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INTERVIEWEE: Yolanda Leacraft

INTERVIEWER: William Link

DATE: November 30, 1988

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

WILLIAM LINK: This is William Link and the date is November 30, 1988. And I'm here with Yolanda Leacraft. I wonder if you would mind telling me a little bit about your early life, where you were born and when you were born, and some of your early experiences with regards to black/white relations.

YOLANDA LEACRAFT: I was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 2, 1931. My parents were divorced when I was very young and my mother and I lived with her grandfather because her parents had died when she was very young. My great-grandfather was seventy years old when I was born, and I think that a lot of my love for history and my concern for people came out of growing up in his home. He was a Presbyterian minister.

One of the things that I remember about my childhood is that I probably had a childhood very different from what many people think blacks ever experience. But I was--this was not, you know, just indicative of my lifestyle, I knew plenty of other black kids who had the same kind of lifestyle that I did. Bringing that just forward for a minute to today, often when I talk to people about the Bill Cosby show--and some black person had said to me, right here in city government, "Oh, I never watch that show because blacks don't live like that. And I don't think--I don't believe in role models," and so forth.

And my answer always is, "Well, some blacks do live that way." And I think it's good not only for our race to know it but for other races to know it because we get so much of the ghetto kind of thing.

Now going back to my neighborhood, [pause] the street that I grew up on in Winston-Salem was very close to downtown. I guess today it would be considered downtown Winston-Salem because R. J. Reynolds factories are all around that neighborhood. Hanes knitting mills were very prominent in that location then. [Pause] I can remember a physician lived to the right of us, a funeral director to our left, [and] across the street there was an attorney.

Also, most of these people also had tenant houses on the same street, my family included. They were varying degrees, some were nicer than others. I would have been very pleased to live in the ones that my family owned. It was very interesting that everybody's house was, you know, a big Victorian house, and these tenant houses were usually one-story affairs. And everybody's tenant homes were painted whatever color their own home was so you immediately kind of knew, well, these were the attorneys' houses--

WL: Right.

YL: --and these were the ministers' houses.

WL: They were located immediately--

YL: Yes, in the same--

WL: Attached?

YL: Well, you know, they may not be right next door but in the same block or down the street or something like that. And my great-grandfather had three of these houses and they were like--well, one of them was a two-story house, the other two were one-story, but they all had like six rooms so--and it was interesting that the families, every--different generations of the families just lived there. It wasn't like you see today where renters come and go. And these people were our neighbors and our friends, you know, they were in and out of our homes. Then there were other houses on the street--and I guess this is very indicative of what black neighborhoods were like where there was no zoning. Then there were also on this street--this was a pretty long street--my grandfather's church was on this street, then there were the flats, you know, the two-story brick flats that had like four families living in each. They were what we called the "shotgun houses."

WL: Who would live in the flats and in the shotgun houses?

YL: Most of the people who worked in the factories. Most of these people did work in the factories, nearly all of them. [pause] But I never saw any problems with class. As we--you know, I can just remember these people being in and out of our home just as anybody else would be. One of the things-- I think we were probably the last family to leave the street, certainly because of the church, as long as my grandfather lived. He lived until he was eighty-six and was preaching until one week before he died. So my mother and I lived there all of that time. Being a divorced woman in the forties and fifties, that was pretty bad, you know, so my mother always had to teach school out of town somewhere

else. But--

WL: Was there a strong social taboo against it within the black community, divorce? Or--

YL: I think so, probably more as an undercurrent kind of thing, almost like it is today. I can remember in my own life being a divorcée when I was in my thirties and how people who had been friends for a long, long time treated me differently. Now that I am a widow I have friends who are widows who tell me that this is really a shock to them. That when they were part of a couple, and now these people just seemed to have turned away from them. And I say I was really prepared for that side of it because I had--

WL: Been through it.

YL: --been through that before. So I think my mother experienced pretty much the same kind of thing. And [pause] she usually, at that time when I was very young, she taught in eastern North Carolina in rural sections, and I can remember sometimes going there with her when the schools opened early in the summer and then closed so the kids could pick cotton and that kind of thing.

WL: She would work that far away and you would stay in Winston-Salem?

YL: Right. Yes.

WL: Did she teach in the small schools?

YL: Yes. Very small, like Bladen County, eastern North Carolina. Down that way. I can remember that very vividly and maybe I was four or five years old. I didn't go to school yet. And it was way, way out in the country. And, you know, I just thought it was primitive.

WL: Compared to the big city?

YL: Yeah. Compared to Winston-Salem it was--And, you know, these kids had to walk so far to school and everybody was barefoot and all of this. And I just--you know, my mother never let me go barefoot. And I don't know why, but you just didn't go barefoot. Maybe that was what the poor people did, but I was--and that was always my greatest thing, wanting to take off my shoes and go barefoot.

I can remember even as a teenager when my friends were getting their jobs in the summertime, and about all that was available to black girls then would be to babysit some white person's children. And I can recall one friend of mine. She and I could never

babysit. And we were just devastated because all of our friends would be talking about their summer jobs. But we were really sheltered from this.

Now, her parents worked for the Hanes family, and I guess this was maybe "The Hanes"--now they are probably deceased. But I recall going to their home with her sometimes in the summer. We would ride our bikes because it wasn't all that far from where I lived because, you know, it was kind of like all the blacks are on this side of Main Street and the whites are on that side.

And I can remember Mrs. Hanes, this old, old lady; really what I would call the matriarch of the Hanes family. And at that time my friend's mother was her cook/housekeeper. And she lived in this huge mansion, and my friend's uncle was her chauffeur. And whenever we would come over we would always have to come up to her bedroom and tell her what we were doing in school and what our aspirations were. And I just felt that she was genuinely interested. It wasn't any of the thing that you sometimes see depicted where children are asked to perform. We never were asked to do any of that. But I guess these people had been her servants for many, many years and she was just interested in them. And people at that time who worked for private families had lovely homes. These people were homeowners, and in, you know, one of the better sections at that time where blacks lived in Winston-Salem. They were in a neighborhood truly where they were all private homes. It wasn't like my neighborhood at all.

WL: Well, let's talk a little bit about growing up in Winston-Salem and the experiencing segregation.

YL: Okay.

