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INTERVIEWEE: Robert B. Hayes
INTERVIEWER: Kathy Carter
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[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

ROBERT HAYES: Robert B. Hayes, Assistant Principal for Instruction, Page High School.

KATHY CARTER: Okay, thank you. Mr. Hayes, tell me a little bit about your family background, when were you born?

RH: A long time ago. I was born in October 1933 in Greensboro. My father was a railroad worker for Southern Railway and stayed with them until he was able to retire. And he left there and went to work for Central Motor Line. My mother was--worked in a laundry and in some later years she got to be the private laundress for the Cone family. And she stayed with them until she retired.

KC: Okay. And you have brothers and sisters?

RH: I have two older brothers and a sister.

KC: Who took care of you when you were growing up?

RH: My grandmother took care of the household when everybody else was at work or in school.

KC: Okay. And you describe that as a matriarchy of sorts.

RH: A matriarchy, indeed, because she was the ruling one. Everybody, in fact, everybody looked for her for advice and counsel.

KC: What kind of advice and counsel did she give, generally speaking?

RH: Well, having a strong religious upbringing, she believed in living by those religious teachings. She was very concerned about her individual household welfare as well as those people in the neighborhood. And [unclear] I believe she cared because she did for people even though we were considered poor. She would get up on a Sunday morning

and make homemade rolls and send out to other families in the neighborhood, so that whatever we had, many times she'd share it with other folks. So that taught a, a strong object lesson.

KC: So she practiced as well.

RH: She practiced what she preached.

KC: Great.

RH: And she expected the same in return. And we found that to be true in our neighborhood, that any adult could feel free to speak to any child if that child got out of line, and the parents would thank the one doing the correcting, which is quite a change from what we see nowadays.

KC: Where was the neighborhood you grew up?

RH: It was in east Greensboro. It's on the site where the brand new post office terminal now sits, so it's not there. You might say the post office is on my house. [laughs]

KC: Okay. And church was quite important as a center.

RH: Quite an integral part of life itself. Church was stronger than the school, even though we spent more days in school than we did in church. But we found that we were involved with many of the same people in church that we were involved with at school, so that we got the triad kind of connection--home, school, and church. And strong relationships were built and fostered, and some of them continue to thrive, believe it or not. People that we were with in those early, early years we find occasionally. And we can sit down and reminisce, and see the strength in what was attempted to be taught to us at that time.

KC: Very good. And which church did you belong to?

RH: I started out at the United Institute Baptist Church that was within walking distance of where we lived. And when I got to be twelve, then I went to my mother's what we call home church, which is Shiloh Baptist. Still walking, but nevertheless old enough to get there and back without parents having too much concern.

KC: Excellent. One of the things I've noticed in studying about the period, especially with respect to civil rights [in] twentieth century Greensboro, is that quite often churches became a focus of education or socializing attitudes of how one ought to behave in this

society, what sort of line one ought to walk, or should one be activist. What sort of advice or counsel or information, suggestions did you receive from your church, if any?

RH: Well, I think that the passive resistance movement has its roots in biblical teaching, because the Bible teaches one to turn the other cheek in the face of adversity. When people mistreat you, you know, you don't strike back, that is to turn the other cheek. And the other concept is that you can heap coals of fire upon peoples' heads by returning kindness for ugliness. And this was the kind of thing that was stressed in churches, in the sermons as well as in the homes, you know. And if there was anything to be interpreted as violence, it was supposedly purely in self-defense. Not that you go out looking for trouble, but you defend yourself and get away from it.

KC: Okay. Tell me about your educational experience in Greensboro as a young boy and young man.

RH: Well, I started out in Charles Moore Elementary School, which no longer is exist[ing] as a school. It's part of [North Carolina] A&T State University right now. And from there I went to Washington Street [Elementary School] and then to Dudley [High School] because there was no such thing as a middle school in those days. You went from eighth grade high elementary to ninth grade senior high. So from Washington Street when I finished the eighth grade, [I] went to Dudley and--for four years, from grades nine through twelve.

KC: And then to A&T?

RH: Then to A&T for an undergraduate degree. And when I finished A&T I went into the military for four years and stayed in Texas. And when I came back is when I got my first teaching job at North Carolina.

KC: Okay. I'm interested in why you wanted to become a teacher, or was that something that just sort of happened?

RH: No. It was a bug that bit me early. In fact, I guess it happened when I was a sophomore in high school, and that was the year that my sister was born. But watching her grow up, and when it was time for her to go to school, I had gotten--I had had strong teachers in high school myself. But then I saw how the Catholic sisters nurtured their children in the parochial school, which sort of solidified some ideas that I already had about teaching.

