UNCG in the 1960s Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Yow

INTERVIEWER: Clyde Ward

DATE: October 25, 2006

CW: This is Clyde Ward interviewing Robert Yow on October 14, 2006. Can I call you Bob or Robert?

RY: Bob's fine.

CW: Thanks, Bob. I appreciate you talking with me today. I wanted to talk to you about your life and career here in Greensboro. Can you start out by telling me a little bit about your personal history, maybe where you came from or start with your parents?

BY: Okay. My mother was born in Georgia and grew up in the tri-state area in—where Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia all connect. And they kept moving and they moved to Eden, North Carolina in 1920. And for a job at the mill up there and while they were moving there a truck turned over and killed her father so it was her mother and her—I think four girls and her older brother that lived there. They lived there for two years. Then they came—moved to Greensboro to work the Cone Mills for a better job.

And my father was born in the Chatham-Randolph County area; grew up down there, Family—most of them moved to Gibsonville in the early 1900's. His mother died when he was about three, two or three years old. So both of them had lost their parent, when one of their parents when they were young. And he moved to Greensboro and played on the semi-pro baseball team here, which was like minor leagues back in the '20s and '30s. And that's where he met my mother and they were married and I am the last of eight children. First one born, I think, in 1927 and I was the last one in 1951.

CW: How did they meet?

BY: I have no idea.

CW: [chuckle]

BY: They worked, they both worked at Cone Mills. They lived in the vicinity and I assume that's where they met.

CW: I am not surprised. So did he play ball while he?

BY: Yes.

CW: Worked as well.

BY: Yeah, well back in the old days that is what they did. They worked at a place and they played ball for them.

CW: Oh, so he played for Cone Mills?

BY: It was called the Cleave Cone Mills.

CW: Oh.

BY: He played for a mill team but he worked at Cone. And so, that was his two jobs; was to play baseball and he worked the mill and he was an electrician.

CW: Wow.

BY: They got married, she was, I think she was fourteen when she got married and he was ninety-nine—to—he—I guess he was twenty-seven. He was thirteen years older than my momma.

CW: Wow.

BY: When I was born in 1951, he was right at fifty-two years old and she was thirty-nine. I was born in Greensboro at St. Leo's Hospital on Summit Avenue, which doesn't exist anymore, it's a Sonic and a Wendy's [restaurants] and something else on that block now. It was a Catholic Hospital there that I was born in and lived in the Proximity neighborhood, grew up—and lived in the same house until I got married in 1976. Went to the mill schools. First of the ninth grade I was in Proximity [Middle School]. I went to Page High School and graduated and then went on to UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. Growing up, we had a lot of our—the things we did, were around the mill neighborhood. It was—it was a mill village. When you talk about a mill village, they have everything; we had our own YMCA on Fairview [Avenue]. We had our own drug store right beside it where you got your medicines and beside it when I was real young, but they tore it down by the time I got to be very old, there was a company store where you did all your shopping. You bought your clothes, and—

CW: Owned by the mill?

BY: Owned by the mill.

CW: Wow.

BY: All they're on Fairview Avenue there, so that is where all of the shopping was. At Christmas time they would come around and give all the families a turkey or a ham for Christmas. We lived in mill housing on Summit Avenue. They built houses for their employees and then the only effect it really had on me is that when I got into high school

when I needed a job, they hired the mill kids to work. The first summer when I was sixteen I worked in the dye house, just cleaning. Then I—for about three or four years and even through college, I was a painter. We painted all the weave room and all this, we painted all the asphalt stuff on top of the roof white to reflect the sun and stuff like that. It was just one of those experiences where all the things were there and we did not travel. If we wanted to go uptown—my daddy died on my, was buried on my sixth birthday so we did not have a car. My mother never had a license, so anywhere we [wanted to go we] either walked uptown or we caught the city bus uptown. So it was not, you know, a lot of our growing up was spent in the neighborhood.

CW: So everybody in that community was, they worked in the same place, so you all had a lot in common?