WL: As a child, did that affect you very much?

YL: Okay. One of the things that I remember that I didn't know why because of our proximity to the factories and the knitting mills, all of these white people walked by our house everyday going to work. And it was kind of like we got to know them and they would stop and chat with my grandfather, especially. One of the things I can remember is having this Persian cat that these woman just loved to stop and pet this cat. And I would always--our house had this iron-like fence around it, like wrought iron fence, and so that was our--you know, and I played in the yard and they would stop and we would talk through the fence and they would stroke my cat. And that was probably the first encounter I remember with white people.

The other thing that I remember is--the other thing is that my great-grandfather was very fair complexioned. Most people thought he was a white man. I can remember as a little girl--I don't know how old--but we walked to the A&P [grocery] store which was just a few blocks away. And wherever we went we walked. He didn't ever want--he

didn't ever like to take the public buses. And I can recall going with him shopping to some of probably the better stores that are still in Winston-Salem today, and he shopped for my mother and me like once or twice a year, he would go--and this is very interesting, he would pick out all of our clothes for each season. And when we would come in the store, it wasn't like shopping now. One of the managers would come and assist him and all of the shopping that he did. And then he paid one check for everything from every department when he finished shopping. That was just very vivid to me. And when my mother would come home, you know, he would have all of these beautiful clothes that he had bought for her to take back and so on. So he did that, like I'll say in the fall for the winter and then again in the spring for the summer season.

And the first real taste--I think it was S&M Clothing, but it was a well known men's haberdashery. And a lot of times then--and they always would say, I used to hear people say the Jewish people always stood outside of their stores. And I can remember these men who owned that store right there at the corner of Liberty and Fourth [Street] at that time. And they would always be standing outside of the store. And when we could come--and then that's where he would select his clothing, and he would buy his the same way, so much for each season.

And one day when we were leaving somebody remarked, and I don't know who it was said, "Who is that little nigger girl that is always with that white man?"

And another person said, "Oh, I don't know. Probably the child of same majordomo in his household."

So they never knew that he was black. He had two brothers in New York. One was a dentist, one was a physician. The three of them and one other brother that I just remember him as Uncle Charlie. And they had--he was Charlie Roberts because their mother had been married twice. I have a picture of her and her name--on there, my mother has written Great-grandmamma Levy, L-e-v-y. And I don't know where that family name--how that comes in, because in some of the oral storytelling I have missed some of that. But I just remember--and she has on this beautiful black dress with all the white lace collar and she's very fair, very French-looking woman.

And the brother, Charlie Roberts--and I really need to do research on this--I remember somewhere seeing a letter from him in the days after the Civil War. He was one of the first blacks in the North Carolina General Assembly. And his home was Louisburg, North Carolina. But I keep saying, you know, I need to research this and I just haven't had time to do it. But then the other two brothers lived in New York: one was a physician, one was a dentist. And the four of them went to Lincoln University in Chester [County], Pennsylvania. So I don't know whether they had grown up--because my mother always said that they were free--so I don't know if they were descendants of blacks who were free and lived in Pennsylvania and later came to North Carolina. You know, I just don't know.

I think Uncle Charlie was a minister also, because a lot of his descendants live in

Louisburg and there is a Presbyterian church there that I've talked to someone recently who remembers them. So that was kind of our family. [pause] And I--the reason I think they grew up in the North [is] because a lot of the things that Southerners eat we didn't eat, [laughs] you know.

I went to a private school here in Greensboro, to a Lutheran school when I was a teenager. My friend that I was saying her family worked for the Hanes family, she and I each came to school there together.

WL: What school was that?

YL: That was Immanuel Lutheran [College]. It's closed now. But a lot of things that black people are supposed to be, you know, our favorite foods, I didn't know of those foods until I came to this school. I had never had grits, which people thought was bizarre. [laughs] My grandfather was a great huntsman so we ate a lot of game in the winter. There was always like a couple of weeks when he would take off from the church. And, you know, I remember him sitting around getting his guns ready to go hunting and he had his hunting clothes. He and some other men would take off and they'd go somewhere in eastern North Carolina. And so we ate a lot of deer and rabbit and all of that stuff in the winter [laughs] that people just don't know--well, blacks don't know about as a large group. But those were the kinds of things. You know, I never had rice; I never had pinto beans.

WL: Getting back to Winston-Salem, would you characterize--based on your memories and based on places you've been since--would you characterize race relations in Winston as being--

YL: Well, you see--

WL: --good.

YL: I thought they were very good because I was sheltered. I didn't know about the segregated water fountains until a teenager. But when I look back on it, I see that your family shielded you from all of that. I didn't know. I can remember going in Woolworth's in Winston-Salem and knowing that there was an eating counter over here on this side. But always in Winston blacks could eat at the stand-up counters, which they didn't do that in Greensboro for a long, long time. But I remember as a little girl you could go to Kress or to Woolworth's [five and dime stores] or to the old Silver [dime] store and get anything you wanted at that stand-up counter and stand there and eat with anyone.

But I can remember in Greensboro this happening during my teen years when

those counters were opened up to blacks. So I didn't have this perception. I can remember, I guess, what probably goes on with a lot of people in small towns and cities that certain blacks were talked to by the white power structure about whatever. I can remember my grandfather just saying, "Well I have to go to Wachovia [bank] building," or wherever, "to this meeting," and so on. And I guess that's kind of like the same thing that maybe George Simkins in this time has--in the earlier times, experienced here.

But [pause] you know, except for that one incidence about--incident where someone wanted to know who I was with this white man all the time--because, I mean, I guess we were a fixture. We walked everywhere. He had parishioners in--well we called it Salem, you know. It was like this is still Winston, [and] that's Salem. And I can remember walking with him there.

One of the families that I really remember that lived across from the [Edward] Belo house. And every time when I used to be substitute teaching with fourth graders and we would take trips to Old Salem and, of course, you know, how it is now. But I would always share with them my recollections of Salem when I was a girl. And the people that lived, I think there's a little house that they call "First House" that's kind of diagonal from the Belo house, or used to be, and this house next door to that was a house built in the style of the houses in Charleston. This couple that lived there were black but nobody knew it, I don't think. And they were members of our church. He was a barber. He had his barbershop in one little side. And they had the most elegant Victorian Charleston. You know, the kitchen was in the basement on a brick floor. You came upstairs and the dining room was on that level and the bedrooms were up above. And I really don't think anybody ever really knew.