In high school I had always volunteered to assist with paperwork and the kinds of things that teachers say they are bogged down with. But I enjoyed [being in the] classroom and I was fascinated with learning. And I always tried to take more than I

needed to when I was in school. I say I was privileged. I had strong teachers who were committed and concerned to teaching, and their teaching involved caring about the children that they were responsible for.

KC: Was there any one in particular who stands out in your memory?

RH: I guess I was fortunate, because I look back on my high school and I admired all of my teachers. I was particularly amazed at my foreign language teachers, and I guess that's what sort of strengthened my idea of going into teaching. I had a lady Latin teacher who had come to us from Chicago, which seemed like a foreign land in those days. But she was so intent in her teaching. And then I had a French teacher in high school who had the same kind of verve and vigor. But my English teachers and my math teachers were very strong and they--by today's standards, students would probably say they were mean, but that is not, that is not at all the case. They were rigid in their teachings, but they were flexible enough to understand differences among individuals, and they worked with all of their students.

But one thing that all teachers that I had in high school, or in school period, through the grades, were teachers who would not think twice about saying, "If things don't get better, your parents can expect to see me," which meant that a teacher was coming to your house. And that's the last thing any child wanted, was to have a teacher showing up on his doorstep, so you tighten up your program in school. But the line of communication was forever strong because we had an unwritten kind of understanding--if the negative message came from school, the teacher was telling the truth. Don't expect an appeal at home, which makes a world of difference in dealing with kids in school.

KC: I imagine it does. To back up a minute, you said that the teachers cared about the students personally as well as academically. Tell me a little bit about the personal side of this. Was there a building of self-esteem or--?

RH: And just total school pride, because they, they saw in every kid some amount of good. And they pushed hard to get that good to be developed, all the way through school. And by the time I got to high school, I found that I was competing with friends in my circle to do better than they, which is positive intrinsic motivation, psychologists would probably call it. You get the motivation from within, because somebody has done something to tell you you are better, but you can be even better than you presently are. So you continue to strive for the next level of excellence. And when you achieve--now what we learned at home is all that you achieve belongs to you and nobody can take it away. Once you get it, it's yours. So the more you get, the better off you are as an individual.

KC: Okay. This is a segregated school system--

RH: It was.

KC: --you were educated in. Of course, that would be the case until, I guess until--

RH: Until I started teaching, actually.

KC: Actually, that's right. So you were dealing with a system in which Dudley school received different equipment and was a different facility from the white schools.

RH: And less equipment.

KC: Okay, less equipment.

RH: And inferior in many instances, yeah.

KC: Tell me a little bit about that.

RH: Then we took what we had and did the best we could with it. And that's what, that's what the teachers did. They did not complain, where we could hear at least, that "We don't have as much as anybody else, therefore we cannot teach them." We took what we had, and we got the best product possible. And I think in many instances it surprised others as well as us with the end result, because we did not let that temporary, seeming roadblock stop us from achieving.

KC: All right. Tell me a little bit about growing up in segregated society outside of the school system. Greensboro, of course, wasn't as extreme in some cases, say cities in the Deep South. There were worse places. But I'd like you to speak a little bit about that, if you could.

RH: I still remember lunch counters downtown. I remember water fountains. In fact the one that I remember better than any other was the water fountain that was in the old Kress store, which is across the street from where Schiffman's [Jewelers] is downtown on Main Street [Elm Street].

And I guess it proves that you can program people to accept. And it was an accepted thing that if you go into that store and there are two water fountains, you read the sign above before you bend to drink, knowing full well that it presents a dichotomy in the minds of thinking people. Because if you are told you are as good as anybody else, then why must we drink different waters? Okay?

So you get an internal struggle, but knowing full well that the system is structured

that way. And to fight means you really lose, because the system is going to rule against you until we reach that point when the whole of the masses begins to say, “This is not the way life ought to be.” And if you go back to the religious teachings of the total society, if we’re all teaching it from the same Bible, why are we not all getting the same message? So I think that that’s an undercurrent in the civil rights movement itself. If we are Christian brothers, then we must be brothers.

And eventually those signs did come down. And there were those who tested those signs, and who received remarks and looks that were, that would say “This is not what you should be doing.”

KC: Did anything else happen to them?

RH: No, not really.

KC: Okay. A breech of social etiquette and custom?

RH: A breech of social etiquette until the point in time when those people at the university said, “Let’s.” And then they proceed with their movement and the marches started. And I really got an other-side-of-the-coin look, because I saw some of it outside of the state of North Carolina. And when you make comparisons, you really see that location is not that significant when certain things are enforced.