BY: They had six plants down there. They had White Oak, Proximity, Revolution, Print Works. And then there was one down in Pleasant Garden, I cannot remember the name, Olympic Plant, I think. There were five plants that most of them worked at. They lived in that vicinity, so they could walk to work if they wanted to.

CW: So you had, like, a shared experience with everybody in the community. I mean, you all did the same things growing up the same—

BY: You went to school together. You shopped together. And the only thing we really left for, it is we left it to go to church. There were some mill churches, but there was not a Mormon Church.

CW: Were they?

BY: A Memorial Baptist church up there on Fourth Avenue and a Presby—a Methodist church and then on Sixteenth Street there was a Baptist church and a Buffalo Presbyterian. Those were the four churches that were in the mill village and so we rode out at the Colfax one when I was born and went to church out there mostly.

CW: So you were raised in the Mormon Church?

BY: My mother was a member. My father wasn't, so the four youngest ones, we were members of the Church. The four oldest ones, my daddy would not let join. I guess somewhere along the line he changed his mind, I don't know. By that time the four oldest ones were married and gone.

CW: Oh, okay. I wanted to ask you, the integration of the neighborhoods. Were they as integrated then as they are now? Or how was it working, I mean, what was the ratio of you'd say in the plants and in the community?

BY: There was no integration.

CW: None at all?

BY: It was all segregated. When I was growing up, integration happened when I was in high school and in middle school. I grew up where blacks would sit on the back of the bus. There were no blacks in our neighborhood. And the thing of it is when I was teaching school kids used to laugh when I [told them] there two water fountains; one for the whites, and one for the blacks. There were two bathrooms—four bathrooms, one for the white males, one for the white female—

CW: They did not believe you.

BY: And they were written above the door: white male or black male. You were taught—I was not taught they were the enemy, I just thought that we do not associate. We were different types of people. It was interesting, as the first time I remember having a whole lot of contact was when I was in middle school, I guess in ’65, or ’64, this was right after all the [1960 Sit-ins that happened in Greensboro where the A&T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College] students walked up there, and I remember just out of curiosity we all walked to town one day to watch the marches, the Sit-ins or whatever.

CW: This would have made you in what, about the eighth or ninth grade?

BY: No, that was back in the early ’60s, I was ten or eleven years old. So, I was probably in the fourth/fifth grade, something like that. But I really didn’t understand what was going on, I just—and my thing was: why can they not sit down and eat in that restaurant?

And my mother would say “They just do not do that.”

And I would say “Well, why not?”

And she would say “Well, we just do not do that.” And in the end, nobody had an answer as to why you did not do it. It was just, because I would tell kids when I was teaching school that my mother was brought up that that was just the way it was, and I would say I do not know who started it, that is just the way things were and it was accepted. And people did not want to change, I always thought it was amazing that Greensboro was one of the few places that was willing to change. Because all I remember about the Sit-ins was they would go downtown and if they didn’t do what the police said, the police would arrest them and they took them down off Dexter Avenue to where there is an old retirement home now, but that used to be a county detention center. And they would take them down there, and I do not know how long they kept them there or if they would just let them go the next day. But I remember they used to put them in handcuffs and take them away. They said it was from not listening to the police. But it was very peaceful, and I never saw the stuff like I saw on TV in Alabama where they brought in the fire hoses and dogs or beat them with clubs. It was just very peaceful. They would march down there and sit down and refused to leave; they were arrested and taken, as I was told, down to that center.

CW: That’s interesting. I think, do you think that the impact was still there, even though it wasn’t maybe as violent as what happened?