WL: How common was this where you had light skinned people--

YL: Very common. Very common.

WL: --who would move in--presumably move back and forth between white society and black society?

YL: And I--I don't even know whether they were doing what in modern times we call "passing." That's just where they came and he opened his barbershop and, I mean, they were way up in their eighties when they died and, you know, they had still lived there. But I think they had come from Charleston initially. But I found them very--you know, nobody questioned who they were. Now there were other blacks who lived in Salem who were maybe lighter complexioned, but they were--didn't have the features of whites like these people did. And maybe they lived a few streets back but everybody knew that they were black. But yet their mother--and that particular family I still see them occasionally--I can recall that their mother looked very much like these people who lived over there by

the Belos' house on Main Street. But so far as any tensions and that kind of thing, you know, I always wondered why the white children could go to a school that was nearby, and they could walk to school and go home for lunch. Those kinds of things but it was--

WL: And your school was located across--

YL: Yes, I went to east Winston to what was the Fourteenth Street School, which is now torn down, but it was right next to Atkins High [School]. It was a huge, huge school; had maybe eight or nine hundred students from first through the seventh or eighth grade. And my biggest problem with all of that is that all the kids in my neighborhood had to walk this long way to this school and my mother insisted that I ride the city bus, which at that time was the Safe Bus Company, which was owned by blacks. And that bus company served east Winston. Very seldom did we ever ride a Duke Power bus. I can't even recall as a young person riding a Duke Power bus, and I don't know whether it was because blacks were so, had so much allegiance and loyalty to the Safe Bus Company, because at that time it was world-renowned and maybe the only black-owned bus company in the world. That--

WL: It serviced the black community.

YL: --the black community.

WL: So all of its ridership--

YL: All of its black--all of its ridership was black and their buses stopped on Church Street and the Duke Power buses stopped on the next street at Liberty Street.

WL: Would that mean that blacks would not ride [unclear]--

YL: Only those--only those who were going to work in the homes of whites on the west side of town.

WL: And those buses were segregated during that--Jim Crow?

YL: They were segregated. Right. Very much so.

WL: You came to Greensboro then from--this is when you were a teenager?

YL: Yes.

WL: To high school?

YL: Yes, when I was fourteen I came here to school.

WL: What kind of school was it?

YL: It was a school that was operated by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. [It] had mostly a white, German staff, a few blacks--like for physical ed[ucation], home ec[onomics], some of that. But most of the teachers were whites. At one time, I understand, it was all white, Germanic background. I feel that I got an excellent education there. The staffs were small. This was during the same day--this school. And someone said to me recently, "Why doesn't someone do something about Immanuel Lutheran like they did about Palmer Memorial."

I said, you know, "We still have reunions even though our school closed in 1961." Just this year there was a reunion up in White Plains, New York, of the students and two years from now it'll be back in Greensboro again. But Alex Doson[?] had done a lot of research on the school and its history and did get a marker put up on East Market Street--you know, those highway markers near historic sites. [North Carolina] A&T [State University] owns all of that property now.

But the reason I say that I got such an excellent education there, when I went to Winston-Salem Teacher's College--it was then--they were using the same textbooks that I had had at this school. And I was often exempted from classes like my English classes and so on because I could often, you know, have taught the class. Let's say, if the professor was teaching how to diagram sentences, you know, I knew it as well as he did. And I guess that it got to the point where the rest of the class would just sit back and let me do it. So he would exempt me from a number of the classes and that kind of thing. But--

WL: So the curricular emphasis was a sort of traditional, academically-oriented--

YL: Absolutely.

WL: --and achievement-oriented--

YL: Very much so. Very much so. I can remember us going on, you know, outings to Palmer Memorial Institute when Dr. [Charlotte Hawkins] Brown was the president and we exchanged some of the lyceum series kinds of things. I'm sure our basketball team played their--you know, because we were both small black schools.

But I said that the historical significance of her school is different because it was started by a black female and ours was started by these German missionaries to the South.

And of course that does have some significance. And I have given a lot of the artifacts from the school to the Greensboro Historical Museum, because when they were tearing down the buildings, you know, and I had the blocks from the cornerstone and a lot of that. And the last time I checked on it, they said, well, one of the problems is they had a lot of trouble getting--a lot of it is in German and just getting somebody to transcribe all of that for them--translate it, really.

WL: How did it work, having--I mean, what kind of relations were there between teachers and students? The fact that there were racial differences--

YL: That was very interesting. With, for instance, there was one--during my time, Dr. Henry Nau was the president. He had been a missionary to Africa so he lived among blacks, and he had been also a missionary to India. So he had had this experience of living among blacks and was very comfortable with living right on the campus. There was faculty housing. He attended the Grace Lutheran Church where I attend still today. Where most of the other faculty members went to Ebenezer Lutheran Church across town.

One faculty member I remember--well, two really--but the first one, he and his family soon moved somewhere near Ebenezer Church. His wife worked at the old Ellis Stone department store which became Thalheimer's. And I can remember going there in the days when they just began to even let blacks come into the store. Of course in that day, working in a department store was a very high kind of job for white women. And of course, she knew a lot of us students and she always seemed a little bit embarrassed when we would come into the store just by our presence. She had kind of a haughty manner.

The other professor and his wife who lived on campus--they lived there I think until very old age. He was the librarian and an English professor. I don't ever remember having any interaction with his wife; maybe you would just see her walking to the bus line. I found it very interesting or strange that these German women walked a few paces behind their husbands.

But those who lived on the campus, except for the president, you know, they didn't mingle with us. After class they were in their houses. The other family, you know, they came on the campus and they talked and, you know, came to the dormitories and got involved in our programs. We had a very small school. We probably had an enrollment of two or three hundred in its heyday. And a lot of students from the city of Greensboro came there. Many of the returning vet[eran]s came there, you know, in the early--late forties or early fifties.

WL: What kind of relationship did it have as an institution with the Greensboro black community?

YL: I think very good. Some people in the community sent their children there, especially if

they were at Dudley [High School] and having problems. And they would send them over there to kind of shake them up. I think Dr. [James E.] Cheek, the president of Howard University, went there at one time, for example. He and his brother both, I think.