In Texas, there was much the same kind of mentality concerning lunch counters, that if certain people walked in and the hue of the skin tone is not right, then you are rejected and you were told, “You cannot be served.” Without reason, just point blank, “You cannot be served.” So that the movement really had started in other places. It was being tested but, you know, somewhere has to be given credit for being first.

KC: Right, right. Tell me something about Texas. You were in the military--

RH: For four years.

KC: For four years. And you would have gone into the military then in the mid-fifties, is that right?

RH: Yes. Fifty-six, 1956.

KC: Truman had issued an order to desegregate in, I believe, ’47 or ’48, so desegregation had been--

RH: Enforced in the military--

KC: --enforced.

RH: Yes. And life was quite different, because there you did find people treated as people. And I wish that everybody in the world could go through basic training, because that is a strong kind of sensitivity training that you go through. That's exactly how you would label it. You find out what it means when they talk about the equality of man, because people said, "Why do they cut off all the hair?" They said, "That is identity." They do psychological things that have physical appearances.

If I take your hair, you lose a major segment of your identity, so that everybody in here is baldheaded. Then I have a room full of baldheaded men and ethnic identification is not the important factor. Hair is. And only when the hair begins to grow back, and the different textures of hair manifest themselves, do you start getting differences again. So as long as we have the sameness we whip them into shape. Okay? Then all of the baldheaded men are treated the same, from sunup to sundown. They're all dressed alike. Therefore you have a crew of baldheaded men in identical clothing, and the only thing that you can say is, "I have a group of skinheads dressed in fatigue."

After six weeks later, when your hair decides "I must grow," then you get textures of hair and then you can see some other differences. If you put them all outside in the hot Texas sun, a hundred and ten degrees or better, then they all get brown. [laughs] So there again, you wipe out ethnic identification. I've got some brown baldheaded men. So there, there is much logic to that psychological dealing that we call basic training. And it's only toward the tenth, eleventh, thirteenth week that you begin to even assume any semblance of individuality. You must prove that you are an individual, but you must go through the ritual.

KC: Yes. Okay. What branch of the armed services, the Army?

RH: I was in the Air Force.

KC: Air Force, okay.

RH: It's still mean. They were still mean.

KC: So I hear. I had a cousin who served.

RH: That's right. But a great learning experience. You learn to work with people not just for a little while, but for a long time. And you understand the true meaning of sharing. And we can go back to the biblical teachings of, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Indeed you are if you're going to make it through, because you find that when it's time for any kind of

inspection, that there must be cooperation within the total unit if the inspection's going to go the way it ought to.

So you see everybody down on the floor, waxing floors. You see everybody helping everybody else make a bed that is going to pass an inspection. You see everybody polishing brass so that the buttons stand out, the belts are this way, the hats are shaped. Cooperation. And you forget, you know, "Should I help this man because he's Spanish or German?" or whatever. No. The overpowering influence says we've got to stick together as a group, because when we all achieve then we all share in the end result. And it's a beautiful lesson in life.

KC: Somehow I've never heard military service described quite that way before, but it makes sense. It makes sense.

RH: I enjoyed it. I loved every minute of it. I guess I was a crazy kid after I got in there, because once out of basic training you have a permanent assignment to a base. I used to get up--I used to volunteer for Saturday morning parades because every unit had to have a group in the Saturday morning parades. And I'd always tell the major, "Are we marching this week?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "I'll be there with you." So I had to carry the, what they call the guidon, which was the banner identification for our group. So I marched behind the major in the parade. Loved it, loved it.

KC: What was the name of the air base?

RH: Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

KC: Okay. And you were there for four years?

RH: For the full four years. I was in basic there and when I finished basic, they assigned me to the other side of the base. So that was the longest military move I had. [laughs]

KC: What was your rank when you left?

RH: Airman First Class, and I was an administrative specialist. I was holding what they called a military--a chief clerk position, which means I was a chief administrative person. I was administrative assistant to the major is what it turned out to be, because I handled all of his correspondence and disseminated correspondence throughout the unit.

KC: And yet you didn't make a career of the military.

RH: I thought seriously about it, but I had, I had programmed me for teaching. I was bound

and determined I was going to teach because I knew that I could reach if I got in the classroom.

KC: So you came out of the military and you had your degree from A&T. Now, tell me about life at A&T. Back up a few years.

RH: It wasn't so different from what it had been in high school, because I was still at home. So I did not, I did not have to contend with living on a college campus. And most of my time on the campus was just for class work, except time I spent working in the music department and singing as a member of the college choir. My mother thought I was a music major but I was not. I was majoring in languages. The off time that I had I devoted to developing the musical skills.