BY: You know, the only thing I remember from that time is, a lot of people thinking is “Well, why do they want to change?” You know, and being a white person, I had no idea why

they wanted to change, because I just figured they had what I had. They just didn't live where I did. You know, I was ten or eleven years old, I didn't realize they didn't have equal opportunities and, you know, that they were looked at as inferior human beings. I just it was like, we live here, they live there. The Japanese live there; we all have our little communities. Because I had grown up in a mill community, and I just figured we all had our little place. You know, and I am one of those too, when I was growing up my first four oldest brothers—the first three oldest brothers and sisters weren't allowed to go to Greensboro Senior High School because they were mill kids. They were in the city schools as long as they stayed in the city schools that the mill had built in the Caesar Cone or Proximity. And when they got to high school, they had to the county school system and go to Rankin, because they felt they would degrade the school. And the same thing was true of the kids of Pomona; they were forced to go a county school. They wouldn't let them in Greensboro Senior High because they were looked at as poor white trash and my brother quit then.

CW: So there were class divisions even in the white community.

BY: The white community. So, my fourth brother went to and graduated from Greensboro Senior High probably in '55 or '56. [He] was deferred and he was an all-state football player, so he was the first one to go to Greensboro Senior out of the eight kids and I had two sisters that went there, and the two youngest ones, we went to Page [High School] when it opened up in 1959. The classes was not just white black, they were segregated by whites, too. My brother said the only reason he was accepted was because he was a star athlete. One of my sisters right after him was a good girls basketball player, but girls didn't play then like they play now. They may play five of six games a year. They played basketball and that was about it. There was class distinctions there also.

CW: That is great. So, growing up in Greensboro, and going to high school here, tell me a little about the atmosphere. Because you were in high school right in the beginning of the desegregation.

BY: When I started high school in '66 at Page and I think '65 and '66 was when segregation ended, so they were allowed to go to the high schools. Dudley was still there, so Dudley was still a black high school when I was in high school because I played them in athletics. But they were incorporated in, I guess they had always been in the city school system, but they always felt like they didn't have as good of facilities, and they may not have, because at my age I wouldn't have known then. History has been taught that they were given less financing than the white schools. We started playing them in our athletics when I was at Page.

I remember we had in the ninth grade at Proximity Middle School, I think it was the first time I went to school with blacks. And there were a few that would come, most of them stayed at Dudley, and Lincoln and Gillespie were the two black middle schools back then. They were junior highs back then because they had the ninth grade. There was a couple that went to ninth grade with me and in high school there was some with us, a couple of football players, but the majority of them still stayed at Dudley. So, there was integration, but it wasn't forced integration. And you still had community schools. So, I

guess the blacks that went to high schools with me was the ones that lived in the communities that were assigned to that school. There wasn't a problem between the students with the blacks being in the schools, but there was always that conception around the house, you know you read in the paper, "We don't want our kids going to school with the black kids, because they are going to make them worse people." And that sort of stuff.

CW: But at school, there was no problem.

BY: The kids didn't have any problem. We though they liked the same things we liked, they did the same things we did, and that's the first time I thought to myself, "Why can't them people eat with us? They eat the same stuff. They act the same way we do." So, it was an educational experience to see the different people that lived in the same city I had all my life, and all of a sudden young ones are starting to understand there was not a whole lot of differences, except we're really not supposed to like those people. It was educational that way. I imagine at Page we graduated a class of about six hundred and eighteen in 1969, and I'm just guessing but I bet there were not any more than sixty or seventy blacks in my class. Less than ten percent, I bet. It may have only been five percent. Forced integration didn't happen until probably the mid- '70s when the orders came down and they started bussing kids everywhere to try to get them equal.

CW: Were you aware even in high school in the late '60s, how aware were you, I'm sure you were, of some of the hot button political issues of the time. Did you guys talk about Vietnam or any of the civil rights things of that time? How were you all—How'd you guys deal with that?

BY: In school I really don't remember a whole lot about civil rights. I remember in '64/'65 was when the civil rights bill that [President Lyndon B.] Johnson signed [in 1964], but I think most of that I learned after I got older. As I was growing up I remember it was signed, and I remember the forced integration at the University of Alabama and Mississippi with James Meredith, and that was just like when President [John F.] Kennedy died [in 1963], it was on TV. And they showed you as the police whether they were state or federal marched these black students into these schools to be enrolled and there sat the governor, and the local police at the doorway going to block it. I mean, it was national news, as in "is this really going to happen, is this bill going to work? Is it not going to work?" I remember seeing that, so, yeah, it was a hot issue.