There were a number of people, when we had the reunions here--I know, for instance, A. H. Peeler, you know, he tells about the days when he was there and he played basketball and all. So there are a lot of people who went to school there from this community and really, you know, say that that's how they really got their lives turned around and got on the right track academically or whatever.

WL: What about the tuition cost?

YL: Very, very low. I remember looking at an old catalogue not long ago and it was like maybe thirty dollars a month--forty dollars. I can remember leaving Winston, catching the Greyhound bus to come to school. And as I got into the taxi, I remember my mother giving me some cash money, maybe forty dollars, and this was to pay my first semester's tuition and have spending money. And my friend and I were in the taxi together--and I remember this so clearly--and apparently I got out of the taxi and left the money on the seat. I just don't know.

But when I got to Greensboro, I didn't have the money. And of course, she was leaving later that day to go to her school. And oh, I was just devastated, because that was a lot of money to have, you know. [pause] And I remember that I had to call my grandfather and tell him this, and I didn't want to tell him. So what I did, I wrote my father a letter, you know, who I had kind of had contact with through the years, and he sent the money to pay it. But that's how low the tuitions were, and this included everything: your tuition, [and] your room and board.

WL: What were your first--what were your early impressions when you arrived in Greensboro. Growing up in Winston-Salem, did you think it was a different kind of place? Or a--

YL: It felt different. I couldn't identify exactly how. Certainly, you know, there was a close affinity to Green--to Bennett [College] and A&T at that time. The ORD [Overseas Replacement Depot] was operational there and it was just right across the fence from our campus. In fact, part of the school's property had been taken by the army to build some of that.

WL: ORD is?

YL: Yeah, you know, where the soldiers were in Greensboro back in the forties, in World War II. I forget what that stands for, but it was where they came before they were shipped overseas, I think. And of course we weren't to talk to the soldiers and any of that. You

know, that was a real punishment kind of thing.

WL: So you arrived during the war years? That was your first experience.

YL: Yes. I came here in ’45. I can remember that on Saturdays we could go downtown shopping and so could the Bennett girls. And Palmer’s buses would be in town Saturday. Saturday downtown was a big event. And of course, A&T students were pretty free. And we had to all line up--there was a junior college, a high school, and a seminary on the Lutheran campus. And the junior college women were our chaperons. We had to line up by twos and walk downtown. And we left every Saturday promptly at one o’clock after we had lunch and our rooms had been inspected to see that we had put clean linens on. I mean this was really a part of it, you know. There was this inspection every Saturday. And then if you passed muster, I guess, then you could go into town; if not, you couldn’t.

Same thing if we went to the Carolina Theatre. That was the only theatre we could go to. I’m sure there were some who slipped and went to the old National [Theatre]. And there used to be a Palace [Theatre] on East Market Street. We couldn’t even walk on that side of the street. There was a certain place that you had to cross to the other side. Of course, the Bennett girls were coming down Washington Street the same way. The only thing that was different than us--

[End Tape 1, Side A--Begin Tape 1, Side B]

WL: We were talking about your first impressions in Greensboro?

YL: Right. One of the interesting things on these Saturday excursions to town, the Woman’s College girls would be downtown and the Greensboro College. And the Woman’s College girls always wore their school blazers but they didn’t have to wear their hats and gloves like we did. But you know, everybody knew this was the day. And we were basically treated well. You knew where you could go, where you couldn’t go. And most of the stores were open to you--you just couldn’t try on the clothes.

WL: You were allowed to come in but not--

YL: Yeah. You could--Belk, for instance, was opened. Ellis Stone, as I say this was one of the really la-di-da stores and, you know, just the prices--that later became Thalheimer’s--just the prices. But you know, Belk, and I was trying to remember--I can’t remember. There were a lot of boutique, what we would call now, small shops. Then there were the, you know, chain stores, the lower price stores, too. There was no problem going in any of them.

WL: Was there a great--obviously then there was a great mixture of blacks and whites that came together on Saturday?

YL: Downtown shopping on Saturdays, yes, yes. And everybody knew that all of these young women were from the schools around.

WL: You all had your blazers.

YL: And the town seemed to welcome them. And you knew exactly which group was which and all of that.

WL: By the blazers.

YL: And when we got downtown those who were going to shop had one chaperon assigned and those who were going to the Carolina then they went there. And if you were shopping, you had to shop by twos. You could never shop alone. And the upper-class woman would tell you at what time to meet her back at the square. And then, we would take our walk.

And you know, one of the interesting things is how naturally the guys from A&T would stand on the corners and watch us, you know, walk down the street and say things to us and that kind of thing.

But I think it was probably pretty much like any small school anywhere in the country at that time for, you know, young people of a--when I first came there it was more probably middle-class black kids coming there. Later on, I began to see more kids, I would say, they were probably, some of them were still middle-class. I remember some from New York who were not. But a lot of churches would maybe provide scholarships for parishioner's children, and especially if they were beginning to get into some problems in the bigger cities. We had large, large contingencies of students from Washington, New York, [and] Philadelphia. Not so many from the Deep South because there is another Lutheran school still in Selma, Alabama. A lot of them would finish their high school there and then come here to junior college.

WL: Coming from New York and Washington, they would come from Lutheran communities or middle-class black--?

YL: Yes, middle-class black and most of them came from Lutheran churches. Probably more so than those of us who came from the South. Because I joined the Lutheran church while I was still living there, which was to my family, just, you know--

WL: Presbyterian, and all?

YL: Yes, oh that was--you would have thought that I had renounced God at that time. I would visit the old Presbyterian church occasionally. And I think they have forgiven me now. But, you know, that was--you would have thought somebody had died. I remember talking with my grandfather about it and writing him many letters about it. And, you know, he finally--he never told me not to do it. We discussed it, and I think that he thought that I was probably caught up in maybe a lot of the ritual in the Lutheran church.

But I can remember having a conversation with him where we really discussed doctrinal kinds of things and he felt that I was really committed. And he said, "Well if this is what makes you happy my preference is that you remain a Christian and be a part of a Christian church." And, you know, just having his support made it a very, very easy transition. But even when, you know, later when I had married and then later divorced and moved back to Greensboro because of my work, when my children would go to Winston to visit relatives they always got them to the Lutheran church on Sunday. So they respected that.