KC: I see. And did your parents send you to college? Did you get a scholarship?

RH: I had to work my way through school.

KC: You worked your way through, yes.

RH: I had two jobs. In fact, I kept jobs all the way through college. I had a morning paper route, which meant I had to get up early in the morning and deliver papers, and get back home and get ready for early morning classes. And an afternoon paper route, which meant that after my latest daytime class I had to deliver evening papers and get back home, and go back to the college campus for choir rehearsal at seven o'clock in the evening.

KC: Okay. You have said that your teachers throughout your public school education were caring, both academically and personally, and they instilled ideas of what you get is yours forever. How does that compare with the faculty at A&T?

RH: Those that I got to know were much the same, especially the foreign language teacher that I had in college who was a strong disciplinarian, though I--that was not new, so that didn't bother me--who was a taskmaster for work, but that again didn't prove to be a problem, because we'd been trained to work hard in high school. So it was just an extension of what I had been through, so I find again that working with students in college--I was competing within the group the same we did in high school. Who can get the better grades? Who can make the dean's list next semester? So that the competition among us was a healthy competition, highly positive, with strong end results.

KC: Quite often college campuses are the seat of social change or encouragement for social

changes--four A&T students who sat at Woolworth's counter. Was there an encouragement again, a spirit of going out and working for change at A&T?

RH: To be an individual, to be the best individual that you can be. And I--it may be dependent upon in which school you find yourself enrolled. Since I was in English and foreign languages, I was, like I said, I was keyed into developing those skills. But I would say yes. Being the best that you can be, being an individual. And I'm sure that somewhere in all of that civil rights you can find some political science majors probably who test the system. And students will test systems, not just in college but in high school as well, because we have a few testers here.

KC: And you were at A&T--

RH: Healthy social change. So you change within the law, and then you read the law and study it to see if the law as written is as fair as it ought to be. We learned that the laws were not chiseled in stone. That's one thing we know, that laws can be changed and have been.

KC: And you were at A&T from when to when?

RH: From 1951 to 1955.

KC: Okay. So you were a junior then at the time that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was handed down. And how was that perceived on campus?

RH: Quite positive, a major step for education. But we would have to have years go by before we could feel the full impact or receive any full benefits from it.

KC: Exactly. "All deliberate speed" did not always mean it would happen this year or next.

RH: That's true. It does not mean walking fast.

KC: No. [laughs]

RH: "Deliberate" is the operative word.

KC: Exactly. And yet, Greensboro seemed to go through a very lengthy and, appears to me, reluctant process of desegregation, but without a lot of the disturbance such as at Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957.

RH: I think that might be, as in some other places--I call it selectivity, because I can equate what happened in Greensboro with what happened in Wilkes County. I found myself in the same situation in both places.

Wilkes County depended upon the media to spread the word, so I think we have to look at the wording that is presented and how the media interprets or prints. Wilkes County heading on the day the schools opened for integration simply said, "School Open Today." Okay?

The other thing is that when I came to Greensboro, there was not--well, I can't say not--there was about the same amount of selectivity of staff. I think the boards of education looked at particular kinds of personalities to pave the way for those who would come behind. And I think that that's critical, because really, if you put a negative personality, one that's perceived negatively, highly volatile, into an already volatile situation, it would make it worse, and you don't get the best possible results.

KC: Right.

[recorder paused]

KC: Okay, I am interested in your early teaching experiences, where you started and how you got from there into the--

RH: My first year of teaching was at Yadkin High School in Booneville, North Carolina, which is between Winston-Salem and Elkin on a back road. Rural area, simple life. The challenge in teaching in that area is that the people really have a minimum amount of exposure with what we call the outside world. They were in their world. They were content in many instances to stay there, so that if anything as volatile as civil rights were in that particular area, it would have an entirely different kind of impact. And I say that because in an area--and we use the word "outlying" with reservation--but away from a major community per se, the people there have been associating across racial lines for as long as they've been there. So that when you say they are going integrate schools, it's no big deal. They've been living together that way all their lives.

The same way in Wilkes County. There is such a mixture across racial lines for many reasons--and we won't even underscore that, but we'll say it and move on--that those people are acclimated to dealing with people of other ethnic groups. So that you say--and I think that that may be why the newspaper said that, "School Open." To them, that's exactly what happened on that day.

The incidental thing is that at each of the major grade level divisions that year, there was a minority person on staff, which was a newness. So, when the boards of education selected these people, they went in as trailblazers, paving the way, because the underlying, unwritten message is, if these people make it, then we are safe to send in

more. Okay?

