segregated in the North, you know. No, I was not prepared. I was shocked on the first day I went to school. Because I kept looking around for a color other than, you know, black, and didn't see anyone.

MBR: So you went for full high school. Do you remember what W. Gresham—was it a typical high school besides the fact that it was all black kids?

CSR: Yeah.

MBR: Did you switch classes? You know, all that kind of thing?

CSR: Oh, yeah. We switched classes. Yeah, we switched classes. I went to Mr. Mack for math, went to Miss Kenny for English, went to Miss Barnwell for Social Studies, went to Miss Manigault [Short] for science. So, yeah, we'd switch classes about five or six times per day.

MBR: Okay. So very typical high school.

CSR: A typical high school otherwise.

MBR: How did you get to school?

CSR: We went in the school bus.

MBR: You went in a school bus; okay.

CSR: Hm-hmm (affirmative.) Yeah, back during that time when we were bused.

MBR: Right. One of the things that people have brought up is that the differences between—and in particular, schoolbooks that were given at Meggett versus the white schools, that it was known that they were secondhand books.

CSR: They were secondhand books. They were written in; yeah.

MBR: Okay.

CSR: Yeah. Written in. Same as with the Parochial School. There were torn out pages. You know, we didn't—we never got the best schoolbooks or any new schoolbooks. It was always used schoolbooks from previous schools that was handed down to us at the Gresham Meggett School.

MBR: When you think about Gresham Meggett, what do you think—what kind of education did you get? Do you feel like you—

CSR: I felt I got a quality education. And I say that because—I'm saying it compared to today. Back during the time that I went to school, it was all African American teachers. They pushed us to learn because I think they realized that it was not going to be easy. They realized where they came from, that it was not going to be easy for us African American students moving forward. So they were persistent. They were committed, and they were—they loved us [as though we were their birth] children.

Not to say that children aren't being loved today, but I just felt like there was a deeper commitment with the teachers to ensure that we got a quality education, you know, and they were available to assist if we needed help. So, yes, in my opinion—and I say that because some of the things that I can recall as far as history is concerned and my—I have a grandson who's a history buff. And there are things that he and I can share that I learned during high school that students are not being taught today, about American History, World History. So those were things that the teachers back then instilled in us that we needed to learn.

MBR: Did your folks participate in your education, like through PTA talking to teachers?

CSR: Yes. They believed—

MBR: Was there parental support there?

CSR: They believed in attending PTA.

MBR: Okay.

CSR: Yes. PTA was—and I must say now, whenever there was a PTA meeting, the auditorium or the cafeteria in Gresham Meggett was full. The parents believed in coming out to the PTA meetings to find out what the children were doing, what the teachers had to say compared to today. It's just the opposite. You know, they were concerned about us and our education.

MBR: And you talked earlier—and you were telling us about the history of this church here. Was there church leadership involved in your education at all? I mean, did the church leaders talk about the value of education? And when you had to—look, you had school, home, church. I mean, how did that—or did it not?

CSR: No. The emphasis was placed more from home.

MBR: Okay.

CSR: And I can't say that the church leaders during my time before I graduated from high school because really, I was not that involved in the church because of the fact that my mother was not coming to church. My stepfather was a Baptist. My mother was a Presbyterian, but she wasn't coming. So really, my interaction with the church was—when I came, I came for the worship service and nothing else during that time. I became more active in the church back in the 1960s and '66, '67, is where my involvement with the church became heavily involved.

MBR: I see.

CSR: So, prior to that time, you graduated from Gresham Meggett; no. There was just the parental and the teachers' involvement is what instilled in me to be who I was or who I am; yeah.

MBR: Well, the 1960s was a time of big change.

CSR: Yes.

MBR: How aware were you—I mean, you graduated in '63. How aware were you of the Civil Rights Movement about activities in Charleston to integrate schools, or not?

CSR: Not.

MBR: Not?

CSR: No. The only thing that I remember about segregation—and I'm going to be honest with you, I'm not one of those persons who were hung up on segregation. The only thing that I remember about segregation to be honest with you is riding the bus, the public bus, going to Folly Beach. I know that we couldn't sit in the front, and I know we had to sit in the back. And I only say that because on the weekends, on Saturday and Sundays, I would work at a restaurant called Kokomo's on Folly Beach.

I would just go there early on Saturday morning or Sunday morning before time to go to church and clean up the restaurant, clean bars, clean the bar off and sweep the floor and wash the glasses and put those things up, and I'm riding the bus. I know that we could not sit to the front. We had to sit to the back.

And also, in riding the bus going from Sol Legare to the City of Charleston, I remember we could not sit in the front. We had to sit in the back. Also, going to the lunch counter at Woolworth's in the City of Charleston, you know, we couldn't sit to the counter. We could stand up and order something, and then we'd just have to take our stuff and go. But those were the only places that I really recall being, you know, involved in and noticed the segregation more so than anyplace else, knowing that there was a separate water fountain and all of that too.

MBR: Right. It's sort of in that very public's sphere, transportation.

CSR: Exactly, yes.

MBR: That sort of thing.

CSR: Yes. Hm-hmm (affirmative.) Yeah.

MBR: One of the things I keep asking or trying to get a feel for, did—and I think you hit on it before. Did Gresham Meggett—I think you talked about it in terms of the teachers. Did they have a philosophy that set them apart, the teachers, the people there, to make sure people got on the right footing, whether it's college, whether it's vocational, did—was there a major—and I think you have answered this by talking about the teachers themselves and how they treated everybody was their child.

CSR: Yeah, exactly.

MBR: I think that's what you were kind of getting at.

CSR: Exactly. Yes.

MBR: Yeah. Which I think is really beautifully said. Because it sounds like you were nurtured there.

CSR: Yes, very much so. Yes, I agree. That's the right word. Yeah, I was nurtured there. Right. It didn't make a difference who you were, you know. And as long as you gave the impression that you wanted to learn, the teachers were willing to sacrifice. And they used to sacrifice because sometimes they would stay after school to ensure that you had an understanding of this particular thing that maybe you didn't get in class. So, yes, they did nurture us.

MBR: How about the women as teachers? Were they mentors? They were professional women.

CSR: They were.

MBR: Was that eye opening to kids going to school there that African American—

CSR: Uh-uh (negative.)

MBR: No, it was just expected.

CSR: No. It just was expected; yeah.

MBR: It was expected. Okay. Very nice.

CSR: Yeah, it was expected.

MBR: After you left in '63, what did you do after graduation?

CSR: After graduation, I moved to Washington D.C., and I stayed with my Aunt Alice, went to work at McBride's for about two years as a clerk and then a cashier, and then worked in the business office, counting proceeds at the end of the day. And then, after that, I got a job with the federal government doing particular work. And then after that my mother got sick, and I came back home.

MBR: You came home?

CSR: Yeah, I came home to Sol-Legare in 1962. I came home in 1962, my mother she died in '63, so I came home before then.

MBR: And you've been here ever since?

CSR: Yeah, I've been here ever since. Yeah. I've been here ever since.

MBR: Okay.

CSR: I worked at the shipyard for 30 years, and then retired from there April 1, 1996.

MBR: What did you do at the shipyard?

CSR: I was in the supply department. Did everything, worked in every position that there was, duty officer, supervisor, etcetera.

MBR: Neat. Well, I appreciate you talking with us.

CSR: Sure.

MBR: Because we kind of want to get the essence of what was there at W. Gresham Meggett in the context of the times, and we're learning through everybody we talk to it's different for everybody.

CSR: Exactly.

MBR: There's no one story.

CSR: No, very true.

MBR: I love that you came back. Actually, two years after leaving—after graduation, and got into the shipyard and that became a career, I guess.

CSR: Yeah, it did. It certainly did. Yeah.

MBR: A good workplace?

CSR: It was, and close.

MBR: Did they treat you fairly?

CSR: No. I had to file a lawsuit with the EEOC in Washington D.C. because of unfair treatment. When I came back, I put in my application. I was hired as a card punch operator. I was hired with the understanding that—we're going to hire you for the nightshift. And the first time that there's an opening on the dayshift, we will transfer you to the dayshift. I guess that was my other experience with segregation, a big experience with segregation.

Of course, time went on. Within a year, there was an opening on the dayshift. They didn't fill the opening with me. They didn't move me from the nightshift to the dayshift. There was another opening on the dayshift. Someone else left, and they filled that opening also and hired someone else. I'm still on night shift me and another young lady, Gwendolyn, we were the two on nightshift. We were the two blacks. We were on nightshift. Everyone white was on dayshift.

So after the second hiring of the second person, I went to my supervisor. I didn't have a supervisor at night. We supervised ourselves at night. I went to the daytime supervisor, Miss Trudy Gasque and asked her why is it that they've hired two people. I was promised that as soon as a vacancy became available on the dayshift that I would be transferred to dayshift. She said, "Well, the next opening that there is, we'll transfer you." I said, "Well, that's not satisfactory to me. Two have already been hired..." I said, "I need to speak with the next in line."

So she sent me to Lieutenant Commander Schwartz. I spoke with him. And he told me, he said, "Well, Ms. Roper, the next time that there's an opening, we'll transfer you to the dayshift." I said, "Okay." So I didn't say anything. I went home and I wrote a letter to the EEOC office in Washington. I mailed it to Washington D.C., the next day. And within three weeks, there was a group from [the shipyard EEOC Office saying]—they got some kind of communication from Washington D.C.

And the same Lieutenant Commander, came to me and asked me, he said, "Well, we have visitors here from Washington D.C. in reference to a letter that you mailed to [the EEOC Office in] Washington D.C." And I said, "Yes. I sent a letter to D.C. because I felt that I was treated unfairly. I was promised to be moved to the dayshift and you all said that whenever there was the first opening that you would transfer me. "

I said, "You had two openings on the dayshift, and you never even ask me if I wanted to be transferred to dayshift. So, yes." "Well," he said, "why did you bypass the EEOC office here and send your letter to Washington D.C. There's a process where you

should have gone through the shipyard submitting your disagreement to the local EEOC office then if we were not able to fulfill your request or look at..." I said, "No. Because I knew that you all would not do anything about it, so I just went right to the top to the horse's mouth..." Well, I use that terminology, "to the horse's mouth," where I knew for sure that something would happen.

So evidently, the EEOC sent a group down from Washington D.C. and investigated my complaint. And as a result of that investigation, the nightshift was abolished because it determined that it was not needed. There was no need to have a nightshift. There was enough office space on the dayshift that the two blacks that were on nightshift were transferred—within two weeks, we were transferred from the night—after they came and did their investigation, sent their result back.

Within two weeks, we were transferred from the nightshift to the dayshift and that abolished the nightshift completely because it was not needed. But because we were blacks, they just let us sit there on the nightshift, where we supervised ourselves. So that was my experience with segregation at the shipyard.

MBR: Hopefully, it improved after that.

CSR: And from that point—after that, I didn't have any problems.

MBR: No.

CSR: I think it probably went around the mill that, you know, that I wasn't afraid to write to Washington D.C. And I was promoted to the highest position when I left the shipyard. I left as a GS-12.

MBR: Was it Gwendolyn who was with you?

CSR: Yeah. So she was black.

MBR: I'm sure she was happy, too.

CSR: Oh, yes. She was happy, too. Yeah, because otherwise—because she was on the nightshift when I came. She was the only one on nightshift when I came, so we were the two that were on nightshift, so we both benefitted from that action.

MBR: Right. Sometimes it works.

CSR: Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. But I was just lucky that evidently the right person got my complaint.

MBR: Well, we were lucky that you were at church today.

CSR: Thank you. I appreciate you asking me.

MBR: No. Thank you very, very much.

Ned B. Roper

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on February 23, 2019 at W. Gresham Meggett School (Septima P. Clark Academy), James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. David Richardson is the interviewer; Terri Gillett assisted.

Remarks in brackets are those added by Mr. Roper after he reviewed the transcript. They serve to clarify and add context to his experiences growing up on James Island and attending William Gresham Meggett High School.

DR: Today is February 23, 2019. My name is David Backman Richardson. We are at W. Gresham Meggett High School in one of the classrooms. And I am about now to begin to interview with please state your full name and address, sir.

NR: Ned Bernard Roper Junior. 1916 Allen Brown Lane, Charleston, South Carolina, 29412.

DR: What is your date of birth?

NR: My date of birth is 21 July, 1951.

DR: Where were you born?

NR: I was born James Island, South Carolina, primarily on Grimball Road, Barnhill.

DR: How was it that you were born on James Island and Barnhill?

NR: Well, my father had always wanted children, my mother did, too. I have two older sisters. And for sure, he had plans on that farm, and he definitely was going to try for a son, and sure enough, his try worked out and I was the firstborn son.

DR: Who delivered you?

NR: My grandmother. Feedie Roper. Yes, she did.

DR: We're going to talk about her a little later.

NR: Amen.

DR: Okay?

NR: Amen.

DR: So where did you spend most of your childhood?

NR: All of my childhood up until the age of about I'd say 19 was spent on James Island. I lived there, worked there, grew there, matured in my young life, church life on Barn Hill, James Island primarily. Charleston, farm markets, Johns Island, Mount Pleasant, all around the low country with farmers like my dad. So I grew up in this area.

DR: What was your father's name?

NR: My dad was Ned Roper and clearly, he was his own man.

DR: And where was he born?

NR: He was born on James Island.

DR: What was his occupation?

NR: His occupation was farming, my Lord.

DR: Okay. How many acres did he farm, do you think?

NR: On average, at one point I think – because he rented properties, and around the area back then was a lot of farming areas available. Folks would lease it out. He had in his family I would say about maybe 50 acres, give or take, family owned. And then I would say about 75 – no, I'd say about maybe same, 50, that he leased out to different locations.

DR: Were there other African American farmers on James Island at the time?

NR: Oh, my god. Yes. My, god, yes.

DR: So what would you rate your father's in terms of size of other farmers' operations?

NR: On the island, James Island especially, he was [at that time] by far – and that's not brag, but fact—as to [being] the dominant farmer. [He was] a young man with a plan, and he had his goals and [a vision of doing more with what he had. He was a son of sharecropper and now the owner of property on the island. He and my mom aspired to build the farm and to open a large open-air vegetable market on Folly Road.] So his aspiration was bigger than just farming there and he would provide vegetables to the local grocery stores in and around the Charleston area. So again, I'm not sure if I answered your question. But he had vision.

DR: What was your mother's name?

NR: My mother, my dear mother was Katie Elizabeth Simmons Roper.

DR: Where was she born?

NR: She was born not on the island. She was born proudly from Moncks Corner, Cordesville area, in that area.

DR: Explain a little more about your mother's hometown and where she was born and connection with some other historical-

NR: Oh, Lord. Yes, my mother, who had a very strong memory – I thought my dad did, but my mother kept numbers, names, situations intact in her mind, sometimes scary. So she knew many folks, and overtime her history would bring her forth in working with the various other writers, and she was very instrumental in helping one put his thoughts further beyond where he was writing about his family's slaves – [The book was titled *Slaves in the Family*. It was by Edward Ball.] But he was very active in researching who [she] was or who her family— [Heyward family—was. And she] was very active in bringing up oral history clearly, distinctly that tracked very closely to the dates, the names of folks [and situations] who were once slaves [in her family.]

DR: Her memory was very much intact.

NR: Very much.

DR: She had a photographic memory.

NR: My, God. Scary. Once we heard the stories, she would track even deeper in communicating with him on how much he knew in written history from the books of the slave masters, and she could go back as far as her memory in talking with her grandmother who was a slave.

DR: How many siblings did you have?

NR: I have, again, three other siblings. One has gone onto glory, but I have two older sisters, as I said, and a younger brother. And again, that's the blessing. Dad's future was wanting sons, and clearly I was one and then he was number two. And so God to be the glory.

DR: Let's go back to what kind of occupation did your mother perform?

NR: My mother, God bless her, was a jack of trades in many things, but her heart was in nursing. She had a large family, and all her brothers and sisters, all but two survived, and I think she had about maybe 13 brothers and sisters of which two survived. Her older brother and many others passed in the middle and hence what she saw as a young child inspired her to get into medicine. And so she was a midwife, and that was her goal. That was her goal, and that was what she did once she came to Charleston from that area that she grew up, was to get into medicine. So she worked as a cleaning individual, and once blacks entered the field of medical needs, they taught, and she got to know the doctors in the area, worked very closely with, and they inspired her to take the midwife training and the rest was history with that.

DR: So you had two women in your immediate family that were midwives?

NR: Yes. Yes.

DR: That was your grandmother?

NR: Hm-hmm [affirmative].

DR: And her name again was?

NR: Mary Roper.

DR: And your mother?

NR: Katie Simmons Roper.

DR: Now, what else did Ms. Katie Simmons Roper do other than worked as a nurse?

NR: Well, again, she recognized very much and helped me inspire – helped me to know and understand my father's vision. So when I didn't quite get it, she helped me understand the importance of his vision and she supported him, so she was a farming wife. She drove, she worked hard with the people, inspired, led, and she ran that market wholeheartedly. And that was her work and her love. So, yeah. She was a working woman.

DR: You ever seen her on a tractor?

NR: She would not. She stated very clearly – I don't think it was a question. She would do everything, anything that was needed. That was one thing that she would never do. And so she never did, no.

DR: Where did your parents go to school?

NR: Oh, Lord. Powerful words. My mother was very strong on education and knowledge. Not to say my dad wasn't, but my mother was the true disciplinary. You were going to get the books and she would make sure, and she would work with you closely. If she didn't understand, she would sit beside you and help you memorize whatever you were working on. And so she was very close with that. My father, not as much, but he pushed [and encouraged you in all courses.]

DR: Where did she go to school?