WL: You mentioned that the theatres on Saturday, blacks would go to certain theaters. Not the--

YL: Well, we may go to the same theatre but we sat in a Jim Crow section.

WL: I see.

YL: But our school only permitted us to attend the Carolina. Now, the boys would go to the National and I'm sure sometimes the girls slipped to the National.

WL: Was that because of the films they showed or a [?] issue?

YL: Probably. And maybe just a status kind of thing. The Carolina certainly had all the more middle-class type films. They may have had a little bit more of the rock and roll or that kind of stuff at the National, you know.

WL: I see. Was--what other kinds of evidences were there of segregation in downtown Greensboro? Do you remember in the forties?

YL: Let me see what I can--well, certainly I remember the segregated lunch counters. I remember Kress had these big eating area down in the basement. Much bigger than Woolworth's is now, it's almost like a restaurant, half of a floor, maybe. And we couldn't eat there. You just pretty much knew, for instance, well you knew you didn't go in Brownhill's [apparel store].

WL: Not even go at all?

YL: I don't remember anybody going. I can remember you didn't go in Montaldo's, which was where Merrill Lynch is. I can remember--and this connects to Winston-Salem--the Montaldo's there. I remember a black woman who used to sell the Montaldo's clothes out of her home to black professional woman, mostly teachers and nurses.

WL: She would contract with Montaldo's to do this?

YL: Yes. And I never knew how that came about, but I remember that she didn't work. And I don't remember her husband; he must have died rather early. But I don't know if she ever worked at the store. I just remember her being at home and women going into her home. You know, she would get whatever clothing they wanted. And later on, Montaldo's opened a shop down on the Church Street section of Winston called the French Shop.

And this was a store where the black women went to buy the Montaldo's. It was a beautiful little shop. And, you know, they had the Montaldo's label and all of that but it said the French Shop Montaldo's or something, and they had black clerks working. Well, that was a real coup in those days, in the early forties, that there was a store that these black women worked as sales clerks. And I remember that Wachovia had a branch at that time that was for the blacks who didn't go into the main banks.

WL: In Winston-Salem?

YL: In Winston-Salem. You know my memories go back and forth through the two communities. But I also remember that all of the tellers in this bank were white males, and they all wore khaki jackets. I remember when they got their first black teller that was going to later become manager of that branch. And this was probably in the very late forties. And I really think that was probably the first major bank that had, you know, any blacks become managers and that kind of thing. At that time, I was working with North Carolina Mutual [Life] Insurance Company.

By this time, this black male had been a manager for several years. Then a white female, I mean, a black female who was in our office at North Carolina Mutual as our bookkeeper was recruited by Wachovia to come work in the same bank. She later became a manager herself. Each of these people then later on after integration became managers in other branches around town. But I really think that that was probably the earliest--you know, they always had black couriers and that kind of thing--but I mean really managing or even being a teller. To me, this was just not open to blacks at all during that time. People were quietly recruited when people make--and I don't know how these decisions came about, you know.

WL: But obviously it represented some effort to--

YL: Yeah, these could have been some of the kinds of meetings that I'm telling you that I remember my father--my great-grandfather going and I guess it was one of the Atkins brothers. I don't know which of them it was, but one of the older ones in the Atkins family, which is the family George Simkins's wife comes from that family. There's been a lot in the paper from time to time about her father and some of the kinds of suits that he started.

WL: Was that S. G. [Simon Green] Atkins? Was he the--

YL: Let's see.

WL: Was he the son of--

YL: J. A. [Jasper "Jack" Alston] Atkins, I think, because Alston, his name, was my grandfather's last name. My grandfather was Dr. J. C. Alston. And they named him Jack Alston Atkins.

WL: Oh, I see.

YL: And that was Anna Simkins's father. So those families--those two families were very prominent in that kind of effort during those days. But they did it very quietly behind the scenes; there was never any fanfare about it.

I can remember in the *Winston-Salem Journal* that there was always a page that had the Negro news. And then on Sundays, there was maybe two pages. And they hired a black man at the paper, you know--I remember him--who did that writing of the black--it wasn't anything like the *Carolina Peacemaker* but, you know, it was reporting weddings and deaths, and who got an award and that kind of thing.

WL: It was read, too?

YL: Oh yes, very, very much so. In fact, I think when they were going to do away with that in later years, there was--a lot of people said, "Oh we don't want you to do this." But they just wanted all the news to become just a part of the paper. But that was kind of a historical thing because the only black newspapers we had were like the *Amsterdam News* and something like that.

WL: So you think there was in both Greensboro and even more so Winston-Salem a sort of

softening of the system that you [unclear]?

YL: Well, I just--I just know more about it in Winston because that was going on all around me, where in Greensboro I was kind of isolated on this campus. I can remember, getting back to one of the professors, the one that I said was a librarian. There was certain--if you were very, very academically gifted or had a lot of motivation, he really, you know, really supported you and cultivated you in every way. His name was Arnold Pennekamp. And most of the kids just hated him. Today, they would say he was a racist. I don't even remember what they called him then; I don't think racist was a part of our vocabulary. But they just hated him.

And another friend who lives over at Old Greensboro Court now, she's a retired school teacher, Thelma Sandifer and I--she was his library assistant. And she later came back there to teach English after she finished at A&T. But he just really seemed to dote on us. So, you know, the kids always--well, Thelma was in college [and] I was in high school, but I always got a lot of fall out from the kids about it--plus Thelma lived in the city and so she wasn't [unclear]. But he would stop and talk to me on campus and just ignore everybody else in my group and then go on his way. And his conversations would usually be, if I were sitting around on a bench or something and just laughing and talking, he would always remind me that there was this book that I needed to finish reading, something like that. That, you know, that we were going to be discussing this at such and such a time, that kind of thing. It always had something to do with your school work.

But I can remember seeing him just get almost so frustrated that he would almost go into a tirade in class when students hadn't prepared their work, when--and see, they knew they could make him very angry this way. A lot of it was very deliberate, you know. Because then that--and he was so meticulous about everything, had to be letter perfect. That, you know, they didn't want to hear him critique their work severely so they just wouldn't do anything and that would just really set him off. And he would tell them how, I guess, they were lowlifes and they were never going to amount to anything. And his favorite phrase was, "You'll never amount to a tinker's dam." And none of us knew what that was.