KC: Right.

RH: So that when I went to Wilkes Central [High School]--and I think I, we had talked about this before--I had been hired to go to a school, and I had never been talked to. The board had picked me out of all the minority people in their teaching staff in the county, so that when I got to the superintendent with word from my principal, who said, "The superintendent wants to talk to you this evening. I think he will say something about your moving to Wilkes Central next year." And that's all I got [unclear].

And then when I get to him he said, "I need to ask you some questions." And then you go through the ritual of question and answer, and at the end of the session he said, "Well, I want you to know that the board met last night." So my visit is anti-climatic, isn't it? "They met last night and they have hired you to go." So he's simply saying, "I'm underscoring that they have made the right choice." [laughs]

KC: That was quite a lengthy question and answer session.

RH: It lasted three hours. But he said, "When you go there, they are waiting for you." So somebody had gone and gotten the school ready to receive my mind and body. All right. And when I got there everybody knew my name. See, so I'm at a disadvantage there only because I don't know other people's names. But I, like I say, the mental attitude has to be such that, you know, you're either ready to accept the challenge and deal with it or go in the opposite direction. And because they received me positively, it would be foolish of me not to respond in kind. So I felt comfortable from the first I stepped foot on campus. And when they gave me my schedule, the people on my hall came to me. My fellow teachers said, "You may be new here but you're not alone, because if you need anything you let us know." Now that makes you feel at home and comfortable.

Then they say, later on in the year, "We would like you to serve as senior class advisor and oversee blah-blah." And this may be to see "Can we test this man's skills and see if he can function the way these folk have been telling them?" So they give me a task, but they also offer their support service.

So that year when we, we did a senior class play, which was relatively new. But the thing about the senior class play is we had to let it run for three nights. Previously, they had only done it for one. We had it for three nights, we had standing room only all three nights, and we raised more money than any senior class in the history of the school.

So when we did the senior class gift, we put up a brick wall out front with big aluminum letters, because the school did not have a brick wall with their name on it. So we figured we're going to make a major stand and do something. We're going to make sure it's a lasting stand. So the sign was built, the letters were ordered, and you know,

big-to-do. Now we have a brick wall with the name of our school on it.

We went to commencement that year, with the seniors having been briefed that this is commencement and these are the expectations. They all showed up attired. Even though--I told them, I said, "Even though you have on robes, what's underneath is just as important as what's seen. You will look the part, because this is your parents' big day. So look good for your parents." The music was fine, the march went off without a hitch, we went through graduation. The next year they said, "We will do it in the stadium, because we will need that to accommodate the crowds." So we were trying to set precedence as we went, but they were all positive kinds of things.

And then when I came to Greensboro, much the same thing, you know. You are given a challenge, even though it may appear to be disguised in a subtle way. But you accept your challenge, and you have to prove to people--as I told the kids in class, I said there's one thing in life that is undeniable. Quality is colorless, but everybody wants some of it. And if you've got quality, then people want to be with you, because they want some of it to rub off on them. And they don't think about the color of your skin or anything else about you. Nowadays you call it class, same thing. But if you've got it, people want to be associated with you, because they know that you've got it. And by being with you, will it rub off and will they say the same thing about me?

So those--I have been in classrooms in senior high school, you can feel and hear certain things. And my gimmick was, "Today the lesson is not in the textbook. We must talk about life and clear the air, because there's something hidden hanging on this group that we need to clear. And as soon as we clear that, then we can open the book and learn textbook content."

And that teaches a lesson to students of, "Hey, everyday is not between the pages of the book. But we are still learning something that is vital to us and is going to last us for a lifetime. We can talk and not be fearful because we're not graded. But we will continue to be honest." Lots of good things can come out of it. But mindsets have to be at a particular level. And I think of my professor at the university who said, "No matter which instructor you have, you prepare yourself to go through rituals." And it's simply that you are flexible. If you must make an adjustment to get through from here to there, then make the adjustment, because it is not a permanent adjustment. You can go back to where you were after you get through with the move.

KC: I know we need to wind this up because you're very busy. But I'm interested in if you have the teaching bug, what inspired you to become an administrator? There are thousands of us teachers who become administrators.

RH: I know and when it happened to me it was very new. I was still teaching senior high school English and French. I had helped another teacher run a summer session at a high school and in 19--get my years straight--'67 probably, the Richardson Foundation had

some scholarships available to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. And the school system could nominate, and out of those nominees the school system came up with two people, and I was one of those. So I was sent to Chapel Hill to get my master's in educational administration and supervision as a Richardson Fellow. So I felt very honored. As my minister always says, "Gratified but not satisfied, because if you're ever satisfied, you quit." Gratified means I'm thankful and I'll keep pushing on.