NR: She went to school in a graded school, in Cordesville Graded School, Moncks Corner, of which her father and a few other senior individuals worked hard to try and get a black school together. And there were historical notes that came about and we found out details in [Slaves in the Family], that she spoke about that clearly were articulated in the same book with Edward Ball.

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DR: Ball, Edward?

NR: Edward Ball. Yes. And he touched on that. Her parents were very active there, too. Yes.

DR: So there was emphasis on education in your family?

NR: Oh, yes.

DR: And much of that came from your mother?

NR: Mother.

DR: Where did your siblings go to school?

NR: My two older sisters graduated and matriculated from [William Gresham Meggett High School on James Island.] My youngest sister graduated two years ahead of me, and my older sister graduated three years ahead, so she was a '66 [graduate], and [my other sister graduated in] '67. And I graduated in '69.

DR: '69. You were the last.

NR: The last class.

DR: So you were younger than your sisters, then.

NR: Oh, yes. And they made sure that even though I had a lot of privilege on the farm, my mother made sure, "Yeah, you have privileges as the older son. [You will respect your sisters.]

DR: Now you said you graduated from Gresham Meggett in '69, but where did you go to elementary school?

NR: I'm sorry?

DR: Where did you go to elementary school?

NR: Well, I started here at Gresham Meggett when it was an elementary school and a high school. We took schools there. I took classes here. And then when Baxter-Patrick opened up, we were the first graduating class that left Baxter-Patrick coming back to high school here. Yeah.

DR: Okay. And where was Baxter-Patrick?

NR: Baxter-Patrick was less than a half a mile from my house.

DR: So you were able to walk to school?

NR: I walked to school.

DR: So when you came to Gresham Meggett, how did you get to school?

NR: Well, at that point in time, we rode the bus. And then back in those days, you could drive school buses. And because I was an avid driver then, I started driving once I was, what? 15 or 16? 16 years old I was a driver.

DR: 16?

NR: Yes.

DR: Yes. Yes. So Gresham Meggett, location and proximity to where you lived, if you didn't drive the school bus-

NR: We walked. We walked.

DR: So most of the people in your immediate community went to this community school?

NR: Yeah. Community school was key.

DR: You mentioned something about Baxter-Patrick.

NR: Yes.

DR: You said that was right down the street from you?

NR: From my house, it's not in rock throwing, but not far. Less than a half a mile, if that. Walking distance from my home on Grimboll Road going I guess southwest. Yeah. Not far from my home was Baxter-Patrick.

DR: So when you transferred here, what year was that when you transferred from Baxter-Patrick?

NR: I would have to do the math. I can't remember exactly.

DR: What grade were you?

NR: I was I think in the seventh grade.

DR: Seventh grade?

NR: Yeah.

DR: So that's five through 12, right?

NR: Yes.

DR: So five, before '69?

NR: Yes. Yeah.

DR: Okay. So that was about 1964.

NR: '64, somewhere around that time.

DR: Okay. All right. Any significant difference between the physical structure of Baxter-Patrick and Gresham Meggett?

NR: Well, for me, the fact that being one of physical presence, I would always look at how this school was built. And clearly when Baxter-Patrick was being built, being a farm boy, I wanted to see how they did what they did, and I saw how they built that, and I knew a lot of carpenters, and I loved carpentry so I watched how they built that and the structure, and then watched this. So clearly, there was a big difference in what it offered. And they offered the same thing, but they would have to rebuild here, do some construction. I watched some of that happen they tore our doors and changed up the sizes of this building.

DR: So you were here before they added the other wings? Or you came afterwards?

NR: They were just building the final wing on the backside.

DR: The backside?

NR: They were just finishing that. These major wings, first two wings, I remember those. The other one, they were just finishing up.

DR: How many students were in your class when you came here? And what year that was when you transferred to Gresham Meggett?

NR: I'm thinking about what? '64?

DR: '64?

NR: '64.

DR: Okay.

NR: I can't remember the size, but there were some folks who came and some left. And then based through matriculation, I guess whatever situations they were dealing with in their life. Our class dwindled down to 78.

DR: When you graduated?

NR: When I graduated.

DR: But when you transferred-

NR: It was much larger.

DR: Much larger?

NR: Much larger.

DR: So there were more than one class of the same grade, then?

NR: Yes.

DR: Do you remember some of the teachers?

NR: In my early years, I do, because we were close to the teachers. One that stands out in my heart of hearts was my first grade teacher, Ms. Grayson. She took me from first grade into second.

DR: And this is at Baxter-Patrick?

NR: No. This was here.

DR: Oh, here?

NR: I started here. First grade here at [William Gresham Meggett].

DR: Okay.

NR: In fact, the room across the hall, that was first grade. And second grade was the next class over. So I recall that vividly.

DR: And those teachers were?

NR: One was Ms. Grayson. Then there was Ms. Dunkin, Ms. Hampton, Ms. Counts, Ms. Spears, and those were the higher grades. And then there were others, but those stand out, because they clearly tracked with my mom and what she expected being here in this classroom. And so that was very key for me and many others as to what the expectations were here.

DR: Are you suggesting that you had very in-depth parental interest in your education?

NR: Oh, without a doubt.

DR: And support?

NR: Oh, my Lord. Without a doubt. Yeah.

DR: They were directly involved? She was directly involved in your education?

NR: When she came to visit or whatever – just walking through, there were times that all I recall, if I may, one that stands out in my mind, in the sixth grade or fifth grade—fifth grade, we were doing the division problem on the chalkboard, and I was to divide six into 666, and I could visibly see that. And she walked by the classroom and the teacher spoke to her, and I was stuck—[so surprised I forgot how to divide and couldn't remember what to do. I was surprised and shocked because she stopped by, and I just locked myself into confusion].

DR: You were petrified.

NR: Petrified. There was nothing wrong, and they explained there was nothing wrong. But 6 into 666.

DR: You testified a minute ago that your mother had a photographic memory. How much of that did you pick up?

NR: Not much. Not much.

DR: Any of your siblings?

NR: I think my oldest sister, Charlotte. She has the depth of knowledge from that vantage point.

DR: How would you describe your relationship with the teachers here?

NR: Without a doubt, much respect. Again, that's what we were taught. That clearly, that they were here to give me something. They didn't promise you anything, because you've got to get what they have to give. And she says – Mom says– you need to receive it. So whatever they have to offer, you need to take [the knowledge] and come on home, and that was her point, come on home and we'll help work with it back here.

DR: Would you say that the teachers helped to nurture you?

NR: Oh, my God.

DR: How would you describe that? What do you mean when you said that? They nurtured you?

NR: Expectations. Encouragement and empowerment that you have the power to do anything you put your mind to. But you've got to put your mind into it. Don't let

distracters, including your friends, not even me as your teacher, though I'm going to push you to do better. I love you, but you're not going to sit here idly by and waste my time, your time, and most definitely your parents' time, because they want you here to be educated. And so the empowerment was there. And you got it at home in a loving way. Here in the schoolhouse, it was no different as to we have expectations. If you've got a question, ask it. But you will learn. You can learn, so therefore do.

DR: At that time, would you say there was a great tendency on the parents' part to really trust the teachers?

NR: Without a doubt. Without a doubt. And if there was a question, and we had one or two cases with trust issues, but the PTA and individual responsibility of parents, which was my mother, would come and work behind the scenes to find out what's going on, what's happening if there's a concern with a student or some miscommunication where we're not sure if that child is either capturing it or doesn't understand or if there's a distraction. Because we're all working kids.

DR: Now that's what Ms. Katie did. But what about some of the other parents? You had that same collective interest about other students' parents?

NR: As I can recall, and hearing, again, conversations with my older sisters, my mom, again, I can only picture my walk more so that they were older, so I would hear the conversations about relationships and attitudes and challenges, so I would overhear it, and then I would look at me as to what – I'm not having this issue. Because, again, to me, it was a little different and I don't have a good appreciation of the challenges, but clearly there were different concerns that were raised at different levels. But in my case, I didn't have any concerns such as that. Whereas she needed to get involved one or two maybe. One or two, but mostly there was issues with understanding families and challenges of clothes and dress. That was, to me, more girl kind of issues than whatever else as I can recall.

DR: Now, are you aware of the fact that James Island High School was also located on James Island?

NR: Yes.

DR: And do you know what type of students went to school there?

NR: Oh, yes. Most definitely. That was a white school.

DR: And Gresham Meggett?

NR: Gresham Meggett was a black school.

DR: Did you have any classmates during the time you were at Gresham Meggett that went over to James Island High?

NR: One of my classmates—a good friend to this day—one James Grant. And we communicated here and when he transferred over I would see him in the neighborhood. And we've communicated from then to now on life and what we've had to challenge, deal with and grow [all the while going forward].

DR: So you told me James Grant from Cut Bridge?

NR: Oh, yes. Yes.

DR: Mrs. Grant – Elizabeth was his mother's name.

NR: Yes.

DR: Yes. Okay. He now lives in Maryland.

NR: He lives in Maryland.

DR: Yes.

NR: Columbia, Maryland.

DR: Absolutely. Yes. Based on the information and experience that you had and occurred at the time, how would you compare your vision of what the difference in the schools were?

NR: [Lack of equipment. Un-used books—readable.] Give me a second, because that's been a hard pill, but I understood. I swallowed it, hard. I knew what the motivation was for me and my household. I knew and understand the motivation of what my teachers wanted me to get. And I can recall one or two times here that I questioned why we didn't have enough Bunsen burners [in science, chemistry class], because I liked science.

DR: In the chemistry lab?

NR: In the chemistry lab. And that teacher was Mr. Salters. And he was stressed because he didn't have enough items to teach. But I remember that. To go back, when I went to South Carolina State, my goal was to be all that I could be, and I thought I wanted to be a mechanical engineer. But I realized when I got there the depth of knowledge that I got here was not enough to push me over the hump in that field, calculus. And

I didn't fail, but it bothered me because I couldn't attain what I wanted to. But again, going back to teachers and parents, my mother had always told me you've got to put your mind on what God has for you to do. And you're there. And my dad wanted me to go. I shifted from mechanical engineering and I spoke to my teacher who now was a professor who moved up to South Carolina State and taught biology. And he told me-

DR: And who was that teacher? Salters?

NR: Dr. Salters. And he always told me, "If you need me, come by and see me." And at that point in my career, I realized what I didn't have here. And I remember him saying in a frustrating point, "We don't have what we don't have." And I went to him, stressed, because I felt I can't go back to that. I can't fail. I've got things to do. So when I went to see him, he said, "Roper, I was wondering when you were going to come over here and see me. You see me around the campus. How are you doing?" "Doc, I'm not doing well. I realized what I don't have, and I've got classmates from other states, other cities who are coming with tools that I [didn't have]." He said, "Well, [you've never failed.]" "You've got to consider some of the things that we've always taught you to have; a love for different things. Have you thought about other fields? Have you thought about biology? Teaching? Doctor? You don't have to stay there."

So my point in that whole thing was, one, I remember him then, hearing his frustration, not appreciating it, but getting there, and then recognizing what I didn't have there, not allowing myself to feel put down, but going to another avenue. And I completed that with my degree in biology. And then my [Master's] in ecology. So again, it's an area that interests me. It didn't help me in the military, but it did work well for me [—expanded my technical knowledge and thinking.]

DR: Given the limitation of your resources at Gresham Meggett, do you think those same limitations of resources were present at the white school?

NR: When James and I have spoken on occasion, going back in his dynamics-

DR: This is James?

NR: Right.

DR: Okay. Because he was one of the persons who transferred?

NR: Yes.

DR: You all remained friends?

NR: Yes.

DR: And go ahead.

NR: He reiterated similar kind of concerns. But James is a smart guy. And Mom and Dad, educationally, strengthened him in many ways. And that was a good thing. My parents did the best they could. They gave me other kind of strengths, and we shared that kind of accomplishments. Strengths from others, physical direct action, getting it, that kind of thing. So I had those strengths. And didn't appreciate it until much later, but he had strength, knowledge at home, strength folks there, and he took that on. So we've shared and understood what we've brought home and put it in place to move forward. Key word being moving forward with the little that you had and what you did. So we talked about what strength they had to offer. The courses and the books, and the courses and the books here clearly, I shared that again with Dr. Salters, because some of our books were used, battered, some parts were not there. So you go with what you've got.

DR: So in other words, your books here were not up to par-

NR: Not up to par.

DR: ...compared to what James had at James Island High School.

NR: Right. Right. Right. Didn't understand that, because you don't know what you don't know. Later on in education, when you get to talk and meet on a different plane with Dr. Salters, and we understood, older now, missing out on what you've missed out. Didn't know any better. You did the best you could, but you don't know. How much could he have passed onto us that would help us beyond this? Teaching the best he could to keep us moving.

DR: Would you say that your books at Gresham Meggett might have been obsolete?

NR: Some of them were.

DR: Why would you say that? What evidence?

NR: Now as I look back then, and looking at the fact that some were used, pages torn, maybe out of step with where reality is, knowledge continues to improve. If you've got the knowledge, put it in the books so the children can learn. I mean, before we thought, as we did back then, that Pluto was the final planet, but we know that there's more out there.

DR: How come you didn't go to James Island High School?

NR: Simple. To the point. One, I realized, not initially, but again, my dear mother helped me understand the importance of what my dad's vision was, and he was a black farmer doing very well. And he helped me to understand your dad's a proud black man who's working on his own and on one occasion when I thought I wanted to play football in the evening time, and she helped me break it down. "What do you think you need to do to help your dad? Football? Or he needs your hand, man, work on this farm? He is working hard and he needs your help. What do you think the solution is?" So with that regard, football, and then I started realizing and I thought I would want to go, but then I started weighing out the most bang for my buck is being where I'm at, to continue to do what I needed to do. And of course he pushed for me to go get the education, but he needed me here. [Me going to James Island High School and the time and energy it took would have been harder for me to help him. This was my thought, then.]

DR: So you're saying that your mother helped you to very early decide priorities?

NR: Priorities. Yes.

DR: And focus on what's most important?

NR: Most important things. And I remember that to this day. First things first. There's a lot of things you want to do, but you've got to eat and you've got [to work].

DR: So you would describe your mom and dad as entrepreneurs?

NR: Oh, yes.

DR: Independent business people.

NR: Independent.

DR: Were there many other African American families on the island like that?

NR: The one that clearly – my mom and dad. My dad knew a lot of people on the island, and by far, from a fishing point of view, the Backman family stands out, and again, you had [Andrew] "Apple" Wilder and a few others that he knew when he was going to talk and deal with the business of getting things done, and understanding the challenges that you will run into. They would understand and communicate how to, again, save, fight and push forward. So clearly there was someone on the island by far he knew – he knew many – those stand out. And again, the Grants, he knew them. But again, they were business people too and he communicated accordingly.

DR: So you're saying that the names you just mentioned were business operators on the island and there was a communication among that group of people in their individual operation with shared knowledge and experience?

NR: Shared knowledge, and the times as a little boy I'd ride with him and you'd have those – I call them roadside counseling sessions on the side of the road or whatever. Folks would pull over near the side of the road and they would have communication. Sometimes it would be strong language, frustration, and motivation. At times we wanted to get this done, go do that. To motivate and get over that hump. And so there would be conversations like that or conversations where he would be working. The stretch would be hard and high, and he would go where he needed to go and visit folks at different places. [Many times as a little boy or teen waiting on him I didn't understand how tough things were for him. How important it was for him to have these other black men to relate with. Likewise, to now realize how important his faith and determination had to be during those years.]

[Seeing him go through this many times during the years and doing his best yet still not getting the most out of the farm, I'd still never see him quit or give up. He would always find or work another angle, working the farm or the vegetable market. He'd always say, "People say this...People say that, but again what are you going to do"? Your best, then press on!"]

DR: Let me direct your attention more fully to the practice of farming. Like shrimping, because they're the same category now.

NR: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

DR: Every spring of the year there's a need to prepare for the season coming up.

NR: Amen. Amen.

DR: What were the process?

NR: The key parts of that, knowing and understanding the farmer's almanac was clearly in my dad and mom's mind. They had been through these seasons and they read the signs and they communicated in their plans in prayers on what they wanted to do and how they're going to do in the cycles. I didn't understand. But clearly, my dad would always have his equipment lined up for the season in sharpening the blades on the plows. Especially when he was turning over the property, he would always lift them up and sharpen them. I didn't know. Because he was going to turn that ground over. And over a period of time, I saw and understood older, wiser, on why he would do

what he needed to do, and then we would go and acquire money so he would have money set aside for fertilizer, seeds, etcetera .

DR: Where did the funds come from?

NR: Each year, and because we had funds set aside [from the profits of vegetable] the market, those funds would be put aside, you can't touch that for these reasons because you need to prepare the property and seeds. So with the market, as they grew, they would prepare themselves financially for the funds to do different things at different times. And during the fall months, we would grow large amounts of collard greens for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and holidays. And then we'd package a soup bunch mix [prepared from vegetables grown in their gardens, turnips, onion, collards, carrots and thyme] that my mom would prepare. And all that's money now being pulled together [would be available for the farm.]

DR: Where did the capital come from?

NR: From themselves, within themselves.

DR: Was there ever need to reach outside of the immediate savings to be able to get properly capitalized for this preparation?

NR: If you could acquire funds from, again, the farm aids, if you could get funds for damages from crops-

DR: Why are you saying if? It was available for farmers.

NR: Another time with me riding with him and I knew and I could recognize the stress going in for loans, and when he would apply for funds and grants on loans, and the monies would be very slow. But you need that money when you need the money to purchase what you need to purchase [You would need it then, not later.] And if you don't have the money to get what you need, you're behind the eight ball. There were cases when sometimes we couldn't purchase what we needed. Now you're behind the eight ball. So those who have monies or maybe the funds allocated by the government [would be able to continue in their efforts, while you couldn't.]