The big topic was "Are blacks going to get equal rights or not." In the Mormon Church we are taught that all people are created equal, and like I said earlier, I never understood why they weren't. I was amazed when they said you can't come to school here because you are not the right color. It was just sort of like, when my brothers they couldn't go to Greensboro Senior High because they didn't live in the right neighborhood. I don't understand how you do that, but evidently it was accepted practice in the United States. It had been for years, evidently.

The Vietnam War, it was one of those things in high school where it was going and the only thing you worried about was were you going to college so you could get out of the war? And the interesting thing is that as soon as I got in college is when they started the lottery. So, no longer were you safe because even if you were in college, they put the three

hundred sixty-five days of the year in the thing and they pulled them out and the ones—if they pulled out August the first, and everyone born on August first were drafted. August twenty-second was my birthday and I think it was number two hundred ninety-five, they said it probably wouldn't get to the two hundreds in the draft, so I felt pretty safe I wasn't going have to go fight.

I had two friends I played football with at Page that were killed at Vietnam right after high school. One was nineteen and the other was twenty years old and killed in Vietnam. They played football with me, they didn't go to college, so they went straight to Vietnam, and were dead within a year after they had been over there. So it was an issue that we knew we were fighting a war and we told every day that it was the right thing to do, we were fighting Communism, because we had grown up with the Cuban missile crisis when I was young. Communism was the evil, it was the Satan of the world, and with Korea and that issue, and now here we are with Vietnam with the same thing that if we didn't stop it in Vietnam we were probably going to fall to Communism. The things I remember is that you would go on TV every night and they would have the body count for us and them. You would have a death count for the Vietnamese and a death count for the Americans. It was like a football game—it was like they were keeping score; how many died, how many were wounded in this war. I thought that was—I guess that was the first time I had ever seen a war covered on TV.

Anyway, there's no difference, here we are fighting in Iraq, and we don't keep up with their body count, but we keep up with ours. And we seem to sort of celebrate it when we hit two thousand, twenty five hundred, like it's a big deal. But we go to war, and people are going to die. I don't think you need to be reminded all the time. I think back in that time, when you didn't have cable TV and everybody watched the news from six to seven, and you knew the body count and you knew what was going on. As you got into college, that's when all the protests started with the college students, because they didn't want to go to war, because all of a sudden, you had the lottery, and the college deferments weren't around anymore. That's when you got into the killings up at, what was it, at Kent State or somewhere, I think it was where they killed all the students who were protesting. You had the peaceful marches around UNCG, where they protested, but there was not a whole lot there. It was just a common thing that you needed to protest trying to get the war to end.

CW: So you were aware, going into your first semester there at UNCG, you were aware of those protests going on?

BY: UNCG's a pretty liberal school. [chuckle] And I'm not ultra conservative, but I'm not ultra liberal, but if you're in the middle, I probably leaning more to the conservative side than the liberal side. I was out of place a little bit, but I had a lot of friends that went to school with me, that went from Page, we just stayed here because it was cheaper. We stayed home and drove over there. I was the last of eight kids, I didn't have a lot of money, and if I stayed home I could go to school for two hundred dollars a semester. My four years of college cost me right at seventeen hundred dollars for tuition. I think my senior year my tuition went up to two hundred and forty dollars. That year I spent four hundred eighty instead of four hundred.

CW: It's a little more now.

BY: Yeah, I bet it is. While we were there, I didn't join in the protests, because I had too many friends that were fighting in Vietnam, I wasn't going to go protest against something I felt my friends were fighting for. Whether it was right or wrong, I didn't know. I wasn't that politically motivated back in that day and time. The only thing I remember about it is that it got us out of exams at UNCG one semester. I think it was my sophomore year, after the Kent State thing [Editor's note: the shootings at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio occurred on May 4, 1970], and somehow they sent us all home, and they cancelled exams. So we didn't have to take exams that semester. I imagine it was in the fall of '70, but I can't remember right off. I can't remember when Kent State was. But right after that happened they started to send a lot of the college students home, UNCG dismissed us for exams that year. It may have been in the spring, but it was in my sophomore year, I think.