So I was gratified that they took me. And once into the program--and there again, we talked about dealing with people. One of the first things that they did in the program at Chapel Hill was to send us through sensitivity training, because it's important to know how to deal with people at all levels. And once you learn to program how to deal at a particular level, you make--when you can make people feel comfortable with you, that's the key to the whole thing. If they feel comfortable, then you can accomplish a lot and so can they. But if they perceive negative and they turn you off, then the shield is there, then no real purpose can come out of the association. And I've tried to do that with every summer school staff that I've had. And for that reason I think I get people who say, "If you ever need me again," which is a strong recommendation from somebody if they want to come back.

KC: Yes, yes. Do you miss teaching?

RH: Yes I do. And I want to tell you that periodically I go to my teachers and say, "What are you teaching at X point in time? May I?" And I have gone into classrooms and taught a lesson. So that I don't lose the feel. I think it's very important as an administrator, if I'm going to evaluate a classroom teacher, that I understand the shoes in which that teaching is walking. And if I understand how those shoes fit, then I'm going to be empathetic as well as sympathetic to that person planted in the classroom.

KC: Tell me again, did you, when you came to the Greensboro school system, where did you begin teaching? Was it here at Page?

RH: No, at Smith High School.

KC: At Smith High School, that's right.

RH: I came here and went to Smith as a teacher of English and French. I think they gave me tenth graders that year. But like you say, whatever job they assigned I told them I would try to handle it. And I think that once you prove what you say you're going to do, then it makes it easy to move further down the road.

KC: In those early days of desegregation in Greensboro schools, tell me from your teacher's

perspective what you noticed about behavior and inter-relationships among students as that process was going on.

RH: Initially, there was a great deal of hostility. The hostility, I think, was predicated upon the unknown, because they were new to each other. And the only thing that they had to function with was preconceived notions, what people had told them about, never having experienced firsthand for themselves, so that we did have conflicts between ethnic groups. But here again, getting to know the other--and I found it worked best through student leadership, if you could get a mixed group of student leaders and convince them, and then send them out as goodwill ambassadors to smooth the waters and to eliminate some misgivings that persist in the minds of some of those other people.

We had to do that. And that's not to say that we did not have major clashes, which involved calling in parents, using the PTA [Parent Teacher Association], even using the police community service people to go out and talk with people in communities, because much of that communication has to occur outside of the school, because many people would never come in. So you've got to go to them, as opposed to waiting for them to come to you.

But like I say, when you get to key people, even those people that you know are rabble-rousers, and deal with them one-on-one, first and foremost, never in a group, take them out of their element, meet them on neutral ground, talk one to one and reason with them the best you can to get them to see what it is we're attempting to do, and why their actions are perceived as negative and nonproductive toward our cause. And we had to do some of that.

KC: What kind of conflicts do you remember, what kind of clashes?

RH: The biggest clash that occurred for me was the outgrowth of senior class election and the list that was being worked on was senior superlatives. Well, at that point in time, the white students outnumbered the black almost three to one. So that when election results came in, so did the votes, so that any black kid who was on that ballot, if he had not been talking to these kids prior to the election, certainly would not have garnered many of their votes.

And this is the point that I had, I found I had to make with the seniors when I sat them down and talked to them. And I told the black kids, "Do not make it racial, first and foremost. Don't say, 'I'm running as a black candidate.' [Say], 'I am running for an office.'" And if you want this kid to vote for you, and you think that you want to run for that office, then what you must do is what all good politicians must do. You must go out and beat the bushes and talk to those people before election day. And you can't wait until election day and say, "I'm John, vote for me." Well, John is still anonymity to him because he doesn't know you.

I said, “How many of these people have you eaten lunch with during the year? How many have you visited with? How many have you gone to the movies with? How many have you gotten together with as a part of a study group?” You know, build some kind of relationships prior to the time that you ask them, “Support me.” And if you do these things, then you’ve put in some ground work. When you ask for something further down the line, they can say, “Do you remember him? He’s that kid who studied with us in social studies. He’s the kid that had the crazy--.”

“Oh, oh I know who he is. Yeah, yeah.”

Then that kind of word spreads, you know. “He’s the one who went to the movies with us to see such-and-such a movie.”

“Oh, that kid.”