DR: So there was a source from the Fed that you're able to get loans for farmers and owners?

NR: Yes.

DR: Was that easily accessible?

NR: No. No.

DR: Let me ask this question. Let's suppose your family decided they needed 100,000 dollars to get started for the season. Where would they have gone to get that fund?

NR: Well, he had loans that he had with local bank loaning agencies. And again, the interest rate, as I learned much later on, wasn't the best interest rate. You weren't getting the best interest. And with regard to the Federal government, you have to document and have the pertinent documentation in place in time to then get the funds. So between some of those, I would see on the outside looking in, the stress.

DR: You think white farmers had to jump the same hurdles?

NR: No.

DR: Why do you say that?

NR: Because we had friends, farmers on the island, and some of them were very quiet. And some were very matter of fact on what they were able to do and were not.

DR: So you're saying that there were double standards in terms of-

NR: By all means. By all means. The only thing I wished as I got older and if I could do more to help him as he was dealing with some of the stress, but he was a strong man in his life, he wasn't going to share that. My mother would share that with you. So, yes. In some of the conversations, the [large white] farmers, and a few of the others [smaller white farmers] who started farming behind him. But he (a particular farmer) got the land and the money to afford his own farm.

DR: Did you all have a personal relationship with [these farmers?]

NR: Oh, yes.

DR: Decent person?

NR: Decent. Decent for the matter of fact [of sharing] some knowledge. But again, there was [some financial] knowledge that you wouldn't. [It was sometimes a hard life.] You just deal with what you can and do what you can to keep things moving. Again, for me, watching, as I understood later on, the stress.

DR: Did there ever come a time when the financial resources improved opportunity loosen up for your father?

NR: I could say that overtime, much later, by the time I left home, going to college, '69 through '74 I was in school, but I would come home. And so I was out of touch, but things were I think a little bit easier versus – but prior to the time I left high school, that was a different time, especially as a young man, young people. The times were pretty tough.

DR: Did you ever become aware of a lawsuit against the Department of Rural Development?

NR: No.

DR: On the behalf of black farmers?

NR: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. [Unfortunately this effort was a bit late for my father. Though the facts were being presented to show how unfair black farmers were being treated—stress of farm life had its impact on my father. On September 16, 1978, he died from a massive heart attack. Though he loved working his farm, I've long since realized the stress he had endured in his years and all that he had seen and done.]

In fact, when I was up in DC through the Fields family, they would apprise me of different lawsuits and whatever else was going on in DC, and I would house them and help them best I can and push the envelope up in that neck of the woods as best I could then.

DR: You all were never able to benefit from some of those losses of it?

NR: No. No. At that time – and that's a whole other story. Time and difficulty. And my brother stepped in when my dad passed. We lost a lot of money there. And he stepped in as the young man trying to step into that farm. And overtime as I look at you, know that I thought at one point it was going to kill him. It was too much. The stress, stepping in as a young man trying to pick up and make things happen, the politics of things. It was tough.

DR: Let me ask you this question, Mr. Roper. Your parents emphasized the importance of an education to you all, is that correct?

NR: Yes.

DR: Was that also accompanied with the idea and feeling that an education would make life better for you?

NR: [Most definitely. Yes! Education was key. Go get the knowledge, once you've got it in your head no man can take it.] See, they would support that and push that, [along with building your character. Building blocks were education, character, and faith.]

DR: And you expected that?

NR: Yes. But they also empowered us to trust in the Lord and work with all your might to do your very best. You can do all you can education-wise.

DR: Then let me ask this question. Your life experience and all the teaching and influence from your parents, did education make life easier for you or more aware of how to navigate?

NR: More aware in making better choices. And then again, always look to the high road and not look to the low. Look to the high road.

DR: Positive mental attitude?

NR: Yes.

DR: Anything that we have not covered that you would like to add?

NR: Well, I think that the big thing that was an eye stopper for me was all that we talked about, but then remembering and it stuck with me through all my career, both in the military and in my role as, I guess, a leader, to be aware and recognizing your power, not as a hammer, but to make decisions, because it impacts others. When you have a mission, you've got a mission, but again, you want to do your utmost to care for the people. And so that's always been a plus for me. And later in life, it normally has come around sometimes five times on why you did what you did. I'm not saying everything was a perfection, but clearly the benefits for me and others I've seen as I look back, and then benefiting from it now as a retired individual, both from the army [as an officer] and then from the federal government, [as a senior civilian leader. It aided me through these 40 years of work. In my thoughts I sometimes think I, we, could have done better, then then I recognize that I, we,] did alright because people were prospering and they would communicate that I, we, learned and taught each other to move forward. That's been a big plus for me.

DR: Let me revisit a question with you. Your long-time relationship with Mr. Grant allows you to be aware of what his environment was, or some of what his environment was, and still familiar with what you experienced at Gresham Meggett, do you think the schools were a little bit equal?

NR: No. No. No. No. He dealt with a lot, but because he had the mind and the ability and the information was there, he could sort it. So that's pretty strong. I don't know sometimes. Sometimes I look back. And you understand. I don't know where I was at,

farm boy, how structured – I pray I would have, but I don't know. So I look back now in hindsight. Okay, Lord. You know. But I'm grateful. I'm very grateful.

DR: So I'm hearing you are implying or in fact saying that the difficult times and the frustration, it was your religious belief from your parents that helped you through it?

NR: Yes. I mean, seeing them go through tough times. [It was hard, but their faith and fight was strong. Every morning I wake up feeling blessed that I'm alive and able to do what needs to be done.] I make it do. I mean, you didn't realize what you didn't have. You had everything you needed. Life's nice. There is a dream out there for you. There's a vision out there for you.

DR: Tell me about your grandmother again.

NR: Oh, Lord. Iron will, love, determination. [Her name was Mary Roper.]

DR: And which one is this that you're talking about?

NR: Her nickname was Feedie.

DR: Okay.

NR: I didn't grow up with my mother's mother. She passed away long before. She died early on. Early in the 1900's. Because my mother was born in 1912. Her mother died maybe ten years later. So she knew her mother, but I never knew her. But Feedie was a dynamic force, [on James Island and was] well known.

DR: And how old was she when she passed?

NR: Feedie?

DR: Yes.

NR: She was 102 I think.

DR: What did she do? What was the kind of work she did?

NR: She was a farmer. She was a farm woman and she loved taking care of people. She fed anybody that was in need. If you're hungry, she was going to make sure you were fed. Hence, they had the nickname Feedie.

DR: Now, I understand that she was a midwife.

NR: Midwife.

DR: And delivered many children on this island.

NR: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. But see, she picked up her job – my mom was a midwife before.

DR: Okay. All right.

NR: And fed some of that information to her as to what she could do-

DR: That was on the job training that your grandmother picked up from your mother?

NR: Oh, yeah. My mother was a midwife, because she lived in the city for a while. [She got to meet and work with Catherine McKee McCottry, M.D, Ph.D, who along with her husband. She was the first African-American obstetrician and gynecologist in Charleston. Because of my mother's interest and given the need for health care in the Charleston community, she was encouraged to become a midwife.]

DR: Okay.

NR: And she started working with the doctors in Charleston and then with her background knowledge of seeing her loss in her family.

DR: So I always had the impression that I didn't know your mother was a midwife, but I knew that your grandmother had been – because of the close relationship.

NR: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

DR: And she was 102.

NR: Yes.

DR: Have any ideas how many babies she delivered?

NR: I would imagine on the island at that time, they say thousands, I wouldn't doubt it. When you talk to different people. Before I left the island, many people would acknowledge who I was, and they would shift back to Feedie. And I would go with my mother when she would go deliver children on the island as a little boy. But once she had the farm, she had to give that up.

DR: So it was not unusual for you to hear among other people the greetings or, "That's Feedie's grandboy."

NR: Well, yeah. Yeah.

DR: Or that's Ned Boy.

NR: Yes. Yes. Yes.

DR: Coming up.

NR: Yes. Yes.

DR: So anything else that you might want to conclude here with us?

NR: No, I think the one thing that was very dynamic and I was about to say that, that struck with me and stayed with me was some of the points you covered, but when we left for that last year, the transition happened. New teachers, white teachers coming in.

DR: That was in '69?

NR: '69. And I got to see and meet some of the teachers coming in. Apprehension. They had heard stories. As now, I remember and looked in their faces, and I was wide open – wide eyed open. And I talked with my mother. And she once said, "You will be disciplined. You will be given respect." However, comma, I would go back and talk and I could see the fear in their faces coming here. The younger ones saw it, that we had one teacher, and I'll share this one bit. This is one document and one episode of a problem we had in the classroom, and it could have gotten really ugly. The students were disruptive and they were frustrated, and she didn't know how to control the class. But this is after the class, we got it settled up, and I was the president, then we talked in the classroom to settle this thing down, because we were here for a purpose. To be educated and leave, and get out of here. We were going to graduate. We were going to have to get out of here. We didn't need the disruption. We needed to get out of here. She just didn't know how to control the students. Not that she was disruptive.

DR: So the frustration of the students was demonstrated by their behavior.

NR: Yes.

DR: The teacher, who was fearful of them in the beginning-

NR: In the beginning.

DR: ...also lacked the skills as to how to deal with the [transition, desegregation. Change was painful for all.]

NR: Yeah. Exactly. I don't know how much preparation they had. Some of the younger teachers, but I wasn't in their classes. We were seniors coming through different classes. But the one point I remembered in my graduation, and I kept this in my mind, because it could have been an ugly situation, but we kept it calm, and one we needed to get out of there. And that was my fault, "Guys, we could disrupt this thing all we want. We need to get this class." She's apparently very afraid of us. I know she's stressed. This is her job. She was forced to come here. We were forced to be here too. We've got to get out. But this is one of her-

DR: Go ahead. Read it. Read it.

NR: Yeah. Yeah. This is one of the gifts she gave and this was at graduation, May 21, 1969, "To Ned Roper. Your cooperation and dependability have been a pleasure to observe. You have shown to all your classmates a fine example of a young manhood. Best wishes in all that you do in the future. God bless you." And it's signed D. Coleman, social studies teacher, 1969. So I've always kept that. And I remember that moment. One, keeping our heads, everyone is stressed. She didn't say anything outlandish, but she didn't know how to control the class and communicate on their hard questions: "Why? Why you? Why did they choose our class? Why this year?" And she was stressed, I'm sure, alone being told you were coming to this school. So it was interesting.

DR: So Ned, what I'm gathering from what you're saying is that there may not have been proper preparation by the system of the teachers that were given this new responsibility that they are unfamiliar with?

NR: There's no doubt in my mind from watching outside looking in. And she is one of many, one other that we had teaching classes that we needed to graduate the curriculum. I think history was one of them, and math. We had black teachers teaching. So it was good, but we had to take that class. And so clearly-

DR: How many white teachers were here your last year?

NR: I can look in the yearbook.

DR: Approximately, you think.

NR: About maybe five or so. Something like that. If that.

DR: Were you well adjusted?

NR: No, I don't think so.

- DR: Male or females?
- NR: Males and females. Males and females. We had some younger men that may have had some involvement in teaching, where she was a middle-aged teacher.
- DR: I'm listening to you and the thought that comes to my mind is that the school system did not prepare the teachers adequately for that. They just dumped them into that environment?
- NR: I suspect from watching her dynamics with the students, and I'm not a teacher. I'm just one of the students. We're coming to class, books. And you know how things can get.
- DR: You observed your classmate, her and also how you feel and think. Go ahead.
- NR: So you would see one question leads to another. How do you nip it in the bud and keep things moving? And if you allow yourself to get pulled into something that's going to go not good, or do you maintain the control, or if you try to explain something that you can't explain, that's why – you've got to stick to the lesson. The best I can.
- DR: You have children now that have gone through the integrated school system.
- NR: Yes.
- DR: You hear them talk about some of the same things? In terms of teacher's preparation?
- NR: Well, yes. Teachers preparation. You could see some who were prepared and some were not. And then of course it stands out. If you recognize the teacher's not prepared or fearful, then they feed on it. Some, not all students. But some do.
- DR: You think that's related to some of the black males that are easily expelled from schools now?
- NR: It could be. It could be. Or a child who's dealing with stuff at home. Who knows? Tough situation, how they react, what have they been taught. Stress. You know, that's all I can say.
- DR: I think that the cooperation – I mean, I'll just pose the question. Would you venture to say that the parent supported the teachers at Gresham Meggett, created and fostered an environment where the students were more willing to learn without being disruptive?
- NR: I think that was the case. I think most of the times, having heard in discussion at the parent teachers organization, parents were more active I think, or definitely active.

Everyone had the same funds as to what they brought to the table. But the desire was there to listen and learn.

DR: What do you mean? Everyone had the same? You're talking about economic status?

NR: Economic station.

DR: Which means most of students here were from working class?

NR: Working class. Working class.

DR: So there was no class distinction-

NR: No class distinction. You weren't wearing [indistinct 00:54:14]. You wore what you had. You kept clean. That's about it. Now there's so many different distinctions in sneakers that you wear and your clothes and all that. And there isn't – and some of the schools wear the uniforms. I mean, that supposedly has diminished some of the concerns and stresses. Many to dynamics.

DR: Are you aware that Gresham Meggett has been placed on the historical registry?

NR: Yes.

DR: What would you like to see happen here?

NR: I love the fact that they're gainfully employing the building, educating students. Clearly that's a part of its history. I love that this ground has been put in a place where people appreciate it. I love the fact that it's been a part of where others can come and see and then teach and talk about, again, when you look at the Charleston area, and I have many friends from the Charleston area, many friends I went to school with, [indistinct 00:55:26] a few other places. We share and talk notes now. Some moved back, some have not. But we communicate. Their structure is gone, so they still try to maintain, again, an understanding of what they feel from what they've garnered and then their question is mine now. And that gets back to the point. How do we share for those students? You see, because seeing you, when I see you, I see me, family, me. And so for me, I'm proud and I understand from whence I came. From what I see others here, from whence I came. And when you put it with the school from whence I came. How do we relay that? I don't know how you do that. I didn't have all I needed back then, I didn't know that, but I made it. And now how do you encourage and empower?

DR: Do you ever feel that there's a need for vocational education?

NR: Yes.

DR: More so than we have now?

NR: I think so, because everyone cannot have the same goodness of knowledge and understanding. But a physical presence and an understanding of work, and the need, and how to gainfully employ yourself, that's a question.

DR: How would you compare the need for that kind of education given how expensive it is now to go to college?

NR: More needed now. It's needed. It's necessary. I saw some of this when I was in Germany, in West Germany. Then West Germany. They had a vocational track in their schools where those children who wanted to more get involved in techniques and whatever, it was worth-

DR: You think Gresham Meggett can once again serve that purpose?

NR: I think so. They have the land. I mean, how much space do you need to teach [computer literacy, etc.,etc]?

DR: What were some of the vocational classes that were offered when you were here? You remember?

NR: You had horticulture. And you had brick masonry. And my family still uses that very strongly now. Alan is very much strong. He's retiring now, but he can't even find anyone knowledgeable enough to pass that on. So.

DR: How about welding?

NR: Welding? I can't remember how much – I think they tried that at one of the schools, but again, that's another area. But again, technology, computers. The technology is here.

DR: Roper, we thank you for your time and patience and sharing very rich history of your past experience in your family.

NR: We thank you. I'm glad you were here before me and now.

DR: Oh, man.

NR: God bless you, man.

DR: Yes. Yes. Yeah. Struggle.

NR: Indeed.

DR: Thank you much. Yeah.

Terrie Urie Washington

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on July 29, 2019 at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Velma Fann, historian was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Velma Fann: Good afternoon. This is Velma Fann, and I am here to speak with Ms. Terrie Urie Washington—

Terrie Urie Washington: Yes.

VF: ...about the experiences at Meggett, and Fort Johnson—

TUW: Yes.

VF: ...and James Island High School.

TUW: Yes.

VF: We're talking about the equalization programs, as well as the desegregation programs So, welcome.

TUW: Thank you.

VF: It's July 29, and we are ready to get started.

TUW: All right.

VF: So, I'll ask you a little bit...some of the background, your background, your family's background. Can we start by you spelling your first name and last name for us?

TUW: Yes. Terrie, T-E-R-R-I-E. Urie, U-R-I-E. Washington, W-A-S-H-I-N-G-T-O-N.

VF: Okay. Great. Thank you. Your birth, and your location?

TUW: Birthdate—the whole birthdate?

VF: As much as you'd like to share.

TUW: Okay. January 9, and that was in Charleston, South Carolina.

VF: Now, tell us about your childhood. Where did you spend your childhood?

TUW: It was on James Island. Yes. I grew up with 12 brothers and sisters, and it was a very diverse group of brothers and sisters. With my being maybe three or four years old, I got to experience the ones that were closer in age to me. But in having family time, you ended up hearing the good and the bad stories about school, because everything came into the home, in terms of talking about what was going on. School was an integral part of everybody's life. So that was just as important as home upbringing, because what went into the school also came into the household, too. And if you got a call from the school, something was definitely wrong, and your parents did not appreciate a call from the school. So, being one of the youngest, I always listened and learned, because I did not want to have some of the issues that my brothers and sisters had coming into the home, from the school.

VF: Let me ask you, you were born in Charleston, so what brought your family here?

TUW: We're originally from Charleston.

VF: Okay.

TUW: Right. We came from the plantation. The white side of my family is Grimball [phonetic 00:02:38] from Johns Island. And as far as I know, that's half of where we came from, and the other half was already on James Island.

VF: And your father's name and occupation?

TUW: Harry Urie Senior, and he was a general contractor or a construction laborer.