CW: What made you decide, after you graduated, to want to teach?

BY: When I graduated with a degree, a BS [bachelor of science] in mathematical education, and with a concentration in computers. And I basically had two options. One was to work as a computer programmer. Computers back in that day and time were the size of a room. We used to use the little cards, I don't even know what they were called, but we had to type the codes in there. I interviewed with a job with Chemical Abstracts up at Ohio State, and I interviewed with some teaching things. But my family had always been very athletically oriented, and I always thought I'd like to coach, and the only way you can coach was to go into teaching.

CW: So you got drawn to athletics, as well?

BY: Well, that's the reason I went into teaching, was athletics. It wasn't to teach. I had a good history counselor at UNCG, he made me take his history class for two semesters, and when it was over, he says, "You could be a history major" he says, "but what was your other option?" It was math, and he said, "What do you think?"

I said, "I'm tired of writing papers," so I switched over to math, which was a good choice for me. Because I had always enjoyed math as much as I did history.

CW: And that's what you went into after college?

BY: I went and interviewed, and in that day you used to interview with the principal. You applied at the county offices, but the principals did their own hiring, in Guilford County. So, you went through the whole summer and I didn't have a job, I was painting again out at Cone Mills that summer, waiting on a job to come open. I had flown up to Ohio State to interview with Chemical Abstracts, but they had interviewed my professor who had taught me, but, he had gone up with two other students from UNCG, and they hired him for the job up there. So I didn't get that job, and I don't know that I would have moved to start with. Sometime at the end of July, I got an interview with the school at Northeast, where I had student taught. The principal told me he had two more interviews and he would get back to me. He called me that night and told me he hired a lady who had her master's degree, but I would have a job tomorrow. The next day I got a call from the Northwest principal who was his brother-in-law, and he says, "I need to talk to you," so I went out to interview with him, and started working the next day as a football coach—assistant

football coach and math teacher.

CW: So do you feel like, looking back, feel like you wouldn't have wanted to move so you're lucky you didn't get those jobs in Ohio? Were you happy to stay?

BY: No, I was happy to stay. All my family was here. The only person who ever left here much was my sister who married into the Air Force and traveled. But, the other six brothers and sisters all lived here. I had one brother who moved to Durham for two years, and came back. So, you know, I've been around family, I've been around people I knew all my life. I ran into a school that was an excellent school to teach at. I felt good about what I do. Looking back, I'm glad I did what I did.

CW: I think it is remarkable, you lived your entire life here and had your whole career in the same; basically, it was the same school, right?

BY: Yeah, same school, stayed thirty years.

CW: Thirty years. How did you see from the mid-'70s until when you retired in 2002? How did you see the children change over the years? Was there any change?

BY: The changes are subtle, there's not a lot different, it's just the temptations have become more. When I started teaching in '73, Northwest was a school of 550 farm kids. It was all farmland; there wasn't much money out there. A lot of the kids didn't come to school until after Labor Day because they grew tobacco, and they were all excused absences. Because they were on a farm and they were given farm excuses for being absent. The first year I taught math, I taught the lower level math, there was three math teachers at my school.

CW: Were these communities around here then? Where did you all live?

BY: I was—I still lived in a mill village, when I first started, still lived at home with my mother. She was retired from the mill, and I just stayed there instead of going out and paying rent, so I just stayed there until I got married, three years after I started working. I coached football, assistant football coach, coached and taught business math to about five classes to thirty girls every period.

CW: Then go teach football.

BY: Then they started doing away with the business classes incorporating and everything and I saw a lot of Algebra One and Geometry out of the last twenty years, I taught Algebra Two all day long. And as it went on, Northwest went from five hundred fifty, to when I left in 2002 there was right at nineteen hundred kids, still incorporated from Summerfield, Oakridge, and Stokesdale and Colfax, but Summerfield had become a suburb of Greensboro, basically. So, just massive growth, now it's around twenty-four hundred kids, three years after I—four years after I retired. It's gone from five hundred fifty kids to right at twenty four hundred fifty kids, in a matter of thirty-some years.