But by that time, we were getting a bit self-actualized and we--some of them said, "Well we just really need to go talk to the president. He's cursing us in class." And of course, you know, these are my peers [and] I had to be a part of this but then they appointed me the spokesperson. And since I had this good relationship with the college president, I went in and talked to him about it.

And he had--he said, "ho-ho" to everybody. It was like ho-ho this or ho-ho that. So he would say, "Ho-ho, honey. That is"--you know, he laughed. It was really funny to him. And he said, "A tinker's dam"--he went on to tell me what kind of coin it was in Germany and all. But it was the least coin of any. And of course, we didn't know what a tinker's dam was; we just heard the word "damn". But they thought he was saying d-a-m-

n.

So of course, then the president talked to him, and then the next class period that gave him an opportunity to really give us a lecture about--well, he was right because--you know. He went on to explain what this was and how we didn't know what it was and we needed to be broadened and, you know. I'm sure that nowadays if students were like us, they would say, "Oh, if we could all have classes like this." But at that time, these rabble-rousers, you know. And he was just going into this tirade. But he--and then there was the--there was Professor Kampschmidt. He was my algebra teacher.

And of course, with all these academic classes, we also had religious classes maybe twice a week with chapel everyday and all of that. But Kampschmidt was the kind of guy that had great stories to tell. He would have been a great salesman, you know. He had all these stories to tell about everything. He had one son, and his son Bill--graduates older than I remembered when Bill was just a little kid, I guess when they were living on campus. And I remember him coming around when he was going to [the University of North] Carolina or somewhere to med school. And during the summers, he would work around here cutting grass and stuff. So we all kind of knew him. But he bragged about Bill until you just wanted to be sick. And then the last five minutes then he'd put this great, you know, problem up there for us to solve. [laughs] And we would all go, "But you haven't taught us anything about it."

But when I got to college, I realized that he really did teach me a lot. I just wasn't aware of it at that time. And he was a hard taskmaster when it came to grading and, you know, he would just walk in and say, "Well, today we are going to have a test on the first ten chapters," and pass it out. And we'd say, "But you never really covered this. You talked about Bill." But you'd still have the test. It was rough being in his class.

And I think they kind of sheltered us from the Greensboro community too. It was almost like we were a little enclave unto ourselves. We couldn't stop at any of the cafes on East Market Street. On Sundays, we walked to church, all the girls in front [and] all the boys behind.

WL: Did--you then went to Winston-Salem following graduation from Immanuel Lutheran?

YL: Right. Well, I didn't go right away. I was dating a guy in the seminary so after graduation we got married. He continued in the seminary and I didn't go to school until--then he went to seminary two years. The third year he decided he wanted to go to A&T and finish his degree there. By that time, we had two children. After he finished college then I went to Winston-Salem, which was like three years after I graduated.

WL: I see.

YL: So then I went to Winston-Salem and went there three years, and then during that time

the marriage was really on the rocks. And that's when I had the job with North Carolina Mutual one summer and just decided that, you know, I wasn't going to go back. And then later on, I finished [at] Guilford College since I've been in Greensboro.

WL: I see. And you worked with Mutual for how long?

YL: I worked with them for a couple of years and then I went with Western Electric. And, I guess, I was with them--well that's how I really came to Greensboro this last time to live. Being with Western Electric and commuting back and forth to Greensboro just really got to be rough. I didn't have a car. I would ride with someone who was coming to school at A&T in the morning and catch the bus. And there was no interstate then. And I remember the bus came down Spring Garden Street and would turn on what is now Holden Road--I think it was Oakland then--and go over to what is now West Friendly, at that time it was still West Market, I think. And that was the loop out through Colfax to Winston.

And I got off work at 4:15 [p.m.] and, you know, if I couldn't have been there--that bus came like 4:20 or something at that turn. So that meant I had to come catch the city bus downtown to the bus station, and wait till about six o'clock till the next time I could get a bus to Winston. So I'd often--and the bus went--I don't know where the bus went. It went to Kernersville. It went to Colfax. It, you know, was just a local--it came into the Waughtown section of Greensboro [Winston-Salem] which was good because I lived on that side of Winston, I mean.

But it would often be eight thirty or nine o'clock when I would pick up my sons. And then the next morning, you know, you've got to be ready because this guy that we were all riding with in the mornings had an early class at A&T. So it was just really hectic so I started looking for a place over here. Plus, the job that I had there was beginning to phase out and they were going to let some people come to Greensboro so I had put in for one of those jobs. And that's how I came here. And then I just decided, well, the best thing for me to do was just come and live here. So that's how I got in Greensboro. That was 1959 when I came to Greensboro. And that was, you know--I was at Western Electric. That was probably the most harrowing experience with segregation that I can recall.

WL: How so?

YL: Because, well, first of all, there were probably in that plant a maximum of twenty blacks working. You were treated well. You got the same pay. You worked side by side. But they still had the segregated bathrooms in the plant. And I remember the black women's bathroom was just like a little closet almost, you know. And the white employees, even though you--it was really interesting that Western Electric tried to have an integrated setting within a segregated environment in this community.

The cafeteria was open to everyone, but the blacks kind of staked out their little place where we ate, which was really more like an anteroom. But we chose to eat there because in the main dining room there were all these murals of black pickininnies, picking cotton and stuff, you know. I really recall that quite vividly.

WL: Which was offensive.

YL: It was very offensive and many of the whites were--really most of us had college or college degrees. You couldn't even get in Western Electric in those days. I remember when I first applied in Winston-Salem and the Lexington Road plant was in my neighborhood, and I went there and applied. And all the blacks that I knew were being placed through the Winston-Salem Urban League, and you went in as a maid or a janitor. So I said, "I won't be placed by them. I refuse to go in that way."

And somehow--I don't even remember how I got the interview when I did. And the man who interviewed me--well, by that time I had kind of begun to hear all these high salaries they were making and all. And I thought, "Well if I am going to work, I really want to have a decent income," because this was during the time when my marriage was really floundering.