VF: And your mom?

TUW: My mom, Florence Urie, she was a housekeeper. I think they called it domestic engineer.

VF: Domestic?

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] Yes.

VF: So, how important was education in your family?

TUW: Very important. I know in listening to my parents talk to my older siblings, as they got older, they were expected to do something. They were not permitted to be at home. They were expected to work. My parents worked, so everybody had to work. Everybody had a responsibility, right all the way down to me. Dishes were my thing. My brothers, if it was tending the garden for the older ones, then some of them had lawnmower, yard responsibilities; things of that sort. Yes.

VF: And education as far as your parents? Do you know what grade level they reached, or...?

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] Probably for my father, it was more like the third grade. Maybe second or third grade for my mother also.

VF: So, they really pushed it for their children?

TUW: I think they needed to. They recognized the importance of it, and for anyone to succeed, you had to have the education. Yes.

VF: Tell us about Gresham Meggett. Now, what schools did you attend here?

TUW: For me, I went to Murray-Lasaine Elementary, James Island Middle School, and James Island High School. For my siblings, it was either W. Gresham Meggett or James Island High School, and that happened right at segregation.

VF: Are you familiar with Meggett? Did you ever accompany your brothers or sisters to the school or anything? What do you remember about Meggett?

TUW: Meggett, I remember because, like I said, it was a community type of thing. School was just as important as your home life. So, there was always talk of what went on inside of school; the good and the bad. Anything that happened to anybody, if it came—happened at school, then it came into the house. And I think also, with so many siblings, there weren't going to be any secrets, or don't tell mom and dad, you know. It was going to come into the house, either through the teacher, or through a sibling, or through a neighbor. So, school was very important.

I would say for me, my first interaction was maybe at three or four years old, going to the school with my siblings. And like I said, school was a part of your life, so in those days you got the opportunity to go to school with your siblings. And they had specific

days set aside where you could bring your younger siblings to school, and I guess to motivate them, and let them see what school was all about. And, you know, since hey, this is going to be an experience for you also, you know, and to keep you interested and connected with them.

So, with us living in a neighborhood right off of Riverland Drive, we would walk down Riverland Drive, across the airport, which is now a grown field now, but the hangars and such like are still there, and then, we would walk across to the school. So, it was a straight line, but if you took Riverland Drive and went down all of the side roads, maybe about 30 minutes worth of walking, but if you cut across, I'd say, the airport and such like, it was maybe 15 minutes' worth of walking. So, my siblings that were closer to age to me, Kay and Janet, they were more of the ones that would take us to school with them. Yes.

VF: And when you walked into the building, what did you see? What did your young eyes see?

TUW: Lots of African Americans. Oh, my goodness. Lots of well-educated people. You got to sit inside the classrooms; listen, learn, understand the equipment, the books, televisions. If it was a welding class, if it was a carpentry class, you got to go into the different classroom and environment. And everybody was respectful and very nice with the young ones. Yes.

VF: Do you remember any particular teachers that your siblings talked about?

TUW: Mr. Richardson was there, and he was one of the more dominant figures in the neighborhood and also in the community, because he was from James Island. And so, you know, he would remind us who we were, and be like, oh, you don't want to really have me go and talk to your parents, do you? So that was a rather scary thought. So, he was connected with us through church, community, and then into the neighborhood, and also at the school. Yes.

VF: Do you remember his first name?

TUW: Not off the top of my head, right now.

VF: Okay.

TUW: Yes.

VF: We'll come back to this then.

TUW: All right.

VF: So, you're there. You're looking around at Meggett. You're seeing—now, you mentioned that the stories, whatever happened in school was going to come home.

TUW: Yes.

VF: So, did anything happen in school with your brothers and sisters that came home, that you can talk about?

TUW: Well, I know with my older siblings, when they first started, they were like—they wouldn't tell me everything that happened, so you would kind of have to eavesdrop. But I know with my older siblings, a couple of them, because they did not have, like maybe someone else within the community or neighborhood have, they would actually have to take turns going to school, because they would share clothing; they would share shoes. So certain days, certain people went to school, and certain days, other siblings went to school. Those were with my older two siblings, but more like, with my siblings starting with my brother Harry—we called him Happy; it was more of a cohesive type of environment, because they were actually raised in the house by my parents. Right.

So, Harry was an excellent student; straight A's. The mindset that he could have gone to college, but in those days, college was very expensive. And in terms of an African American going to college, it was very rare; quite a sacrifice. So, he went into the Army.

VF: And what were, what were your dreams growing up? In terms of career wise, and where you wanted to go, and who inspired you?

TUW: I think just seeing people function in a positive manner, that was one of the key dreams for me. I always still go back to the days where we got to actually see and be at the school, and know that, all right, good, my turn is going to come. I'll get to be permanently on these halls at W. Gresham Meggett. So, in terms of wanting to be someone or something, I just knew I was always going to be someone, because we always had that positive energy around us, either through the church home or at school. Probably the biggest thing I wanted to be was maybe a secretary. Yeah.

VF: So, we talk about community and the reinforcement. Tell me a little bit about that. You're on this island, sometimes people may have a different impression about people born on the island—

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: ...their culture, their Gullah language. How, how were you reinforced? How did they make sure that you held your head up high?

TUW: I think constant, being around you. In those days—oh, my goodness. If you did something incorrect, the paddle came out, or the switch came out. So, there was an opportunity for you to be disciplined by just about anyone in the community or in the neighborhood, if they knew you and they were familiar with you. So, I think in terms of discipline, and structure, and them reminding us of who we were, and who we were representing as a culture, that stood out most in my mind. It's like, okay, you know, you're not just representing your family; you're representing African Americans also.

VF: So, was African American history infused, or was it just black history month, or were you always being reminded?

TUW: You had the pictures inside of your home of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and they were always side by side, with every other relative or family member. So, you always were aware of what your responsibilities were, and who you could aspire to. The schools made sure you saw others of your own. Yeah, either through the community, or had them come in and talk to you and interact with you, and the church did the same thing, too. They made sure people came by, you know, and talked to you. Yeah.

VF: So, the move—I guess with maybe your older brothers and sisters from Meggett, where did they attend high school?

TUW: Most of my siblings came through W. Gresham Meggett. My sister Kay, she was the one that was impacted the most.

VF: Okay.

TUW: Most of my siblings were through W. Gresham Meggett, and with her being the one—I don't think she was anticipating desegregation, so she was always the rabble-rouser. I think she resented it at that point, but she adapted. But there were a lot of riots, you know, and disagreements by the time she got to James Island High School. So, they were always tugging and pulling with the teachers and the administrators over at James Island High School. We didn't have a true identity when she came through, and so I think that was difficult for her to adapt to.

She ran away from home, as a matter of fact, with a couple of her friends. They decided they would ride their bicycles up north. They got as far as North Carolina, and like I tell people, I say, wow, North Carolina didn't want them. So, they called our parents, and they put them on the bus and sent them right back to Charleston. So, I

think it was three of them that attempted to leave the south, you know, but yeah. They got as far as North Carolina, so it was pretty funny.

VF: So, let's, let's back up. How, how did the word get out that all of a sudden desegregation was going to take place, and you were going to be going to another school? How did your family learn? How did your sisters learn? How did they respond?

TUW: In terms of learning about it, it was all over the media. The schools made you aware of it. And the churches definitely were an integral role player; Reverend Cornelius Campbell was here. He was very much an advocate for us being calm, and rational, and being responsible about our responsibility, and what a good thing it was going to be. But that's a major change, so a lot of people didn't really want it. They felt we could succeed and do better on our own, but my parents didn't have that attitude. I think with us being white and black, we knew that we could not stay within that black world, like a lot of people wanted us to be. And he says, no, our children need to be structured like everybody else, and have the same benefits of everybody else.

VF: So. the first day...your sister, Kay?

TUW: Yes.

VF: Okay. What was her first day like? Did she come home and tell you about it? Or when she went to the James High School, right?

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] James Island High School.

VF: What, what did she say? How, how—what changes did you see? What did you notice? Did she tell you about her first day at school?

TUW: To her, it was predominantly white. Okay. James Island has always been predominantly white. I think one of the advantages though, is during those days, everybody knew everybody. So, she was aware of the other persons and who they were, but in terms of resenting it, yes, she was very much resentful of having to give up her identity as a black person.

VF: Let's talk about that a little bit, to give up her identity as a black person. What do you mean? Give me—help me understand that a little better.

TUW: I think she had prepared herself emotionally, and just like me, I was looking forward to going to W. Gresham Meggett. Oh, it's my turn coming, you know, I'll be there, because W. Gresham Meggett didn't just have high school, they also had the younger children, elementary, or maybe middle school age children there also. So, I knew that my turn was coming, but she realized, wow, this is—this is gone. And if you look at

it in terms of a young person being maybe 14, 16 years old, that's a [unintelligible 00:16:56]. So, it was very hard.

Like I said, she was one of the key persons that would be involved with the, the riots, the picketing, no going to school. And even though our parents were encouraging it, or the church was encouraging the blending; a lot of the students didn't really care for it as much, but they were the ones that were going to be directly impacted. So, in those days, you were told what your responsibly were. You didn't have that control, and with that, they didn't have control, you know.

VF: So, there were actual riots at the school?

TUW: Yes. James Island had quite a few. As a matter of fact, when I spoke about Reverend Campbell, even as a part of worship, or they would have community meetings, he would remind everybody: be respectful, don't take any weapons, don't take any hammers or clubs, or you know, be respectful of the other students that are at the school, don't do anything that's going to make the community look bad, your parents look bad, and such like. But like I said, they really didn't care too much for the idea of having to give up all that they were connected to and start all over with another school.

VF: So, this is your older sister. Are you close to her in terms of age or just talking? Is she a close sister?

TUW: Yes.

VF: When you saw that spirit in her, what did you think? This is my big sister, what she's going through and how she's responding.

TUW: I think it, it kind of calmed me down, because I was like, oh, wow, somebody's in the forefront. Okay, good. My parents didn't see it that way. They saw it as rebellion, and in those days, you never were rebellious. You just toed the line and did what was expected of you. So, that gave me a good feeling, like, oh, somebody's got my back. They're trying to, you know, keep Meggett alive, and make a decision that's going to impact me later on.

VF: Did she talk about the difference maybe, in the building, or the books, or the teachers? Did she have African American teachers now that she was going to James Island High School?

TUW: To me, in looking at the school, because we were expected to go to the meetings also at the school or in the community, I didn't see that many African American teachers that actually went into James Island High School. Most of the African American

teachers stayed, I'd say, within the elementary school; a few within the middle school. So, most of them transitioned maybe into the areas that were predominantly black. Yes.

And I think in those days, the school had to accept you, which I believe is still the official rule. You have to be interviewed and accepted by that school, you know, through application process. You aren't just sent over there saying, oh, okay, we want so and so to come over. No, you reapplied for your job. Yeah.

VF: Did she talk about the nurturing? I would imagine that Meggett was very nurturing.

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: And then you're thrust into a whole different environment. Were there teachers she was close to, or how did—how did she feel, just being in this new situation? Is there someone she could go to; did she go to your parents whenever problems were there, or the community, or the pastor, or was there a teacher who nurtured her and kind of worked with her through this?

TUW: I think in terms of teachers, the ones that were a part of our community already, they tried to stay as connected as they could to the students that were here. So, the persons like Mr. Richardson, you know, that were actually a part of the school system, they would speak to them, give them positive words of encouragement, but they had that rebellious spirit within them. So, they were not going to not deny themselves the opportunity to do things their way. Right.

VF: So, now you mentioned this bicycle trip to North Carolina.

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] Wow.

VF: She must have done some planning. Did she, did she leave a note? Did she tell you? Did she whisper?

TUW: I think their plan was, oh, I'll be at so and so's house. So that's the way they got away with not being at the house.

VF: Yeah.

TUW: But, yes, you're right. It did take a lot of planning. That's kind of dangerous to me also, is to make up your... And I think that's one of the reasons ultimately, she ended up in New Jersey, because my parents finally had to realize, oh, you know, she is not going to adapt, and we need to just get her out of the area until maybe, she becomes more rationale, or more accepting of the blended school. But once she went up north to

New Jersey, she never came back to be educated. Nope. She ended up retiring as a captain in the Air Force after 33 years, so I think that was a very good decision my parents made when they shipped her off to New Jersey.

VF: Now, was she the only one leaving Meggett, going to one of the—desegregating the high schools? I know you said, your older brothers and sisters were at Meggett.

TUW: Right. She was the first one that would have been going and finishing over at James Island High School.

VF: Was there anyone under her, who finished at James Island?

TUW: Yes. My brother Keith and me.

VF: And how were your experiences?

TUW: Well, by that point, it was accepted. And my parents were always of the mindset, we didn't have a choice, and I think by that point, by the time I got to high school, it was more blended, and it was more accepted. So, it didn't bother me to be friends or be in the same classroom with white children.

VF: So, if we would look back now, as—let's look at you as a parent. Would you have asked your child to go through that process of desegregation? Would you have—what would you have said, or done, or how would you have helped your child?

TUW: I think I would have followed the same course my parents did. Yeah. I think I would have given it a try. I mean, being born in the 50s and the 60s, those were very turbulent times. There was a lot going on. Vietnam was happening. We had a lot of black men that died. And so, I think I would have done the same thing.

VF: So, the effort was to equalize the schools; separate but equal. What's your comment on that? Can you be separate and equal?

TUW: No. The books weren't up to the same standard. I would say, the school was, because it was a fairly new school. And the school probably was given to them because it was an alternative to having us in their schools. So, it was like, hey, let's give them their own school, and they'll be off to one side. So, even when I was in school, and I was at Murray-Lasaine Elementary, the, the books weren't really brand new, but I think eventually by the 70s, and by the 80s, and parents petitioning, the pastors petitioning, the reverends petitioning; there wasn't that much of an opportunity for us to be denied. But everything was always a battle, yeah.

VF: Always a battle.

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] Still is.

VF: Yes. Thank you. Is there anything you'd like to add?

TUW: No, no. I don't think so. I know my, my siblings are probably going to be shocked that I'm doing an interview, but can I include all of their names as a part of—

VF: Yes, you may. Yes, yes.

TUW: ...the interview?

VF: Tell me, tell me a little bit about every one of them: personality, how they did, where they are, the pecking order... Who was really in charge?

TUW: All right. Well, Irene is the oldest. She is like 78 right now; good, positive advocate. She was like 16 years old, okay, when she was there. Kathleen was there also. All right.

VF: When you say there, you mean—

TUW: Meggett.

VF: At Meggett. Okay.

TUW: Right. Hm-hmm. [affirmative] And Harry Junior was there; very well liked, mannerly, good young man. Glen was there, and Lawrence was there. And one story I can tell you about Lawrence is, he wasn't a good student. He didn't care for school. Mother and Daddy were constantly at the school behind him; black principal, black assistant principal. And so, he started carrying this briefcase. And my mother was like, woohoo, finally he's focused on his education. All right. So, come to find out, when they got the call from the school to come in because there, there needed to be a meeting, he had converted a briefcase to a carriable bar. Yes. Oh, my goodness. How he didn't get expelled? I do not know. Maybe by the grace of God through my parents, and the churches, and such like.

But when stuff like that happened, you know, the schools in those days, they, they worked with you. You know what I mean? So that created chaos at home for a while, because my, my mother was denying that it was her child. And my father was like, no, you got to take care of that, and he was like, no, that's your responsibility. So, yeah, that was one of the stories I was permitted to hear. Yeah.

Let's see, Janie was there. She was a fairly good student, but by that point, my sister Irene had moved to Boston, and so she didn't finish Meggett. See, there was still an impression that, the north was better, which it was, because we were more geared

toward not getting the income and the type of jobs we were entitled to as everybody else. So, there we go again. My mother and father made the decision to send them up north. So, Janie finished in Boston with my sister Irene. Janet finished at Meggett, and she went, and she got married to a military guy from New Jersey, so right after graduating. So, I don't think my parents really cared for that idea, but she left, and she moved to New Jersey. There we go again, to get another opportunity.

Kate, she was at Meggett, and she didn't do very well with the rebellion and such like. So, she was sent to New Jersey also. And Keith, he finished here at James Island. And then, my brother Bernard, he wasn't doing very well, so he was sent to New Jersey. And then I finished at James Island High School in 1977. Yes.

VF: Very good. Thank you.

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: Now, your sister, do you call her Kate or Kay?

TUW: We called her both—

VF: Okay.

TUW: ...but I usually call her Kate.

VF: Okay.

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: All right. Thank you for sharing this history with us.

TUW: Oh, you're welcome.

VF: And to—giving us an insight on what it was like, you know, to make that transition. Hearing it as a child, you know—

TUW: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

VF: ...hearing it.

TUW: And, and I mean, the diversity and the structure, it won't be the same ever again.

VF: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

TUW: But I appreciate it. I enjoyed it. Yeah.

VF: So, let me ask you, whose side were you on: Kate's side or your parent's side?

TUW: Oh, I think I was more on Kay's side. In terms of, not wanting to miss out on the opportunity of being a full African American, you know. I think I was more on her, because I feel that whenever you blend into another culture, which it was another culture, you lose a lot of who you are as a culture. So, I was more on her side.

VF: Thank you very much.

TUW: You're welcome.

Willie J. Wilder

This interview was conducted on behalf of Charleston County as part of the project: *Stories from Historic African American Communities: A Journey to Equal Education, W. Gresham Meggett High School, James Island, SC*. Charleston County was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) in 2018 to conduct this oral history project aimed to provide insight into the lives of African American students during desegregation. The project is structured by the NPS research framework: *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2002, rev. 2008).