CW: So that's probably the biggest change, is the growth?

BY: The growth in that community, in that neighborhood out there is big. The kids still have the same temptations. Drugs were coming into play when I was going to high school back in the '60s. But unless you were into drugs, you didn't really know who did them. I never knew. I had speculations about who did drugs, and I knew where you could get them if you wanted them, but I never went there. Drugs got to be more in the open. When I was growing up very few kids had cars, now just about every kid has a car. Very few kids worked during the school year; they worked in the summers. Now kids work all the time. So they have things, in my day and time we went to school, we either stayed after school and played ball or we came home and you did work around the house or do something like that, but now, kids have cars to entice them, to where they want to go. They have jobs. Some of them work at night until nine, ten or eleven o'clock. The culture changed in that way in the things we do for enjoyment, has taken some of the fun out of their lives, I think.

CW: Definitely seem to be more busy, these days. Education wise, what do think are the main differences? Are they more politically aware these days as to what's going on?

BY: High school kids? I think they're just like me. They listen to it, and they have a lot of their parents' views. I don't think they get politically motivated a whole lot in high school.

CW: Not until college.

BY: I think in college, where they start to get out on their own and they start realizing they better have some views. But in high school, I ran into very few, but there are some. But they are the exception. Very few of the high school kids have political views. None of them like war, because, just like when I was going to high school, they don't want to go fight it. Especially when they didn't realize what they were fighting for. And that was the thing about the Vietnam War; nobody really knew what we was fighting for. We were told we were just fighting to defeat Communism. That was the catch-all for everything back in sixties: we were trying to get rid of Communism.

CW: Did you guys ever, were you ever skeptical of that? Or was it just something you just believed in?

BY: I just accepted it. The Cuban missile crisis [in October 1962] was so predominant over that forty-eight hours that, it was on TV every minute, we were all sitting wondering is the world getting ready to end as we know it. At that time I was only eleven years old, so it was very traumatic to be sitting there and, my mother says, "Well, you know, I guess if they shoot missiles it could be over with." I don't see the high school kids, the ones I taught, any more politically motivated than I was.

CW: When did you meet your wife?

BY: We had known each other growing up. She was a member of the Church of a different ward, so we were in the same stake, knew each other. We never dated, or did anything like

that. We went to a lot of church activities together. When she graduated from BYU [Brigham Young University] she moved back home and was teaching, we were in the young adult program here in the stake and we just started dating. We were twenty-four, I guess. Got married about ten months later.

CW: So, about ’74?

BY: We married in ’75—June of ’75. We met and started going out, I think, in September of ’74.

CW: Did you all live in this area, or did you stay close to your family?

BY: You mean after we got married?

CW: Yes.

BY: Yeah, we stayed here. We lived in an apartment down on Elm Street, in Mayberry down there for a year, then we bought a house in [unclear] Oaks, right outside mill village. We lived there for about twenty years, then we lived in an apartment while we built this house.

CW: So how long have you been here?

BY: Right at nine years, I think.

CW: Going back to coaching in high school and your teaching. I don’t want to read into it too much, but tell me about how athletics kind of served as an outlet for the kids and how you could watch them twenty-five years after, well, the whole time you were coaching, to see how sports brings kids together and it crosses racial boundaries and class boundaries. They are not often aware of that, but, I guess the question is, I want to know more about how you felt about coaching these, teaching these kids that were together, doing the same things, training and working and playing together.

BY: I think athletics, I think they face the same problems they do in anything. I think all the things you just brought up are in society, they face in athletics. The key is, it’s a smaller group, with a common goal that you’re trying to do, instead of the whole society trying to integrate, you’re trying to integrate twelve or fourteen people on a basketball team or maybe sixty people on a football team, so you’re doing it on a much smaller level. But in order for that to happen, the same thing that happens there has got to happen in society. Because you have to learn, there’s not a whole lot of differences in people. You have to learn to accept them for what they are.