And [pause] he said, "Well, I'm just so impressed with you. I just will not bring you in this maid's position." And I'm glad he didn't, because when I finally got hired--and everybody wanted to know how did I get hired directly working on the assembly line. But see, I had this man's name and I just kept in touch with him all the time. And everybody else had been brought in this other way.

And there--the bathrooms there were segregated. There was one a long, long way--well, Lexington is a huge plant and we had to go this long way. They had one in the office area which was through a breezeway into another building, which was supposed to be off-limits to anybody who worked in the plant. That was for the secretaries only. And then this other one for people in the plant was down this long, long--I don't how long--you know that plant is several city blocks--then you had to go downstairs.

And they had female security guards, and they would come in and observe while you were in the restrooms. I just never figured that one out. But, you know, you could only stay in there like five minutes. If you wanted to chat with somebody, she would make you leave. Everything was very regimented, you know. And I guess that's the way it is in industry and I hadn't had this experience at--you know, you could go to the bathroom at a certain time. You could get some water at a certain time.

And the white employees really, you know, they didn't try to hide their feelings at all, many of them. They would just say awful things about you, especially the older workers. Now the younger ones didn't seem--you know, on the lines we would laugh and talk once they got to know you. But it was almost like you went through this initiation. And they never placed the blacks in close proximity to each other. You would be in this

sea all alone and there may be somebody else you can see two assembly lines down. But not--so, at break time we would all--had certain little places we would gather just to keep each other supported for the--go through the rest of the day.

But then, there were some of the supervisors, especially those, I think, who had maybe come from the North with the company, who really tried to treat you as well as they could under the regiment such as it was. When I came to Greensboro, I recall pretty much the same set up. It was assumed that you didn't know how to do anything. I had already worked for the company then about three years. But I remember that at Merritt Drive that there were about ten or twelve of us who had come from Winston, but I was the only black woman in the group. And we each had to sit there and go through kind of a little training school to learn to do the way they did it here, because we all had different backgrounds, but we basically knew. But it was very interesting to me that the whites were placed really quickly until finally I was the last one left.

But, you know, they didn't want to give me any of the real skilled work. And the first job they gave me was--you know, they had to give me something because of the union. But it was just very, very degrading, because the first job they gave me was to wash printed circuit boards. This was during the days of the development of the Nike Zeus rockets, and they had found that if these boards had any fingerprints or any solder or anything on it made them malfunction.

So here I sat with three years of college in my background, and most of these people hadn't even been to high school, and they were wiring and assembling. And here I sat with--well first, the fumes were so bad that they had this kind of metal shield over it, but it was completely--I couldn't even see the person on the other side of me. And I sat there, and right where you are sitting would be like where they painted these things when they were finished. So it was a huge spray painting thing so between that, you know, I was just ill all the time from the fumes. And I think this fan and all of this was put in later after I had just been really sick a couple of times.

So I really had no contact with anybody and I sat there and had a brush and I washed these printed circuit boards all day long. I mean that alcohol, that industrial alcohol was just really tearing up your hands so finally I complained and they started getting gloves. The engineers really tried to help make it more bearable. But you know, then they would come over and look at the situation, and they'd go back over to the office. This went on for a long, long time, but by that time I was separated from my husband so I really needed that job.

And this was about the time that by then the marches had started in downtown Greensboro. And you would have thought that I organized the whole thing. [laughs] I mean it was just that bad. There were a couple of other black women on that floor. But, you see, not only--the hierarchy was this: you're either in the white group, or you're a black from Greensboro who's been here all the time, "But these people keep coming from Winston-Salem and are taking our jobs." [It's] kind of like women taking men's

jobs, so I was in that group, so you see I was totally ostracized. There were other black women on that floor who were doing what everybody else--but because I came from Winston--

WL: You weren't from Greensboro. You were displaced--

YL: Right. Yes. I was displaced twice. But I began to make friends with these guys who did the painting. And then there was a white female that was from West Virginia somewhere, and they probably didn't like her any better than they did me. She was very friendly. So finally they placed her over there working with me so we were both were back there. I washed the coils and she did some kind of inspection and then they went into this oven or whatever. So she and I kind of, you know, we starting kind of spelling each other because it was just really, really monotonous. I mean it would drive you crazy.

But they would be saying all of these [things], you know, every morning when these marches started and all the Woolworth's stuff. I hadn't even been downtown to see any of that but I knew everything that was going on. There was no such thing as being tactful or being careful. I mean it was just blatant, blatant racist kinds of things. And I decided that the only way I could deal with that was that I couldn't keep quiet anymore. So there was this old woman at that time--I'm sure she was in her fifties. I remember her--she was from Colfax. Her name was Hortense[?]. And they farmed. They--nearly all of these people farmed and then came in worked in factories during the day.

And oh, she was just vehement. And one day I just stood up and I looked across there and I said, "Well, you are talking as if you are talking directly to me. And I'm not the cause of any of your problems." And I think--you know, the whole place--I dared to speak to this woman and speak to her in that way. And I don't know what else I said but I'm sure when I got through I had said everything that had been on my mind. And [pause] that woman later became my best friend. And after that the other women began to open up to me. Oh, they began to bring me gifts.

And during that time I had a younger son who was stricken with meningitis, and he later died. But all during that terrible time, these same people who had hated me so--and I mean this was just the course of another year maybe. They just became such--and some of them still call me up now, or I run into them in the mall or in a restaurant, and it's just like a grand reunion. But it was like that broke the ice. And I just decided I just wasn't going to take it anymore. And of course, this went through the whole floor. And I just said to the other women when we got together at break, "Well, you don't have to take it either."

And of course, then from that time on, everything that they passed around for the employees to participate in like the [unclear], I signed up for everything. I even--they even had this so-called, it wasn't exactly a beauty pageant, but they selected Ms. Winoco[?] every year. Well, no black woman--I signed up for that. And they had it down

here at the Greensboro Women's Club, and I've still got my pictures. I said, "I'm going to do everything," you know. I was just--the [Greensboro] Coliseum was pretty new and there weren't any shows much--I remember Western Electric put on some kind of follies every year--I signed up for that. They had a choral group at Christmas time--I signed up for that. And I mean, I wouldn't let anybody refuse me anything anymore. And that has pretty much been my adult life. I said to a friend at Guilford College just this week, I said, "Are you going to--"

[End Tape 1, Side B--Begin Tape 2, Side A]

WL: Okay.