This interview was conducted on March 20, 2019, at St. James Presbyterian Church, James Island, Charleston County, South Carolina. Mary Beth Reed was the interviewer; Jenna Tran was the technical assistant.

Mary Beth Reed: So, my name is Mary Beth Reed. I'm with New South Associates. And today we are St. James Presbyterian on Secessionville Road, and I have the honor to be interviewing Mr. Wilder. So, the first part of this is really tell me about you, your family, where you grew up.

William "Cubby" Wilder: Yeah. Make sure, Bill "Cubby" Wilder or William "Cubby" Wilder—

MBR: Okay.

WW: ...or William Bill "Cubby" Wilder.

MBR: That's right. I knew.

WW: Because my nickname was all through high school.

MBR: Was it?

WW: Yeah.

MBR: I wondered about that.

WW: [Indistinct 0:02:39] Cubby.

MBR: Because everybody calls you Cubby, so I figured it's in your—

WW: Yeah.

MBR: So, Wilder is W-I-L-D-E-R.

WW: That's correct.

MBR: Right. So, what would you like me to call you? I can call you Mr. Wilder.

WW: Cubby.

MBR: Okay.

WW: Yeah. Cubby Wilder's fine.

MBR: Let's start with you tell me about, you know, where you grew up, your mom, your dad, how many brothers and sisters you had, and kind of get a sense of what they did for a living. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

WW: Yeah. My mother name was Rebecca Wilder, and she was an elder in this church. And my dad Harrison Wilder II, he was a fisherman and a fireman [indistinct 0:03:23] and my mother was a domestic worker. She worked mostly on Folly Beach as a domestic worker. My family consists of—it was eight of us not eight, but at the current time it was nine of us in the house there. There was—I have five girls and two boys, only two boys. My brother was named Harrison Wilder. Everybody called him Harry. And we all went to this church except for my one older sister. She went to First Baptist Church.

And so, out of the nine of us, my mother is deceased, Rebecca Wilder. She lived to be 94. My father died when he was about 55 from a heart condition. And two of my sisters are deceased, Thomasina [phonetic] Wilder and Susan Ann [phonetic] Wilder. Thomasina died when she was seven. And Susan died—she was 65 when she died, something like that. But she's deceased. So, right now five of us.

MBR: Are there. Did either of your parents go to school?

WW: Yes, my mother went as far as sixth grade. She always said she wanted to be a teacher, but she had to stop school to work on the farm. And my father, he was always finishing and farming. He could never get a government—he was trying to get a government job or he'd go to a CWPA job that they had back in the days to clean the ditches and do stuff like that. But it was a government job, but he never got on. So, his entire life he worked as a fisherman and a farmer.

MBR: I see.

WW: And he would take his product down to the Charleston Market before they got commercialized.

MBR: Oh, okay—

WW: Yeah.

MBR: Was it, like, truck farming? [Indistinct 0:05:29]

WW: Truck farmers. He was like a truck farmer.

MBR: So, did you live near here?

WW: Yeah. [Indistinct 0:05:34] about two miles from here.

MBR: Two miles, okay.

WW: Yeah, about two mile from Folly Beach. And the [indistinct 0:05:42] can make their own boat, their own nets, and everything like that. And the farming part, before farming got commercialized, there were small farmers. And like you said, they were truck farmers, exactly.

MBR: Oh, okay. Did you parents value education? Did they want you to go to school?

WW: Oh, yeah. The main thing my parents want. Say, "You're not going—you're going to school. You're not going to stop, and you're going to finish school." Because that's what we wanted to do, but we had to work. And so, they stressed, especially my mother, my mom. Dad thought he wanted use to—he was always trying to get us to do what he did. He was a fisherman making his own net, making a wooden boat. He made that. They made oars. They made everything. Yeah. That's the [indistinct 0:06:32] that. So, they was from the [indistinct 0:06:35].

People [indistinct 0:06:35] a lot of the West African culture, making the nets, making their own boats, and the oars and everything. They were self-sufficient. That's correct. So, my community, when I came up, there were no whites living on the Seller Creek [phonetic], in the Seller Creek community. It was all black fishing community, farming community. And that has all changed with development. And people wanted to be near the water, because I'm only two miles from—we're only two miles from Folly Beach and it's beautiful.

MBR: Yeah, I'm sure it is.

WW: [Indistinct 0:07:11] Islands out there. And at one time back, my parents told me they had to take a boat to get to Charleston. They had to pack up their product. There was no bridges, so they had to take the boat. [Indistinct 0:07:29] Bluff is the highway. Down there they call it the bluff, yeah. They load everything in their little horse and

buggy, and go on down to the end of the creek down there called Limos [phonetic] Creek—not Limos—Ella's [phonetic] Creek, and they take their product down there, the fish and farming product, and take it to the end Dove Bluff [phonetic], catch a ferry over to the market and sell their product, and they'd come back home. They finally got a bridge. It was the Wappoo Bridge to get over here. And then, when they got the bridge, they really became truck farmers with a horse and buggy. Yeah. So, anyway, in the mean time, when they got done with the bridges, Folly Beach opened up. And they were—my mom became a domestic worker on Folly Beach. And they had a little truck they used to shell vegetables, the home-grown vegetables on Folly Beach. And so, yeah.

MBR: Well, where did you attend elementary school?

WW: Okay. So, at the age of about six, my aunt—my grandmother died. She died in 1947. And my aunt came down. And at the time, the older folks didn't mind. They had so many kids, they didn't mind giving up the kids. So, my aunt wanted me, so she took me to New York. And so, I raised up in Harlem. I lived on 127th Street between Greenwich Avenue and 5th Avenue in New York.

MBR: All of you have such incredible stories. This is—so you grew up as a child—

WW: Yeah. And I attended PS 68. And I went from first grade to sixth grade. I graduated sixth grade. They had a graduation ceremony then for sixth grade. So, I graduated from PS 68 in New York. And then, I moved down to Charleston, South Carolina, back down to Charleston, South Carolina, and started W. Gresham Meggett the seventh grade. And from seventh grade to the twelfth grade, I was at W. Gresham Meggett.

MBR: What did you think of the school? You're coming from New York, you went to—

WW: It was a brand new school, so I was highly impressed. The school I attended in New York was a nice school. It was four story, and we used to always have fire drills and all that kind of stuff.

MBR: And that was an integrated school, wasn't it?

WW: Integrated school. I didn't know about segregated until I came out here and my [indistinct 0:10:11] I went on Folly Beach with my cousin. Because when I left here at six, I didn't know anything about color. I was color blind. And when I came back, then I got the rude awakening about color and the different races. Because you have to stay in your place when I came back. In New York, the main street was 25th Street in New York. And that's my aunt, you know, I need to go shopping on 25th Street.

Now, when I came back to Charleston, the main shopping place was King Street, which is pretty much commercialized, King Street. Well, it used to be we used to come to town on Saturday with our little piece of money and spend our little money getting our little shoes, shirt or whatever we need to get. And that would last until the next weekend or to the next month or whatever.

And so, there was not a whole lot of money in the community. And we improvised by just getting by with what we [indistinct 0:11:25]. One thing I did like, and I think about it now, why I think I'm so healthy and why my mother lived to be 94 is because we ate up the field. And we grew our own—I mean own—We ate out of the field and we ate a lot of fish. Lot of fish and a lot of—very seldomly too much pork and very little beef. Yeah, so—

MBR: That's a neat insight.

WW: Yeah, pardon?

MBR: Yeah, that's a neat insight.

WW: Yeah.

MBR: Well so, W. Gresham Meggett, you came back to a segregated—

WW: Yes, I came back down here, and they had W. Gresham Meggett. And then, I was wondering why they had J. Balinor [phonetic] High School. The named W. Gresham Meggett after a superintendent, the white superintendent of the district at the time, William W. Gresham Meggett. And then, came down with the white kids they knew. And most all of them was [indistinct 0:12:23] most all the schools that were white owned had the name of their vicinity, just like downtown Charleston there, Charleston High School.

And then, Burke was the black school, but Burke was the only high school in the city, when we came back. [Indistinct 0:12:42] built our school. Then, as you know, they all [indistinct 0:12:46] a school called [indistinct 0:12:46]. So, and then they had the school over there named St. John. That was the high school, but black was not allowed to go to St. John. They went to [indistinct 0:12:58]. So, Burke, anybody who wanted to go to school on the sea island had to go to Burke High School. It probably was Burke, Avery, Avery Institution, and there was another school, a catholic school called—what is the catholic school called?

MBR: It was in Charleston, wasn't it?

WW: Yeah.

MBR: I don't remember the name of it either, but it—

WW: What was the name of that school? ICS [Immaculate Conception]. ICS, that was not the black school, but it was catholic, but it was not integrated. And guess what? All of the Mexican and black, the family—Well, you can see mulatto [phonetic] or the kids that were parents that—there wasn't a lot of them. They white—they were mostly mixed kids, but they mostly went to ICS. You would hardly ever see a dark skinned kid at ICS. And believe it or not, the races discriminated against the other—blacks discriminated. Light skin went to ICS. And then, it was like class. Yeah. The dark skinned blacks didn't socialize too much with the light skinned—

MBR: The light skinned—

MBR: ...with the slight skinned, because light skinned blacks—because they went to ICS. Now, there was some—Don't get me wrong. There was some blacks that went to Burke, but my mama couldn't go to Burke, because she [indistinct 0:14:32]. Another reason she didn't go to high school, because some of the blacks were fortunate enough to go to Burke. I think it kept the ferry or the bus. So, when the bus came after they built the bridges, a lot of the kids started going. And before they built W. Gresham Meggett, a lot of the high schools when they finished—because almost all these children had in sections had their own neighborhood school. Like, on Seller Creek with the school is still standing.

The Seller Creek School went from K to ninth grade. When you get in ninth grade, then you go to Burke, if you can get there. And then, down Cutbridge [phonetic], they had Cutbridge Elementary School [phonetic]. They were K to ninth. And then, they would have to go to Burke. And then, they had one called Society [phonetic] Corner School. That would be this area right here. That went from K to ninth grade. So, those kids, they called it the—it was right down the street from this church, Society Corner School. And then, they had Three Tree [phonetic], that was—we called that neighborhood Honey Hill.

MBR: Three trees.

WW: Three Tree.

MBR: Okay. Three Tree.

WW: Tree Tree. [phonetic] Yeah. Was it Tree Tree or—Tree Tree or something like that. But anyway, that school down there by Honey Hill. So, those kids went there from K to nine, and they all would merge together and go to Burke, if they can get there. And then, when the bus came through, then the bus got picking up. The black kids were

taken, then, and the white kids would go to [indistinct 0:16:09] High School. Burke school had a lot to offer. They had a technical school. Brick mason, this, that, auto mechanic. Our school didn't have that when we went there. We just had New Farmers of America, agriculture, at Gresham Meggett. That's what we had. We didn't have—that's the highest technology we had. I mean, [indistinct 0:16:34] now—alternative education. Alternative education.

Well, anyway, I left New York City and started W. Gresham Meggett when I was about 13 years old. And I started the school and when I got started in the school, the first—there was seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. And the elementary school was there. W. Gresham Meggett, the elementary school was there. Some kids was in sixth grade already. That school before the high school, then. Because, see, at the time, the high school was seventh, eighth, and going up on up before you start junior high school. So, when I started school, it was seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. My brother was the first to graduate, one of the first to graduate from W. Gresham Meggett in 1957. The school opened in 1953.

MBR: Oh. What was his name?

WW: Harrison Wilder.

MBR: Oh, that's Harrison Wilder. Yes. That's your other brother, right?

WW: Harrison Wilder. Harrison Wilder, Jr. So, we started school, and we were bussed to school. And at the time, my—a lot of the older generation from, like, my uncle and some other people used to be school bus drivers. And then, by tenth grade, they started looking for students to drive school bus. So, my brother became a school bus driver at 16.

MBR: At 16.

WW: Yeah.

MBR: A different world.

WW: Yeah, it's different [laughter] Yeah. Yeah, he started—no, no, let me see now. He started driving, he drive for two years, so he was a soph—yeah, he was 16.

MBR: Sixteen. Sophomore, yeah.

WW: And he started driving and some other kids start—in his class started driving the school busses. And they turned the [indistinct 0:18:31] the older generation out. And so, I used to be patrolling his bus. He made me patrol his bus after [laughter]—

MBR: How did that work?

WW: I tell you, you got to go after—It worked pretty good. I had to make sure the kids would sit down and stuff like that, if they would listen to me. And most of the time [indistinct 0:18:50] then. And pretty much they didn't listen. They got [indistinct 0:18:56] the bus, then they had to [indistinct 0:18:57] have to get parents. And your parents, you didn't want your parents to know nothing about you being bad or nothing like that in school or on the school bus, so you didn't have too much problem. But anyway, seventh, eighth, and then finally, I think, in the tenth grade, they decided to get a football team, start football. My brother plays. And after they started the football team, I was kind of a little scrawny little fellow then. Anyway, [laughs], but anyway, I wanted to play football, and my mom didn't want none of us to play football. But anyway, my brother played—let's see, he played for two years. That means junior, senior.

MBR: Golden eagles? Was that the name?

WW: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And then, in the process, we started—the teachers started getting us to think of a name. We had to come up with a name of our own, our mascot, which everybody wanted to know the eagles and the color. Yeah, we wanted to know all that stuff. Back in seventh, eighth grade, and ninth grade, we had to [indistinct 0:20:06] the color of our alma mater is based after Auld Lang Sine. [sings] "Oh love, oh Gresham Meggett, we love thee so, we'll never from thee part. We [indistinct 0:20:19] thy faithfully, and memories of old..." I've got it written down right there.

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MBR: Perfect.

WW: Yeah. Yeah. So anyway—oh yeah. All those things was decided, then we decided for the newspaper and the student council and all that stuff. And we got all that stuff going. [Indistinct 0:20:37] And then, the New Farmers of America agriculture. We had a very good agriculture teacher. [Indistinct 0:20:44] Mr. Richardson [phonetic].

MBR: Mister—

WW: Mr. Richardson. He was—he and Mr. Mack [phonetic] was our biology major and our science major and coach was Mr. Mack and Mr. Green [phonetic]. Mr. Green taught health and a little science. Mr. Mack taught biology and chemistry. And he was our coach, Mr. Green and Mr. Mack. And from then, we started winning championships. We started winning championships. Yes, from the tenth grade, my brother [indistinct 0:21:22] they won the championship, then the next year they won the championship. When they graduated and I came along and we won the championship.

MBR: Who'd you play? Who were the other schools? Do you remember?

WW: There was a school. [Indistinct 0:21:33] there was other schools like Hotcat [phonetic], Wallace. Wallace was in West Ashley. And then, we played some schools up country. And I just always wonder why the schools always had the same shape as W. Gresham Meggett. And I never figured that out until I started reading on the history that they built 150 of these schools all over South Carolina for integration to keep the black kids and white kids from coming together. And they were calling them segregated schools. It was [indistinct 0:22:10] school. And then, there were the Rosenwald [phonetic]—not Rosenwald

MBR: Rosenwald [phonetic]—

WW: Rosenwald. Yeah, Rosenwald School. I think the school on Sol Legare [phonetic], which is still standing, was the Rosenwadi School, the elementary. It's still standing. That school is historical. So anyway, we went on with the football team, and I started the honor roll from the time I was seventh to the time I graduated. I was on the honor roll. Yeah, from seventh grade on up to twelfth grade, I was on the honor roll.

MBR: Were you headed toward a technical degree or to a college prep? What were you thinking at that time?

WW: Well, I took the college prep, the colored prep. And then, the teachers all encouraged me to take that. And although I was good in those other subjects like the agriculture field, I know Mr. Richardson was trying to get me to go into agriculture, but to me at the time, I thought it was so boring, you know? Because kids don't realize too, like my dad was trying to get me to make the net and make boats. "I ain't got no time for that, dad. I'm not going to be no fisherman." [laughter] And so, so it went on. And then, after my brother graduated the first graduating class, I was—what was I, a junior? Because he was two years ahead of me. And I got my bus license, and I started driving school bus, yeah, and played football, basketball. Those were the two sports that we had to offer at the time.

MBR: Did your coaches make a big difference in your life?

WW: Oh, yes. Yeah, our coaches were our heroes, Mr. Green and Mr. Mack. We had them in very high esteem—and Mr. Richardson. You know, kids like me, the teachers, we give them nicknames. Mr. Richardson, we used to call—started calling him Topper, because he reminded me of Topper, the movie. There was a movie called Topper, so we used to call Mr. Richardson Topper. [laughter] And Mr. Green, we used to call Mr. Green "Lover Boy", because he used to be clean and sharp. Was good looking man. He was [indistinct 0:24:29] call him Bulldog? [laughter] Yeah. But we—we [indistinct 0:24:37] winning championships. And we won two state championship. I think my brother and they won a state championship. They won a state championship. And the

next class, '58, they won the state championship, and we won a lot of state championships.

MBR: Did you mother ever get to see you play?

WW: My mother came, but she couldn't stand—my mother came up there to see my brother play. And somebody tackled him, and she would run on the field. "You hit my son." [laughs] But anyway, she stopped coming to the game, because she couldn't stand the—she thought it was too rough. Yeah. Anyway, my dad, he used to come to the game. High praise and stuff like that for his boys, yeah. So, Gresham Meggett, I enrolled in the high esteem [phonetic] class. Very fond memory of school. I didn't realize the education that we were receiving was adequate. But when I went to college, I left Gresham Meggett and graduated.