Coaching is one of those interesting things, in that in my high school career, I had some coaches who I liked, I had some I didn’t like. I had some who motivated by fear, and I had some who motivated by different things. One that stood out to me was, a man who I’m a friend with now, but who I hated as a person. He motivated by fear. I was one of those, I was ready to quit football on the tenth day, I just went home and told my mother, “I do not want to play.” I said, “I’m tired of being called names every day.”

And her statement to me was, "On August 1st, you gave up that right. So he has the right to call you anything he wants until the last day of practice. Next year in August, if you don't want to be called them names, don't go back out there. If you go out there next August, then you're giving him the right to do that again for three more months, since you know his personality."

And I just realized I did not want kids to have to do that, because there had to be a better way, because I had some other coaches who did it differently. And I just liked being around athletics, and had been around it all my life, and so I just took it up. The thing in coaching is that the kids have to know you are interested in them. And in the long run, what I found out that I didn't realize at the time was that coaching made my teaching job so much easier. Because for my last twenty years I was coaching three varsity sports, and I was running the prom. And so, I was with kids all the time. And I was working with them in sports along with the dance for the prom and stuff. And what I found out is that I didn't have any problems in disciplining my classrooms.

CW: Because they were so familiar with you?

BY: Because they knew that I wasn't there to get a paycheck, like a lot of teachers who walk in at eight o'clock and walk out at three-thirty, and the kids never see them other than in the classroom. The kids saw me at ball games, they saw me at the prom, they saw me helping organize the prom. I bet in thirty years I sent maybe twenty kids to the principal's office. I handled my own discipline. And it was easy because when they had plays, I would go to the plays, when they kids were in the plays and would ask you to come. Whereas other teachers would just shrug them off and say, "I don't have time for that." And if the kids knew that if you did not have time for that. You know what they would do? They would misbehave in their classes. And they never quite caught on to the fact that the reason these kids don't care about me is because I don't really care about them. That was the part about athletics that made my job so much easier.

The enjoyment in coaching is some of that stuff, what I found out in the long run is that athletic teams that are good, or programs that are good, are consistent. And what I mean by that is that they don't have change all the time. In Northwest, girls basketball was started by a man who, when they merged three smaller schools into a big one, he came from one of them, and he was there. Between him and me there was two women that coached a year apiece. And I took over for twenty-five years. So the thing was, in the first thirty-four years there was basically two coaches, and there was two in between us for two years. So, two of us coached thirty-two years there, so the kids had a consistent program. The middle school coach, she ran the same program I did. So the kids for seven years, read the same plays, ran the same defenses, and so they didn't have change. They worked on the same plays every day for seven years. They knew what was going on. They didn't have to adjust to new coaches, new styles.

When I went over to the middle school to watch them play, they knew who I was. And she would tell them who I was, and when I would walk in you would see them pointing. So they knew who they were going to play for so when they would come over to the ninth grade at the high school, their parents would give them to me for a week, and they would go to basketball camp. I always thought that was strange that people who had never met me would send their kids off with me for a week without ever meeting me. Some of

them would come up the day we went to camp and introduce their self, but some of them would just send their kid over there with somebody, so here I am with these kids they have never met me and I never met them, but they have seen me around. So they knew who I was, and they knew I was not going to do anything, so evidently, I had a reputation in the community that I could be trusted. And I think a lot has to be said for consistency. Teen schools that tend to have bad situations are ones where they have a new coach every year, different coach every year. The kids never get used to anybody, and they feel like no one really cares about them. Until they understand you really care about them, you're not going to do a lot in athletics. And in think that's true in the classroom too.

CW: There is still a passion there for that, isn't there?