See, so no longer does he become an ethnic person, he just becomes an acquaintance. Then when you get ready to vote, “I know John. I studied with him. We went to church together. We went to the movies. Yeah, he’s a good, fine person. You vote for him, too.” Those people go out and bring in votes so that you don’t end up doing all the talking. But it’s the kind of thing that you have to get kids to understand. If you want people to accept you, it has to happen in more than just one day.

KC: The Greensboro school system has been desegregated, or slash, integrated, whichever term--

RH: Desegregated, and not presently under court order because of--we’ve been through that.

KC: It’s been desegregated for about a generation now. Is there progress yet to be made?

RH: Much.

KC: Can you talk about that some?

RH: I think of--yes.

KC: Please do.

RH: Some things have changed. Some things remain unchanged. One thing that has changed is housing patterns. They’re not as stringent as they once were, because housing codes now say that if you qualify financially, more than anything else, you can live anywhere you want to. So you can have--you see neighborhoods that have opened up much more than they were in the sixties and seventies, so that you are going to get an ethnic mixture in schools based on residential assignment.

The other thing is that staff has changed in that time, so that you have in many

instances a major turnover overall. What probably needs to be done--and I recommend it, I've already said it to some people--that the way to begin a school year with staff is to go through a series of human relations seminars, so that those who have been there can transfer some of the thinking that has carried us through what we've been through.

The newer bodies are not as well advised of this kind of thing. And some of them may be dancing to their own drum so that they're going off different from the main thoroughfare. We need for all of them to be on the main thoroughfare. And if we all dance to a different drum, let's all get off at the next exit together. We're better going as a group than we are as individuals, because that diminishes our effectiveness if we're not all together. And I think that until all staff members have been through some strong human relations seminars, workshops, what, whatever you want to name them, and begin to refocus on the better ways to deal with people to get positive results, then it's going to work in a negative way for the whole system. And I think that there's a lot of that presently in existence. We can see it on a daily basis.

One thing that we learned in human relations seminars is that--and I'm not saying this is just for new teachers, but for some of the older ones--the language of the teacher can trigger a negative situation in the classroom. If you've got an integrated classroom, it means you may have to restructure how you ask certain things. But you still get the same kind of answer and result. And we have--and I don't have statistical data to support this, but I put my lunch money on it--that if you go into an integrated classroom or a predominately black classroom or a mixed ethnic kind of classroom and say "Boy," you turn everybody off. "Hey you," you turn them off. And that is not building self-worth among individuals.

What I found that worked for me [is] learning as many names as quickly as possible, so that you attach identity. And it says to the kid, "This person thinks enough to know my name immediately. There are some things I can't do, because I can now be identified." See, you minimize some other things with a name. So that has been something I have done every year that I've been in teaching.

KC: I've had much the same experience teaching university.

RH: Okay. But not just the kids in my room, but the kids in the school. Learn them by name. And that says, hey! And they go, "How do you know me?" I like to know all of my children. All of my children. So that they can--that's all in--

[recorder paused]

RH: --expectations of teachers can do much to put kids on the track that is the acceptable track. Now I didn't say the right track, I said the acceptable track. But we must convince them that this is the track you need to be on if you're going to function in society and get

what you need out of it. And so that society will give you the support that you need to get to where you say you want to go.

KC: Sounds to me, Mr. Hayes, as though you're restating a lot of what your teachers in Dudley taught you or the approach that they took.

RH: It comes through in the second generation, doesn't it?

KC: Yeah, which I see as a positive thing. I think that's wonderful. Is there anything that I'm leaving out, any question that I am not asking you that you feel I ought to be?

RH: I can't think of anything that you've left out. I think that if the university is going to do anything in this area, and it would probably do it in conjunction with the public schools, then we might get together and jointly sponsor some seminars on an ongoing basis for students at the university who are preparing to go into teaching, for people in the profession who are new to the profession, for those who've been in it for a while who need to be restructured. [laughs] But it would do more than teach human relations techniques, it will also open an, a long and ongoing line of communication between the university and public schools that is very necessary, because we have kids who are coming to you. And if we can start getting the cooperation now then their transition will probably be easy.

But it would, it would just be good for people in general to let the schools supplement a role that has been traditionally given to churches, because the church has been given that unwritten challenge, you know. If it's human relations, if it's moral, you teach it. That's not our baby right there. I don't think it can be as effective unless everybody takes a part in it and says, "We are all responsible." And we are, ultimately.

And I don't see how we can back off and say, "That's not in my job description." You see, I'll accept a third of this, you take a third, and you take a third. Then the job becomes a bit more manageable because it's not a as large. But the end result is big, because if you take all of those and put them back together in the end and say, "We did this and this is the big end result."