I went to a small college called Vorhees. That's up in Denmark. And I was there on a scholarship, academic football scholarship, but where they could afford me. But I didn't the big scholarship, like on the big four-year scholarship, because it's pretty small. And I was in a big world championship, but the kids were much bigger, when you go to them big—Burke was considered a triple [indistinct 0:26:18] school. We was a single [indistinct 0:26:18] school. So, those kids were pretty near a lot of diversity, and they could pick from a lot of students, so the kids were pretty big. Although we used to play a team that were much larger than us, we had guts. And that's what you take to win, guts and heart. So, we had guts and heart, because almost all the team that we met were much larger than us. The kids were big, big old boys. [laughter] But anyway, yeah, we did play Burke.

MBR: Oh, you did?

WW: Yeah, but Burke coach didn't want to play us, because he said they had much more players than us. Because a [indistinct 0:26:57], that's why the population was so vast. You know, they had, like, 3,000 kids and we only had about six or 700 kids. But anyway, they [indistinct 0:27:06] school beat a—a single [indistinct 0:27:11] beat a triple [indistinct 0:27:12] school, so he wouldn't play a regular game. He would scrimmage us, but he wouldn't play us a regular game.

MBR: How did it ever—I mean you came back. This is—So, for you, Gresham Meggett, you got a good education there. It seems like you were well supported by the teachers. Oh, I didn't ask you. Who was the principal? Do you remember?

WW: At the time, Mr. Anderson [phonetic].

MBR: It was Mr. Anderson.

WW: Mr. Anderson was our principal up until I left. We used to call him Lash LaRue, because he used to walk [laughs] with a [indistinct 0:27:41] with a little rawhide hook about that long. And if he'd catch you in the hallway, "Hey! Everybody get out of Mr. Anderson's way," you know, so we used to call him Lash LaRue, because if he catch you, he isn't playing with you. And Mr. Anderson was from the time I got there to the time I left and Mr. Green and Mr. Mack and Mr. Richardson. My math teacher was Miss Banks and Miss Manacle [phonetic], and they were good. They were good. They were really nice. And then, we took home economics and family resource, something like that. But, you know, where they teach you etiquette, how to set up a table, and how to treat girls, and not go around [indistinct 0:28:33] for girls and all that. We were gentlemen, I guess. [laughs] Yeah.

MBR: Did you dress up for school?

WW: Oh, yeah. The thing was, like, we didn't have a uniform back then [indistinct 0:28:47]. But everybody, when they get there, they work hard. Like, the second [indistinct 0:28:52] was like this. We on Sol Legare [phonetic] was farmer's and fishermen. And so, we used to get fish and oysters, sell the oysters and fish and stuff like that. And then, the guys from the upper part of the island, they used to go on the golf course and caddy. So, they made pretty good money, and we made good money, because we used to work on Folly Beach too, domestic work, cleaning yards, and stuff like that. So, you buy all those good old shoes on sale and buy those shirts, so we can good look good for the girls. And the girls go buy their little homemade dress that their mom used to make for them. [laughs] And so, yeah. It was a thing that you go to school looking good, and you want to look good for the girls, for them. Yeah, so...

MBR: So, there was a social life?

WW: Oh, yeah. You'd dance after the football game.

MBR: Did you have dances and...

WW: Yeah, we had dances in our gym. We didn't [indistinct 0:29:48] gym, so all our functions mostly was in our cafeteria auditorium. They convert the auditorium into a—I Mean the kitchen into an auditorium. We'd have our dances. We'd have a dance after all the football games. And the football players, big-time football players like me, because they get all the girls. [laughter]

MBR: It had its advantages. [laughs]

WW: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean and then when they came up with the maroon and gold sweaters with the big M. And then, if you get a little letter, you get your letter, if you're a start player. And you get your little emblem, if you're—your little—if you've been there more than one year or something like that. And so, when you go in the gym with your sweater on—I mean, when you go in dance with your sweater on, and walk around the gym, walk around the dance floor with your sweater on, profiling for the ladies and stuff like that—you don't have to worry about that. [laughter] Yes, it was a good dance. The same with prom. We had junior, senior prom. I went to the prom and it was the teachers with the chaperones at the dance and some parents. And, you know, boys will be boys trying to get the girls up and dance, you know.

MBR: Hm-hmm [affirmative]. That would go with the [indistinct 0:31:24]. So, you—do you remember your parents being involved with PTA or, like—

WW: Oh, yeah.

MBR: ...as part of the education?

WW: The PTA, let me tell this to you. When we went to school, the PTA wasn't existent, but the kids never got in trouble. And they would come to me later, and then they get a progress report. And the first thing with your progress report, the first thing that your parents want to do is see what kind of grades you're making. And they was heavy [indistinct 0:31:58]. They was heavy involved. "Why you got this? Why you got that? How come you got a D" or whatever. At the time I was in school, D was like failing. Of course, D's not failing now, you understand? F was failing. D is passing, but, you know, you could go on. But anyway, my parents went to school a few times and talked to Mr. Anderson and stuff like that. And they always give him a good report. They loved my brother Harry, because he never got in trouble. And but parents had to come to school, because sometimes the kids—but the discipline was so good.

So, they had PTA, but the PTA was not all that well attended, because of the people had to work so hard. [Indistinct 0:32:56] had to really work. But if you got sent home, you try not to get sent home again. I never got sent home. [laughs] I never got sent home, and neither did my brother or any of my sisters. Because you didn't want to get sent home by one of them teachers or get a—there wasn't no such thing as [indistinct 0:33:16], because the teacher would come to you house. They would come to your house.

MBR: They would come to your house.

WW: And you don't—You didn't want a teacher to come to your house and stuff when you was bad, because you would get the switch right there. And I think—you know, I'm retired. You don't know this, but I retired as a teacher. And I see that—special ed teacher. I see that what is missing in the school now is the discipline and parents not attending. Even if they attend PTA—and some parents, the kids still act up, you know, because—But all kids not bad, it's just there's a few bad apples that mess things up for others.

MBR: Right. Well, I—coming back, going to W. Gresham Meggett, and going to an all black school as opposed you went to an integrated elementary school that was more the norm for you, did—when you came back down, did that seem weird to you. I mean how—you go from white schools, black schools, and—

WW: Yeah, it seemed weird to me, because I was wondering why the white school—when I left PS 68 and came down here, and not to see any white kids—this is where the white kids go to school at the [indistinct 0:34:50] high school. Why? And they say, "Because white and blacks don't go to school together." And when I go to Folly Beach, my mom, she was a domestic worker. She couldn't—she had to take the little white kids and stuff like that. And my mom would take them walking on the beach, but she was not allowed to go into the water.

And that's why places like Mosquito Beach popped up. Mosquito Beach is not truly a beach. It's just that it was a place that blacks had place to get [indistinct 0:35:29]. And it was near—it was an inlet water cycle. Unless you would go up here on the other side of Myrtle Beach, they called it North Myrtle Beach, they had a place called Lannick [phonetic] Beach, you could be on the real ocean. So, long as it wasn't me coming from—because I used to go to—I went to Coney Island in New York City, and everything was all mixed up there.

And I said, "Why is it like that?" It's because the whites don't want to mix with the blacks. And there was no such thing as—I guess you did sneak around. You dated, but you would never know about it, because that was, like, hush hush. Because, you know, there was a lot of—you wonder why some blacks were light skinned and some were dark skinned. And then, it was, like, a disgrace to see a real light skinned child in the black community.

And you know that they, the parents must have fooled around with either a white guy or a white man. But there were not too—most white women, you never see no white woman too much with no black guy. But it was just the opposite [indistinct 0:36:48]. But anyway, yeah, I went there. And then, we wanted to play at James Island High School and football, W. Gresham Meggett. But they said, "No, we're not going to play. It wouldn't mix." They wouldn't play, but they kept us apart. James Island wasn't beating nobody.

MBR: I was going to ask you that.

WW: We were beating everybody. Yeah.

MBR: Did anybody—did your mom prepare you and say, “Okay, now, this is going to be an all black school?” I mean, come back [indistinct 0:37:15] from New York.

WW: No, no, no. It wasn’t—It was understood. Like, we would see there was white students guys driving their school bus. We would wave at each other, and they would go with the white kids and it was a black bus and we would go. We would wave at the bus drivers, because, you know, they were young guys like us. And we know we got our license. You had to go to special school to get your bus license and all that stuff. And we was always curious. I don’t know how the white kids felt about integration. I think they felt like they were more—because [indistinct 0:37:50] on Folly Beach, it was all the white kids that has the good jobs like serving the ice cream. They’re doing this and that.

And most black people, guys like me had to go to Folly Beach, I’m cutting yards, slinging yard, and [indistinct 0:38:08]. And I’d be there working and they’d be having fun and going on the beach and stuff like that. So, we always worked in the sense of responsibility. If I think about it, at age 16, I was driving a school bus and so was my brother. And nowadays you can’t even put a 16 year old behind the wheel now. So, that’s the kind of discipline and fortitude that I think the integration kind of thrust on the black person. You had a separate responsibility. And your parents were accountable. You were accountable, accept responsibility.

And they really said then, “You’ve got to get your education. You’ve got to finish school. You’re not going to quit in this house here. If you do quit, move on. You’re not staying here.” And I think most all the parents stressed that in the community. Because most all the kids that—most all my classmates, some of them dropped out now. Because back then, if a girl got pregnant, she had to drop out. It was no such thing as she staying in school and walking around pregnant. And then, she was more or less kind of like a disgrace from the community. But it turned out to be, you treated back in my day, if you got pregnant.

And the girls, they had a hard time, because, you know, it’s just that I realized as I got older that girls got the same emotion that guys got. But we didn’t look at that. And the girls, they prosecute the girls. She could have sex just one time and she’s called “She’s no good,” because she got pregnant. And that was not the case, you know. But we—you know, you didn’t know that, you know. And the community kind of prosecuted her. She had to drop out of church. And she birthed that child. And then,

most of the time—but [indistinct 0:40:18] if there’s—with my generation is that when the girl had the baby, the baby would stay with the grandmother—

MBR: Grandmother.

WW: ...grandparents, then she would, in turn, tell nobody nothing about it. She would go to Burke. She would go to Burke and finish. A lot of W. Gresham Meggett kids went to Burke to finish, and some just dropped out and went and got a job. And a lot of the guys, they took up brick mason. You see all these cinder blocks, anything with these cinder blocks. Most all the black guys used to lay the cinder block, do the welding. We [indistinct 0:40:56], stuff like that.

MBR: So, if you good get to Burke and something happened that interrupted your education, whatever, Burke was always a possibility.

WW: Yeah, Burke was an alternative, because Burke had the veterans there, because—

MBR: What do you mean? The veterans?

WW: Yeah. After the Korean war—

MBR: Oh, oh.

WW: ...they would send the veterans there to do the—come be at the technical school there. And a lot of the veterans went and took the brick mason, the auto mechanic, because they didn’t have the—in the [indistinct 0:41:26], they didn’t have no other technical school unless you went up to there. They had a school called Area Trade up in Denmark, where you do brick mason and stuff like that. And going to college [indistinct 0:41:39] did offer some of the technical school. But you also had to be at a college to get that training, so they sent most of the veteran after the Korean war over in ’53 or whatever. A lot of the vets got a lot of the girls pregnant, the veterans. All the guys [indistinct 0:41:56] money. Yeah, but—no, you know, the girls want guys, who had the money. And the older girls like older guys, you know. You going to be [indistinct 0:42:09]. I’m not saying you, but—

MBR: No. No. [laughs] No, I understand. And it’s trying to figure out who you are and what you’re doing at that time.

WW: Even me, when I was at school, the girls in my class didn’t really like me. The sophomore—

MBR: Younger.

WW: Yes. The sophomore and the juniors, they liked me. But them girls, who was seniors—

MBR: They're looking beyond.

WW: Either a guy is in the military and college, you know. So, that's the way it used to be, you know. But Gresham Meggett, I've been trying to think as I got older. And then, you can [indistinct 0:42:49] as you get older that why—not understanding why, but what caused [indistinct 0:43:20] to be. And it was that not such much that—one thing my parents never did, they did tell me to hate no white person. But they—especially with an all black community and an all black school, we were in a different space. And I never got the time—I'll share with this you real quick—that I was—we used to go on the creek in the mud. And, oh, we caught boats of crabs. See, when the tide go out, you can go in the stream and look for crabs, clam, or all that kind of stuff.

We used to go get the crabs, we'd get the soft shell crabs and the crab that's almost a soft shell crab and the crabs that almost [indistinct 0:43:55]. And we could get a five gallon bucket and take it to the—there was a lot of shops on Folly—not a lot, but there was a few shops, where they would sell crabs and all that stuff. So, we'd take it to the white guy. Mr. Bowen [phonetic] was one of them that [indistinct 0:44:16] Mr. Bowen buy them. And we would take it there, and they would tell you, for the green crab that's almost a soft shell crab, they would give you one cent. And for the other crab that were almost a soft shell, very close to soft shell crab, three cents. And then, soft shell crab, they'd give you five cents. So [indistinct 0:44:39] that low. And you get your little money.

And then, we had to walk back on Folly Road. And whenever we were walking back on Folly Road, we had to walk from [indistinct 0:44:53] and then come across in them islands over there. And then, we'd sell our little product and make our 50 cents or a dollar. We would walk down Folly Road with our little soda and that. And those guys would come down there and they would throw bottles and cans. They would throw bottles and cans at you.

MBR: While you were walking.

WW: Yeah. And they'd have a little thing, we used to call them sticky bombs. Them little bottles that kept them little sharp stones in them. They would throw all them at you. It was terrible. So we always said, "Why those guys—" Then, when you'd see them coming, you'd have to hide. They had a lot of—at the time, they had a lot of palm trees on the side of the road there going to Folly Beach. And some of them, you had to step behind the trees, so you don't get hit. And so, we said, "Why are these people—why are they cruel?" And, you know, you heard the word, "Nigger. Nigger, nigger." So—or even about that, there still wasn't not hatred toward—there still wasn't

no hatred to the opposite race, but just that you try and think of where all of it was coming from, you know.

And it was not until I went in the military—I'm retired Air Force. I went in the Air Force—I couldn't finish Voorhees College. My parents didn't have the money, so I went and joined the service. And my brother, he went on and finished college. He went to Voorhees like me, then he went to Delaware State and got a degree in math. And he came back here with a math degree and started teaching math. So, he was teaching over at these schools over here. He worked at—they had a school called Frampton, Frampton Elementary School. He was teaching them math there. Then he went to Harbor View to [indistinct 0:46:57]. Then he went to Fort Johnson after he—

MBR: So, he actually taught—

WW: ...at a lot of schools. Yeah. He was 30-something years, something like that.

MBR: Oh, my goodness.

WW: Yeah. And—

MBR: You went into the Air Force.

WW Huh?

MBR: You went into the Air Force.

WW: I went in the Air Force, and I got my degree from Southern Illinois University in the Air Force in Special Ed. So, what happened was when I started meeting people—and since you have to be, my first roommate was a white guy from Georgia. Boy, we used to talk up and down. [laughter] And we'd be up and down talking about our experience, all that. And I wonder what happened to that guy. I can't think of his name right now, but he and I was roommates, and we used to talk about the different—He was from Brunswick, Georgia. Have you ever heard of that, Brunswick?

MBR: Yeah.

WW: Yeah. So, we used to talk and we became good friends. And, by the way, in technical school—I went to Amarillo, Texas for technical school, and I met a little white guy name Reynolds [phonetic]. And Reynolds, he was an Alabaman. And boy, he and I became the best of friends. And Reynolds, when we graduated from technical school, Amarillo, Texas, we were taking the ground bus back, and I'll never forget this. We was all right until we got in Mississippi.

And when we got in Mississippi, Reynolds—we went in—we got off the Greyhound bus and we were in this little delicat-, I mean this little luncheonette or whatever it was, luncheon. And I had my little uniform, my little one mosquito. We used to call them mosquito weight. And I remember, we went in there, and we stood up to the bar to order some food. And the lady said, looked at me and looked at Reynolds, she said, "Well, you can stay in here, but he can't eat here. He got to go to the back, round back." And so, he said, "Why?" She said, "I'm not getting into that. You got to go around the back. You know the rules."

That was what the lady said to me. I had my uniform on, now ready to die for my country. So Reynold's said, "He's not going to the back!" "Reynolds!" And Reynolds got really mad. I said, "Reynolds, come on, man." So, I got Reynolds out of there, because we was just like that. And we went to the delicatessen across the street to get some lunch meat and bread, then went back on the bus. He [indistinct 0:49:37]. Reynolds got himself turned red. He was madder than hell. He was—Reynolds was a hell raiser now. He did not like that. Yeah. Even when we was in Amarillo, you know, believe it or not, when we was in Amarillo, Texas. Me and Reynolds went downtown. We was going to go rent a room, you know, after we went out, we wanted to iron our outfits with the technical—I mean—[indistinct 0:50:09] the rest of our—

MBR: You mean a training course?

WW: Training course. The physical part. Whenever we got through that, we went to technical school. And we would go downtown for R&R. And when we got downtown, we was going to get a room and share the room and just two. And then, when we went in the hotel, the hotel said, "No. No blacks in here." And we had our little khaki uniform on. And we had the blue stuff on. So, Reynolds said, "Why?" "We don't allow blacks in here." So, the black one across the track. You have to go across the train track. And I found it that in almost every city I went to, all the black was across the train track, you know. And [indistinct 0:50:54] of all of that, the black [indistinct 0:51:00], you know. So, not until '62. I went in '62, '64-65, that's when they passed the civil rights bill, and those things [indistinct 0:51:12]. And you could see things.