BY: Yeah, I still enjoy it. I went back this past year and helped. The lady who was my assistant, and I coached her in the '70s, and but the lady who was my assistant for fourteen years took over when I retired. She called me at Thanksgiving and said her assistant coach had quit, so I went back and was assistant coach for the last four months. And this year, hopefully she's got her another assistant, so I just work as the assistant AD out there. I go out there two or three nights a week and either take up money at the gates or just walked around and check the facilities while they play.

CW: That's great. Do you have any other highlights from coaching?

BY: Highlights, like what?

CW: Things that really stuck out that meant a lot.

BY: I coached a lot of kids that went on, there is a young lady who just took over the volleyball and basketball team at Smith this year, who is one of my ex-players from back in the late eighties—went on to Radford to play college. I had another player in 1981, '82, and '83 that came back to coach at Southwest and won a couple of state championships in volleyball, and went to the state finals in basketball one year, I think. I have had several of them and I've had a lot of students come back and teach. At Northwest I think there [are] six teachers that I taught back in the '70s. I've got about ten of my students that teach math; Joe Hamilton is one of them.

CW: Oh, really.

BY: I have had about ten kids that I taught that went into teaching math, and I've got some more that went into teaching other things, like English and stuff. It is always interesting to see those kids come back, and I've had about three or four go into coaching, and be successful at it. Coached about, in basketball, I coached about twenty kids that got some type of a scholarship out of doing it, whether it was Division 1 or 2, or NAIA [National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics] or junior college, had a couple of all-state players. Boys soccer and girls soccer had a bunch of kids who went on to play college soccer. Coached two all-Americans in soccer. Soccer was one of those I was called on to coach that I had never seen played in my life. It was one of those things that I went out and got somebody who had

played at UNCG that was on their national championship team to help me for three years. It was successful, we started a program that had never been there at Northwest, back in '82, and it's been successful, I think we've been to the state playoffs twenty of the twenty seven years.

It was a good program, a lot of parent involvement there. There's a lot of kids that came through there that we still have memories with. We had a lot of successes, we had some bad years, but we got a lot of good years too. Some kids got a lot out of it, in the fact they went on the play further on, some of them came back and coached some. I guess the biggest complement the coaches paid was when I retired they did an article in the paper, there was a quote that a coach said, "I coached against Bob in soccer, but I watched his basketball teams, one thing was consistent when they played, they looked like his kids were having fun playing. They didn't look like they were out there having a miserable time." I thought that was a compliment because sometimes you play because your parents want you to play, and sometimes you play because you're expected to play.

CW: Like you said, you tried to coach out of more of an inspirational method rather than out of fear.

BY: I took that as probably the nicest complement I ever got out of coaching.

CW: That's great. How do you feel about UNCG now, and your experience there as far as relating to your career?

BY: Well, it gave me what I needed. I had good math teachers. I had good teachers in a lot of things there. If I had not been—if I had been away from home, I might not have been so successful, because I had people around me. Because I was, sort of, naïve about a lot of things, growing up in a mill village. I had that consistency that I went to college with about seven or eight friends from Page High School, they grew up in the mill village with me, went to school together, all sixteen years. So we had some consistency there, we could fall back on it. Even though I was sort of naïve and more conservative than the school was, I had some things I could stick to there and I could fall back on. If I had gone anywhere else I don't think I would have had that to fall back on, and may not have been, or made some of the best decisions in the world, probably.

CW: Do you think like, your religious beliefs, or what you thought you were going to go into after college, what do you think would have changed, had you gone somewhere else?

BY: I might have quit school. [both laugh] The only other school I applied to was UCLA [University of California, Los Angles] , and I just wanted to go out there because Lew Alcindor was playing basketball. But I knew I couldn't afford it, so I knew where I was going all along, and I had to stay at home, so I could afford to go to school, because I had to pay for it out of Social Security. I think I was getting about two hundred dollars a month from Social Security because of my father's death. Because you could draw it then until you turned twenty-one or got out of college.

CW: Was there anything else I didn't bring up or ask you about that you felt important was to

bring out or talk about?

BY: We talked about a lot of things.

CW: Well, Bob, I appreciate you talking to me today, and I guess that's it.

BY: All right.

[End of Interview]