KC: Okay, very good. I believe I've asked you everything that I wanted to and you've been so very helpful, you really have. We appreciate it.

[recorder paused]

RH: In 1960--and this is shortly after things are supposed to be good for everybody, okay--coming through the state of Alabama and we stopped in Montgomery, Alabama, at Maxwell Air Force Base. The person with whom I was riding was a captain. I had just

been discharged from the Air Force. His friend was a colonel in Alabama and we were going to stop and have dinner. So we got to the base and they told us that he was at home. He--an officer in the military who lived off base. [laughs]

So we went into Montgomery, Alabama, and found his house. And we were invited in and we sat down and talked, and he invited us to go to dinner at the officer's club on base, and we did. But when we came back from dinner and pulled up in his driveway, all of the spotlights hit us and we were surrounded by the Montgomery Police Department and we were all taken downtown and charged with disturbing the peace.

We found out later that there was a city ordinance in Montgomery, Alabama, which stated that there would be no mixing of blacks and whites under any condition. But, you know, just to go to a white man's house and sit down was, whoa. Fortunately--and I keep telling people this and folks find it unbelievable--at that time Martin Luther King was just becoming known. In the South, Northerners were coming down and calling themselves freedom riders to help with voter registration and other things. And I guess the people in Montgomery thought that we were part of that civil rights movement, freedom riders, you know, strange foreign folk who show up in our backyard.

But they booked us and we had to go to court. I don't know why, but I still believe in the power of divine providence. Since I had just been discharged, technically I was not under the jurisdiction of the military. The captain was and the colonel was, they were still in. The military got them out but only after the colonel's wife had called the base and said "You've got an hour and if you don't I'm calling Washington."

They got the colonel and the captain out. Poor Bob [referring to himself] had to go to court the next day. But the colonel had gotten the judge advocate general's office at Maxwell to come to court. So there was this long row of nothing but military brass sitting in the courtroom and they convinced the judge that they would take the case. And the military gave us escort out of Alabama, because they said, "If you get out of court and they've not charged you, you can look for them to stop you somewhere down the road with another charge so that you have to go back. Then that'll be two charges that you will have to deal with in Alabama." So they shadowed us out of the state.

Two weeks after I got home, I got a phone call and the man identified himself as an FBI agent. And he said, "You will be in my office tomorrow morning at eight o'clock."

And I said, "Why?"

He said, "You will."

So when I went to his office the next day, he said, "I am investigating your case for the attorney general in Washington," who was Bobby Kennedy. The colonel's wife obviously did call Washington. The FBI investigated the case. The first thing they said was, "Do you feel that any of your civil rights have been infringed upon? Did they touch you? Did they use harsh language?"

And when I recapped I said, "You know, come to think of it, no, they didn't."

They never touched me, they never spoke ugly. I could hear them talking to other prisoners in the jail, using all kinds of foul language, but never to me. When we got up that morning--got up, I never slept--when we moved out to go from the jail to the courtroom, they shackled everybody in that jail except me. It's amazing. I mean, chaining people one to the other and loading them in the paddy wagon. And here I am strolling along with the crowd.

So I told him, I said, "No, none of that." They told me once, they said, "You may make one phone call." And I guess they thought I was going to call Dr. King, but I didn't know him. That didn't even register. I said, "I know no one in Montgomery." So they took me back to my cell and I stayed overnight. They did offer to feed me the next morning at five o'clock. I told them no, I was not hungry, thank you very much. And when I got home two days later than I told my mother I was going to be home, she said, "Where have you been?" And I looked at Captain Cobb and he looked at me and we both laughed. She said, "What's going on?"

I said, "We've been in Montgomery, Alabama, we've been in jail." She all but had a cardiac arrest.

KC: I'll bet she did.

RH: I said, "Don't even think about it." I got nervous the day the FBI agent called me. I'm serious, I got nervous that day after all the other had transpired. But I said, come to think of it, if anybody ever sings the song, "There's Somebody Watching Over Me," I understand that, because then you see the headlines that came after that day with the three kids who were spirited away and they found the car burned and the remnants of their bodies. I said, "Nobody knew I was in Montgomery, nobody. I could've become a statistic."

So when I got home, I also got a call from the military base in Texas. They said, "Hayes, we just got word that you and the captain were stopped in Montgomery. We wanted to be sure you were home. We were getting ready to leave Texas to come to Alabama."

I said, "No, I am here."

They said, "We just wanted to be sure you were at home."

So you know, there is a power bigger than all of us that functions. And I'm glad it did.

KC: Well, I guess so.

[End of Interview]