And I had a guy, went up in—stationed in Louisiana, Shreveport, Louisiana. I had five stripes then. I was technical sergeant. And this white guy was working under me. Well, the colonel put him under me. And he had four stripes. He was a staff sergeant. He told me, he said, "I can't work for you, man. You a black guy. I ain't working for you." He was from Louisiana too. He got sent right back. He went to technical school and all that. Came right back. He said, "I can't work with you?" "Why?" "Because you black and I ain't working with no black man." So, I [indistinct 0:51:59] to the colonel. And I said, "Colonel, get him out of my section." Because I had one new black guy working with white, white and black. I said, "Get him out. He's a racist." So, the colonel got rid of him.

I don't know what happened to Springer. Sergeant Springer. Springer was his name. Staff Sargent Springer. I was Technical Sergeant Wilder. I outrank him, but he said he couldn't work for me. He was lazy too. [Indistinct 0:52:27]. He was in charge of a section, and he'd say, "All you do is put your foot up on the desk and point fingers. You do this. You do that." I come in there, they're throwing boxes around [indistinct 0:52:35] didn't move. All right, you know. I'm here to work to see the job get done. But I had a couple ugly experiences like that, but that's just one. Those two like Reynolds and Springer, they kind of stick out.

MBR: Do you think, like, going to do a segregated school, did that prepare you for what was ahead or was that a negative? Would you—

WW: I think—

MBR: ...looking back.

WW: By going to a segregated school, it prepared me to fit the challenge that were out there. Because I met one when I was in the dormitory in—My first assignment in the military was at Davis-Monthan in Tucson, Arizona. And I was stationed in Tucson, Arizona for four years. And there was a little [indistinct 0:53:21] there. He was white as a—he was just as white as a sheet. And he was always kind of timid. And went over and asked him, "What's wrong with you?" He said, "Look. I'll tell you the truth. I ain't never been around black people. I only see black people in T.V." [laughter] And it—and I forgot to say—But anyway, this guy never been around black people. But he said, "You know what? You're not like what they say you all are." That's what he told us. You know, he was kind of a little slender little fellow and a small frame. But hey, I think he was kind of afraid of black guys. But he said, "I never been around black people before." Because he was from Montana and he was just as white as a sheet. [laughs] But anyway—

MBR: That's why school was a good thing.

WW: ...he said, "But it's not like—" He said he—I don't know what he meant, but he said, "It's not like what I heard about you blacks and what I see on t.v.," stuff like that. People are just going to love this [indistinct 0:54:20]. But I think my experience with me being—going to an all black school and shared experience with going to the integrated school in New York—because in New York, I didn't tell you, but I had a little white guy then. Delbert. Delbert was my little white buddy. And me and him used to go to each other's houses and things like that. And I—in New York, I didn't see no color like that.

But coming down here, and if you're here, you have to know your place. Because I know one time I was on Folly Beach, a little young fellow. And I wanted to go between some trees to do my business and just, you know. And my cousin almost knocked my head off. "Come back here. You can't do that. You want to go to jail? You can't pee—you can't urinate on here." All right, then. You can't do that on Folly Beach. I didn't know nothing about that, because in New York, I could do that. But it was, you know, not that I'm [indistinct 0:55:27].

So, I think my experience with between the New York City and my education that I got at Gresham Meggett and not knowing that when I got in and started taking these courses that my education, I had to do twice the work to get caught up, when I started taking these classes, college classes, that [indistinct 0:56:00] whereas I went to school pretty—fairly easily. Not really easy, but I made the requirements and do a little extra, you get good grades. But when you get in college and things like that, [laughs] you got to buckle down and hit them books, you know? Yes. So, and so, my experience is dealing with the white folk, I get along pretty easily with them.

Now, I don't know whether it was because my—I won't say my experience, but going to an all black school and the white kids were right there, I didn't—when I got in the military, I just didn't notice no difference, because even technical school, I lack in one point from graduating first in my class, you know. And everybody said, "You can't talk." I had that—I got this colored [indistinct 0:57:03] accent. "You can't even talk, but you make good grades." [laughs] They couldn't understand that, because my diction and everything was not all that good then at the time, because I came from—over here, we speak Gullah, and it's kind of unique.

And when I was in college, I got teased so bad. At Voorhees College, the kids teased me and Voorhees was all [indistinct 0:57:29] not knowing nothing. But being I was in the Charleston area and these guys were from up North, their diction—pronunciation was a little different, you know. And certain words, like street, I couldn't say street. I'd say "street." [laughs] And I had to learn how to pronounce street the proper way and all that kind of stuff. But they teased me so bad. They called me Geechee. And I didn't know what—

MBR: Geechee.

WW: ...and I thought that was negative. Then one day, my rhetoric teacher, English rhetoric teacher told us, said "Let me give you a little history. You all laugh and tease Mr. Wilder. But let me tell you, his heritage is rich. He's got that accent that's from the Caribbean and West African culture, and you all are not aware of it—of his dialect and all that." And she laid out on them. She tell them, "You all should not be teasing. You're all teasing him, calling him Geechee. [Indistinct 0:58:32] like you all want to kid him, but he has a rich history and none of your all parents came from that, because none of

your all parents came in to the Port of Charleston and the Port of Beaufort [phonetic].” I’d say at the time, I didn’t know all that history about the Gullah Geechee.

MBR: Did you—when you were at Meggett, did you speak Gullah Geechee during the classroom?

WW: I speak the same way I speak now.

MBR: Hmm?

WW: I speak the same way I’m speaking now. Yeah.

MBR: Did the teachers speak to you in standard English or...?

WW: Oh, yes. The teachers, they spoke proper English, everything like that. It’s just that most of the people from this area—Because when I was in New York in Harlem, I got me some I was from the West Indies. They say, “You from the West Indies.” I said, “No, I’m from Charleston.” But you find that most of the folks in the sea islands, Charleston Island, James Island, Port [Indistinct 0:59:30] got that same dialect, you know. And so, but I speak the same way I was—I’m speaking now to you in high school.

MBR: Well, let’s—you’ve told me a lot and I know we want to talk about the association as well. But can you tell me if you look back, what you got out of Gresham, what you think made that a unique school. What do you think?

WW: Well, I think that what made Gresham Meggett so unique is that since there was a grass roots school just put in the heart of the black community. And at one time, like I told you, being that we had community schools for the island, it brought everybody together on the island. Because we could see the different folks from the different part of the section of the island, like Cutbridge [phonetic] down the island, Sol Legare, Grimbull [phonetic], and they got a thousand little names like Big Field [phonetic]—

MBR: Did you ever hear of Cherry Beam [phonetic]?

WW: Cherry Beam?

MBR: Am I close? I might be saying it wrong. Cherry—

WW: Cherry, ain’t it Cherry Hill?

MBR: I don’t know. We just heard someone say something about it yesterday. We were wondering about it.

WW: Yeah, and Honey Hill.

MBR: Where's Honey Hill?

WW: And then, you had Barn Hill [phonetic]. And you had, like I said, Cutbridge down—you cut cross [indistinct 1:01:23]. And all these people, yeah. There's a bridge right by County Park or this little creek that's separate, Ellis Creek [phonetic]. It's a little down [indistinct 1:01:39] when you go across that bridge. That's Crosscut.

MBR: Crosscut. Okay. Thank you.

WW: Yeah.

MBR: I know, because I'm trying to learn the geography and it's—Thank you very much.

WW: Yeah, that's on Riverland Drive and you got the county park right here. So, you have all these different area and all of us came together. We're the same dialect, because if they leave here and go somewhere, [indistinct 1:01:57], they say, "Where you from, man? Are you from the Bahamas or the Virgin Islands or something like that?" And I got teased quite a bit when I was in New York City, you know. And I went to speech therapy class to learn to do that street. Then I said street. [laughs] Yeah. So, the uniqueness of Gresham Meggett is that we were a family.

MBR: It brought people down—

WW: And the parents and the teachers treated you like you were one of their, like you were one of their children. And the other unique thing with Gresham Meggett is that the parents stood by the teachers 100 percent. You couldn't act up in school and think you were going to get away with it. If you act up in school at the time, the teacher was allowed to carry this little switch and you had to hold your and out and you'd get you a little whooping or you'd get a little chocolate. Or if Mr. Anderson catch you in the hallway, you're going to—because you had no business in the hallway or ain't no business cutting class. So, the uniqueness about Gresham Meggett is at the time the school was so brand new. There was no trees or nothing like that, so you couldn't go with the class and go hide somewhere or cut class, because everybody looking for you.

So, that's the uniqueness with the togetherness. Everybody was one. And everybody looking to see, if you were getting away with something. And you weren't going to get away with nothing, because the teachers looking, the kids looking, the students looking. And so, and the teachers had patience and they always tell you that you are somebody. You are somebody. And that uniqueness with the teachers and the

parents and the discipline, it led to a learning atmosphere. I [indistinct 1:03:54] that we—that the students there, but I see that almost all on the kids when they graduated from Gresham Meggett that they done really good and became [indistinct 01:04:05].

And ain't none of them [indistinct 1:04:08] the death of education, but they learned value and they learned to respect the elderly, which to me today, everybody don't respect the elderly too well. They thought we had to. So, that's one of the things. And we were not taught to be prejudiced. We hear the older people talk about stay in your lane. And that means don't get out your lane, because when I was—

MBR: Do you want to get that? Are they going to keep your phone? Is that your phone?

WW: Yeah, that's my phone, but don't worry about that. I'll get that. The—

MBR: Stay in your lane.

WW: Stay in your lane, because I didn't share this with you, but when we were little kids, you know, Saturday, my dad would tell me, "Son, do not look a white lady in her eyes. When you see a white lady coming towards you, throw your head down. And maybe you might have to step off the sidewalk." He didn't say that for the man, though. He said that for the white lady. And I didn't understand. And then I told—when I told him the thing with Emmett Till how you had that in Mississippi and he got out of his lane, and they killed him, you know.

And I don't know how many that—my experience, because they had a tree on the island called the hangman tree on [indistinct 1:05:36] Island called the hangman tree, because a lot of guys got hanged on that tree. So, every day they was telling you something about staying in your lane is don't get out of your lane or [indistinct 1:05:51]. You see some, a lot of blacks, and they won't look at you. They can't look at you. They throw their eye—their head down, because they were taught that.

And I used to wonder why certain things was happening. But they never taught us to hate, to hate the white person. We were taught to love, you know. Love you brother. Love your sister. And they all said that, you know, if you get you a cut, if you get cut and they get cut, you got the same red blood. So, I think that a lot of the black folks that graduated from W. Gresham Meggett and the uniqueness of the school was we were not taught to hate. Get your education. You'll have to stay in this environment or this situation. You're going to move up out of it. Get your education, and then you will see that you all can come together and be the same, you know. Education is the key. And that's why that's what we were taught.

Now, we can get a conversation about how does a child learn prejudice? When a child is born, a child don't see color. You put a black child and a white child together, they

don't—they'll play together. It's just when they get there to a certain age, they notice some color, but a different color. But we're all just been coming from that—come from that "I'm better than you or you're better than me." And that's where that—that's the thing that I learned that we were not taught prejudice. We want to know how the white kids, because they have so much hatred toward the black race or think they're better.

And so, I had in my time, you know, I shared already, but I enrolled in the military, but I retired as a Senior Master Sergeant Superintendent, so I had a lot of people under me. I went on got my degree. And I think I was the only two black ones when I graduated and got my degree. But, you know, there's a lot of stuff come out in our classes about race, you know, professor would shift and the class, we was talking about race and stuff like that, you know.

So, and then, when I got out of the military, I went into politics running on James Island. I was a councilman for the town of James Island. I left the James Island PSD commissioner. I was elected to that position for the James Island Public Service District. So, I was a two-term—three-term council member for the town of James Island and a one-year term for the commissioner. In a lot of cases, I was the only black, many cases. So, doesn't matter. You got to excel and push yourself, you know. But Gresham Meggett was a unique experience for me and it taught me value, how to get along with people, and this church here, I raised up in the church. I'm a elder in the church, you know, so—inactive.

MBR: It's a very important—

WW: Inactive elder. I've been inactive. I carry the title, Elder, but I'm not active Elder, because I don't go to the sessions. The session is active Elder. But you know, I guess. I'm retired. [laughter]

MBR: Well, you've done a great job explaining to me so much about Meggett and when you were there. Now, you graduated in what year?

WW: 1959.

MBR: '59. All right. So, ten years later, it closes.

WW: It closed.

MBR: What was the impact of the closure on the community?

WW: From my understanding, in '69, I was in Germany. I was at Rhein-Main, Germany in Frankfurt. And I just heard about it, but I'm—I heard about the closure and the

merger of them going over to James Island High School. And I said, "Well, why they closed Gresham Meggett and have to merge with James Island High?" They said, "Because James Island High School had more technology advancement than Gresham Meggett," you know. I did take chemistry at Gresham Meggett and I did take biology. And we—I didn't dissect a frog until I got to college. And I understand the kids were dissecting frogs, when they was in high school.

So, naturally, you was a little behind, because although I took biology and learned all that scientific stuff, we were not technically advanced. So, they closed down Gresham Meggett and move the black kids over there, because that school was more advanced. Now, from my understanding, I heard that they got a lot of name calling was done. And I heard that they wanted to—I heard this, but I was not here, but I heard that all our football trophies or all the trophies that we won, because were [indistinct 1:12:06] for football, we are [indistinct 1:12:12] and home economics, agriculture and stuff like that, that they didn't want our trophies in their trophy case, so they wanted to throw out trophies out. I heard the kids wanted to fight over that stuff. I heard that, now. That was somebody told me. So in 1969—I came home in '84. I retired in '86 from the Air Force.

MBR: Then you start a political career. When do you get interest in W. Gresham—Well, first of all, your outfit's great [laughs] with your hat and your T-shirt. When did you get involved with developing an association?

WW: Well, the class of 1959 started a dance. And when they started the dance, they used to meet at the old armory in downtown Charleston on the Citadel campus. And the dance was so successful, you'd see people that you ain't seen for years congregate at the dance. And so, a few years later, maybe four or five years, later, we said, "Why is it that we have the dance and we see all the people in all the different classes—12 classes that graduated and we see all those people together, why don't we try and bring them together?" And then, so the president of the class of 1969, she said, "Well, let's do that, Cubby." I was '59 and she was '69. So, we got together trying to meet at Gresham W. Meggett and start an alumni. And finally, we started it. After two or three tries, we finally got it going. And we started the W. Gresham Meggett Alumni Association—

MBR: Oh, that's fantastic.

WW: ...and got a charter for it.

MBR: And got a charter.

WW: Yeah, a charter is an essential in the armory, Secretary of State, yeah. So, our first alumni president was the class of—the first president was Herman Wallace [phonetic].

He was the president. He was the first class that graduated in '57. Yeah, he was the class. He became our alumni president. And after that was Abe Brown [phonetic] and then Arthur Wild [phonetic], and now I'm the chairman.

MBR: I thought you were the chair, right.

WW: Now I'm the chairman.

MBR: So, what are your responsibilities as chairman? Do you have to—

WW: Well, we have a fundraiser we was donating back to charity. As a matter of fact, this building right over here is the senior citizens that our church—this building used to be a old men's for our pastor. So, we can break that into the senior citizen building. So, we donate products, stuff over to the senior citizen building, and we give back a scholarship. We haven't done that in a while, because the office is getting kind of old right now.

MBR: Oh, well, that's how that works.

WW: Yeah. But we used to give scholarships to the—we'd give about five or six scholarships to the churches and they administer, because most churches got a scholarship fund, and we give a donation to the scholarship fund.

MBR: Is there still a dance or do you do it every other year?

WW: Yeah, we had a dance last year, but we had a dance before that. We have the dance. That was the big fundraiser. And then, we had a picnic at W. Gresham on the campus, and then Sunday we have a tea fundraiser. So, we haven't had a tea in a while, but four or five years ago. But that brings all the classes together, all 12 classes, supposedly. There's a couple classes that don't participate, but—

MBR: Most.

WW: Yeah, but most do.

MBR: That kind of reflects what you were saying before that it unified everybody.

WW: Exactly. But this year, I think the class of '69, the students now are about 65, either 64 or 65, something like that. And everybody—all of the older people got ailments, yeah. So, me, I'm 78 and I feel great. [laughter] I'm getting around better than some of the younger crowd, but I feel good. I feel really good, you know. And I go to, I have my physical, everything looked good, so...

MBR: Oh, that's good for you. Well, this has been a honor talking to you today. It really has been. I've learned a lot. And if we can, I guess there's two things. If we have follow up questions, is it okay to either text or call you?

WW: Oh, sure. I'm always available.

MBR: All right. Because, you know, you have this really good grasp of the geography of the schools and the area, and we'd like to maybe tap in and—

WW: Yeah, I got—If you want to, I've got pictures of the old community school.

MBR: Oh, yeah.

WW: I got the old Sol Legare School.

MBR: Oh, yeah.

WW: And that old Sol Legare School, that's the second one. Now, they had the first school. That was in the water. It'd be high tide, you'd be floating around on Soligree. And then, the second school is still standing, so if you want a picture of that, you can get it. But I got a picture of that school. I got a picture of Three Tree [phonetic]. I got a picture of old Cutbridge School.

MBR: Oh, yes.

WW: If the Charleston County Park is right there, and our school should be right there. And then, the Society Corner School was right here. I got pictures of all of them.

MBR: So, Society Corner was right—

WW: Yeah, right down the street from here.

MBR: ...down the street from here?

WW: Yeah. [Indistinct 1:17:46]

MBR: Huh?

WW: [Indistinct 1:17:48] the exact location.

MBR: Well, we're hoping you'll take us on a tour.

MBR: We'll be good. Well, is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have asked you that you'd like to end with? Is there something I should have or something I didn't touch on?

WW: Well, if I can think of—I wanted to really emphasize about the students driving the school bus and at 16. I was driving the school bus at 16, and I started my junior year. Bus load of kids. And I sit there and think about it, a 16 year old now with a school bus. And I think that was unique. And Mr. Mack, I talked to him just the other day. He was my football coach.

MBR: Is he still alive?

WW: Yeah, he was superintendent of—yeah, he's still alive.

MBR: Is he the son that's a politician? No.

WW: Yeah, he's the son. He's David Mack.

MBR: David Mack.

WW: David Mack is his son, his third.

MBR: Okay, that—they came to the very first when we did a public meeting. So, Mr. Mack's elderly, isn't he? Yes.


WW: Yeah. Yeah, he—I was—I came to the first meeting and I talked to Mr. Mack. And I called him just the other day. But he is still and me being—I was the quarterback of that team, when we won the championship. And Mr. Mack used to personally take me with him. We'd ride to the game together. He said, "Cubby, here's what I want you to do now. Now, you stay calm and you make sure that you execute." And he instilled that discipline in me and I cherish it to this day. Good man.

MBR: Well, that's a great way of ending. Again, thank you very much. We really appreciate you doing this.


Appendix B:

Graduating Class Photos

19




Perceil Roper




David I. Mack Jr.
-Class Advisor-




Ervin Finckney




Carolyn Singleton




Betty Richardson




Joe Ann Backman




Evelyn Green




Isaac Gethers




Lauretta Stewart




Ora Lee Rivers



Deloyne Browne




Agnes E. Greene




Walter Mack




Margie Cronwell




Millie Wilder




Thomas Mohoney




Anna Mae Walker



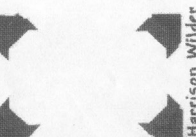
Margaret Gilliard




Fred Chisolm




Harriet Brown




Harrison Wilder




Dorothy Cunningham




Leroy F. Anderson
-Principal-



William Prioleau

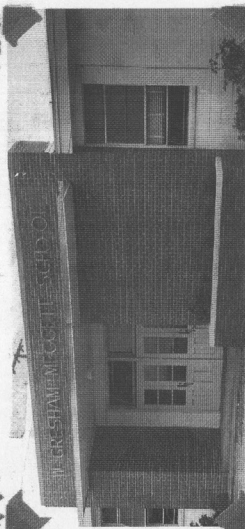


Inez V. Robinson



James Roper

57



W. GRESHAM MEGGETT HIGH SCHOOL

CLASS OF
W. GRESHAM MEGGETT SCHOOL
James Island, South Carolina
Charleston, South Carolina

W. Gresham Meggett School, Graduating Class of 1957



Christopher Wilder

Mable Y. Richardson



Thomasina Gourlina

Benjamin Smith



Edward Greene

Alethia Richardson



LOUISE Gilliard

Thomas Backman



Kenneth Martin

Mary Watson



Johnetta Washington

Woodrow Singleton



G. B. BENNETT
Class Advisor

W. Gresham Meggett School
CHARLESTON, S. CAR.
GRADUATING CLASS OF 1958



Leroy ANDERSON
PRINCIPAL



Inell McDaniel



Azalee Watson



Alberttha Gaillard



Theresa Middleton



Doris Brown



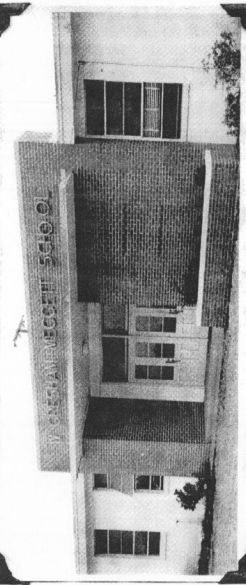
Rosalee Washington



W. Gresham Meggett School

GRADUATING CLASS OF

Charleston, S. C.





EMILY WILDER



JOSEPH GRANT



MARY CHAMPAGNE



ABRAHAM RICHARDSON



BARBARA DAVIS



REMUS SMALLS



CARLEEN MOORE



EUGENE WATKINS



MARY ROPER



JEFFERSON WILDER



DELORES GRANT

W. Gresham Meggett H.S.

GRADUATING CLASS OF

James Ward-Charleston, S.C.



MRS. G. B. MANIGAULT
ADVISOR

19



MRS. A. P. TOWERS
ADVISOR

60



JOE N. BROWN



WILBER BROWN
VICE - PRESIDENT



NATHRYN RICHARDSON
PRESIDENT



RUTH GOSS



JOAN GLADDEN
SECRETARY



JERRY WATSON
TREASURER



IDA SIMMONS



JOSEPHINE ROPER



JOSEPHINE JONES



EDWARD PALMER



RAYMOND ROPER



SAMUEL RICHARDSON



JOE J. SCOTT



JAMMETTA SEABROOK



JESSE RICHARDSON



ALBERT PROLEAN



SUSAN MCMILLAN



REMUS SMITH



GEORGE BRIGHT



IRENE BOLDUS



JAMES RICHARDSON



HERBERT WHITE



PERRY WILDER



SYLVIA GREER



ROBERT BRISBANE



MARTHA WASHINGTON



ELIAS SMALLS



ELIZABETH GREENE



NATHANIEL ROPER


































GAVENDOLYN RICHARDSON



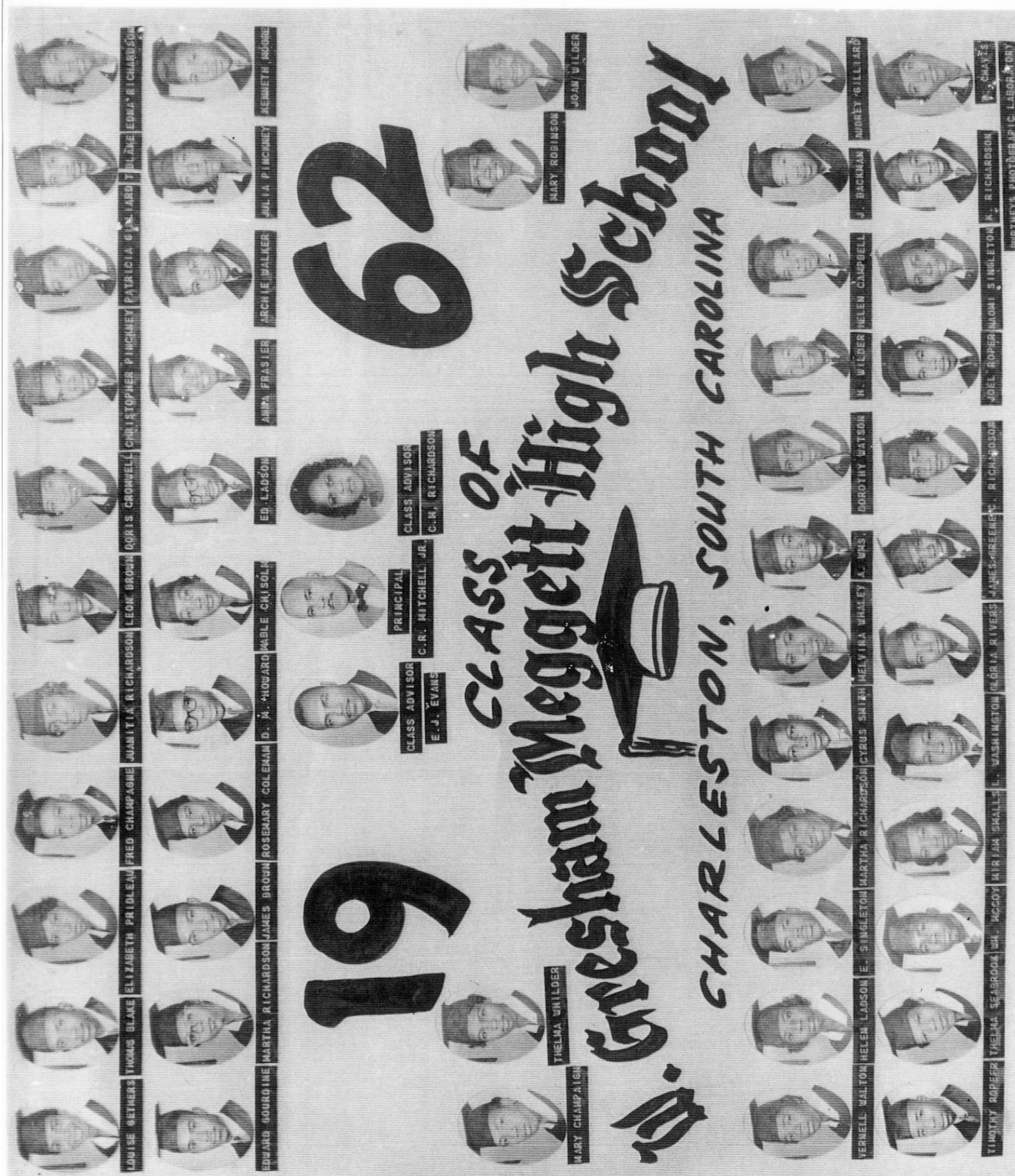
IDA SIMMONS

W. Gresham Meggett School, Graduating Class of 1960

**W. Gresham Meggett
High School
Class of 1961**

 ARTHUR BACKMAN	 LARRY BACKMAN	 EVELINA BRIGHT	 BETTY BROWN	 HAROLD BROWN	 WILLIAM BROWN	 EVELINA CHAMPAGNE	 ARTHUR CHILSON	 JOANN CROMWELL	 OMELIA CROMWELL
 VIRGIL CROMWELL	 LILLIAN DELESTON	 MR. CALVIN R. GREEN Advisor	 MRS. MARION W. MANIGAULT Advisor	 BENJAMIN DRAYTON	 CATHERINE FLEMING	 DOROTHY FRASIER	 THELMA GARLAND	 BETTY GLADDEN	 EVELYN FRAZIER
 HENRY FRASIER	 CAROLYN GRANT	 CLAY HAMPTON	 ROSE MARIE LADSON	 JAMES MIDDLETON	 DOUGLAS PARKS	 CATHERINE PINCKNEY	 DAVID RICHARDSON	 LUCILLE SMALL	 JOHN SIMMONS
 ELDRRED RICHARDSON	 LORES RICHARDSON	 ELLEN RICHARDSON	 ISABELLE RICHARDSON	 LEONARD RICHARDSON	 PATRICIA RICHARDSON	 WALTER RICHARDSON	 RUSSELL ROPER	 SUSIE WILDER	 PARIS WILLIAMS
 IVORY TUCKER	 VIRGINIA WALLACE	 BIRDIE WALKER	 DOROTHY	 GARET WATSON	 AMINTA WILDER	 SUSIE WILDER	 PARIS WILLIAMS	 LUCILLE SMALL	 JOHN SIMMONS

W. Gresham Meggett School, Graduating Class of 1961

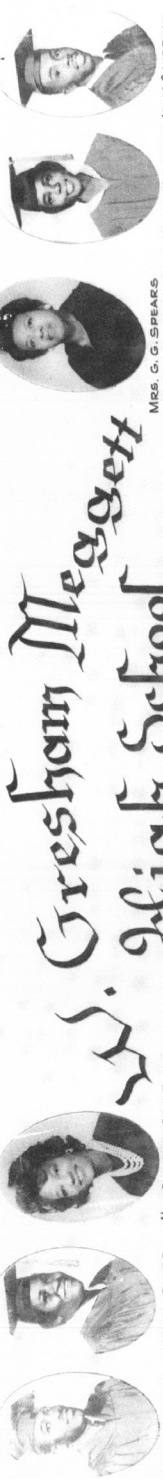


W. Gresham Meggett School, Graduating Class of 1962

W. Gresham Meggett School, Graduating Class of 1963



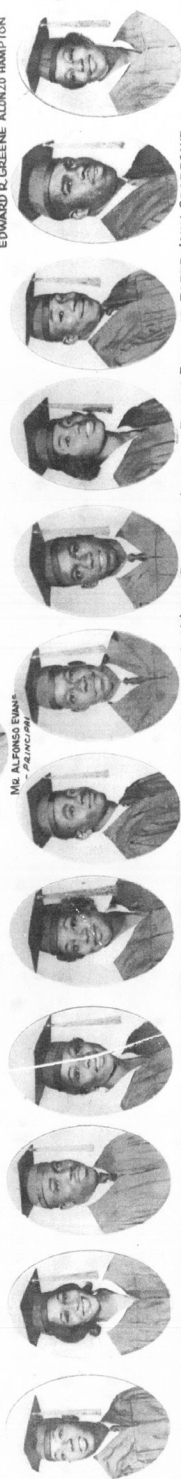
ERNESTINE ARCHER SAMUEL R. BRIGHT ANNIE L. BROWN CURTIS BROWN LOTA A. BROWN NELLIE BROWN HERCULES BUTLER ALBERTA GILLIARD GEORGE GILLIARD SENELLA A. GILLIARD WILBURN GILLIARD ETHEL M. GLADEN



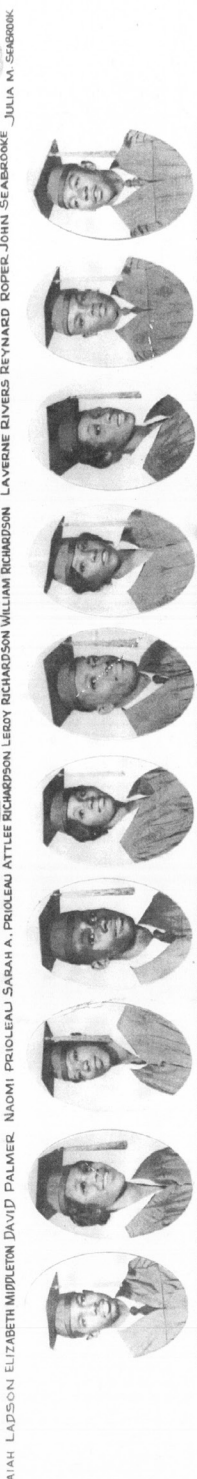
Mrs. G. P. MANIGALT - 420/502 - MRS. G. G. SPEARS - 420/502 - CAROLYN GOURDINE ISAAC GOURDINE



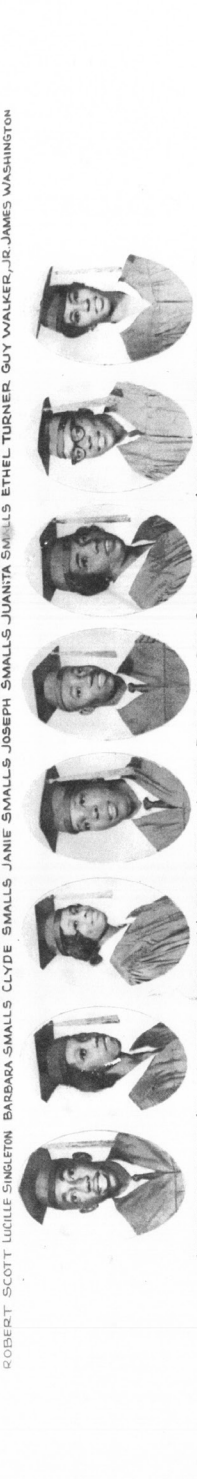
SAIAH LADSON ELIZABETH MIDDLETON DAVID PALMER NAOMI PRIOLEAU SARAH A. PRIOLEAU ATTLEE RICHARDSON LEROY RICHARDSON WILLIAM RICHARDSON LAYERNE RIVERS REYNARD ROPER JOHN SEABROOKE JULIA M. SHABROOK



EDWARD GRANT OLIVER E. GRANT MR. ALFONSO EVANS - 420/502 - EDWARD R. GREENE ALONZO HAMPTON



ROBERT SCOTT LUCILLE SINGLETON BARBARA SMALLS CLYDE SMALLS JANIE SMALLS JOSEPH SMALLS JUANITA SMALLS ETHEL TURNER GUY WALKER JR. JAMES WASHINGTON



ARCHIBALD WHALEY IDA WHITE ANNETTE WILDER AVERY WILDER BOBBY J. WILDER SUZIE WILDER JAMES WILLIAMS JULIA YOUNG

W. Gresham Meggett High School

1964

1965

W. Gresham Meggett

HIGH SCHOOL

CHARLESTON, S. C.

 HARRY URIE	 C. BROWN	 W. E. RICHARDSON	 A. SANDERS	 P. GLADDEN	 J. MICKELL	 I. RICHARDSON	 D. L. SEABROOK	 R. M. SIMMONS	 BETTY JENKINS	 R. SINGLETON	 P. RILEY	 F. BACKMAN	 E. JACKSON	 J. GREEN
<p>CLASS ADVISOR WALTER L. SALTERS</p>				<p>CLASS ADVISOR BLANCHE D. FOSTER</p>				<p>CLASS ADVISOR RICHARD KIRKLAND</p>						
 H. SINGLETON JR.	 M. FERGUSON	 E. ROBINSON JR.	 C. RICHARDSON	 H. L. GILLING	 A. G. WILDER	 L. M. WATSON	 A. WILDER	 C. J. BACKMAN	 J. PRITCHNEY	 ROGER BACKMAN	 V. RICHARDSON	 J. MICKELL III	 M. SMALLS	 R. FOREST
<p>CLASS ADVISOR WALTER L. SALTERS</p>				<p>CLASS ADVISOR BLANCHE D. FOSTER</p>				<p>CLASS ADVISOR RICHARD KIRKLAND</p>						
 B. A. WALE	 J. SANDERS	 E. WHITE	 R. BACKMAN	 L. ROPER	 E. W. ROBINSON	 J. E. WILSON	 E. D. GILLING	 C. MIDDLETON JR.	 M. RICHARDSON	 W. A. SMALLS	 R. FOREST	 E. P. PRITCHNEY	 E. D. GILLING	 R. FOREST

Gresham Meggett W. High School Class of 1966

W. Gresham Meggett School, Graduating Class of 1966