YL: One of the things that I experienced because of this pioneering, so to speak--I mean, I was very active, I was in everything. Whatever they had to offer the employees at that time, I became a part of it. And none of the other blacks would participate, but they always wanted to put me out there to represent them. Of course, then there came the accusations of being, you know, Uncle Tom or Oreo and all of that. I had to contend with all of that. But I just said, "Well I don't care," you know, "this is my life," and--

WL: You experienced pressure from other blacks?

YL: From both sides, right. And, you know, it was just really, really bad. That here you are, you are caught in the middle and you're doing what you feel you have to do. I did not like--and I'm not a person--I may be very angered by something and I may speak very forcefully about it, but my style is not to go around just, you know. I can't carry all this hate around on my shoulders all the time.

Because, for instance, that woman, Hortense, for example, because Hortense had once done me wrong that I could never be her friend. And I think the blacks didn't like this, because I began to go over and eat in this dining room that had that wallpaper. But then I got in a place where I could speak out against that. And say--and what they did, they just covered it up. You know, like put sheetrock up or whatever they did. Anyway, it became a painted wall. And I understand when the mall was redone, when they began to--that it was still there so it truly had been covered up.

But, you know, just a lot of things like that. I felt that I'm an employee here and the management never said, "you can't do this." They wanted you to do whatever you as an employee felt you could do. And finally we got rid of those segregated restrooms, too. They put in a whole--they just built totally new women's restrooms, just tore all of them out. The ones that are there at the mall now are the ones that they built. But--

WL: What was the role of the union in all of this?

YL: You know, they wanted your dues. They wanted you as members. But they didn't care if you came to the union meetings. They just wanted you to vote for whatever they wanted. And I guess I gave them a lot of trouble because one time, you know, they would want us to just go on these wildcat walkout kinds of things. And I said, "Well, you know, I have to think about how am I going to take care of my family and so on and is this really what we need to do. Tell me what the other side of the issue is." They kind of wanted to feed you their own propaganda. I really believe that unions have a place in the workforce--workplace, but I really believe the workforce needs to be well informed.

But I began to, with some other white women, organize a women's kind of--not an auxiliary but just women union members--that there were questions that we wanted to ask. They later on had a union hall right across the street and we just went anyhow. And we finally got female union stewards. It was pretty much a male enclave at first, but once we got the women union stewards in there a lot of things got better.

Later on, I left manufacturing and transferred to the office and later came and worked at the Wachovia building and so on. And when I really ended up leaving the company, it just really got bad because I was confronted again with a new kind of racism. When they brought Bell Labs here and had the Groometown Road site, I was at the Wachovia building. And my supervisor at that time thought, "Yolanda, this would be a real advancement." It was going to be a chance to get into computers and all of that. And I was working in the engineering area and had all kinds of top secret clearances and stuff. You know, he was just really impressed with my progress and he thought that this was certainly going to be an upgrade for me.

Well, lo and behold I took that job out there and it was more of what I experienced when I came from Winston, because Bell Labs had mostly been in Burlington. They brought all of their people from Burlington there, and all of these men were trying to get their wives who worked in the Burlington plant jobs up here, because they had heard that was going to phase out and all that. So here you sit in another foreign land, so to speak. And I went--And they never, ever gave me any real computer training, although that was going to be a computer center.

WL: This was at--excuse me. This was about when? Do you remember the year?

YL: This was about 1969, somewhere along there. Maybe '68. Because the Guilford Center was still being built; I don't think it was open yet. Because I went from the Wachovia building over there. And it was more of this ostracism. Finally, because I kept pressing--see, I no longer had a union to back me up. We got all the benefits that the union negotiated so far as salary and vacation and holidays and all that, but when you had a grievance you had nowhere to take it. So I would keep asking, "Well when am I going to start?"

So finally they put me on a real early, early type computer that they had at that time where you learn to do data entry and you could correct the computer pocked cards. They had a big drafting section there that everything went onto computer cards, all these--so I did learn how to, if there were errors in those when they had gone through the computer in there, they were thrown out. Then I had this little job that I could go back and do the corrections but never get to go work with a real big computers. You know, they had huge computers, this was when computers were tall as this room and all of that. Never got any experience with that.

So I was kind of like a technical clerk who was doing this interface with the real computer department. I had a desk in drafting which had--on the second floor--and then my division had about five hundred drafters. And I had a desk that faced the wall just like that in this room full of men sitting [unclear]. And, of course, we didn't know anything about sexual harassment, but I always had to sit there all day and listen to their crude jokes and stuff.

But there was a white female who had been joining this and we each had like half of that universe that we serviced. Of course, they gave her all the work, mine and their's. They just kind of made me a gopher. You know, I could go pick up, go downstairs and pick up their cards from the computer system and that kind of thing, you know, but never any real work. Even when there was corrections to be done, which I had been trained to do, it was kind of like a steno pool but only it was a pool of data entry things and you could go there and just anybody could use them. She was, you know, assigned to do all of that.

So it just really--it just really was bad. And I had gone through a lot of things by this time in my personal life. And I guess I was divorced by this time. My youngest child had died. It was just a real bad time, so my health really began to suffer and I was out of work a lot. But everything according to their guidelines, you know:doctor's report; they had nurses who came out to visit you to see if you really were sick and all that stuff, so they knew I wasn't malingering or feigning anything.

But then they began to--and of course, when I had this child who had meningitis, I had to be out of work a lot with him. And they began to--they were really trying to make a case to terminate me. And I sensed that right away. And really, it was the kind of thing at Western Electric, and I don't know how it is now, but I've talked to some people who are going through similar kinds of things from time to time, even at Guilford Center they come to file complaints, and I know exactly what they are describing. There is no work to do.

I could have been there all day and sat at my desk and looked at this blank wall. You can't even put a magazine on your desk. At least you couldn't at that time. You just had to sit there. And when it was ten o'clock you could get up and take a break and when it was lunch time you could go to take your--and then you came back. So it wasn't that any work was not being done because of my absence.

But I remember one of the most devastating things, during that time, I had to have a hysterectomy. And I remember the company doctor calling my doctor and saying to him did he not think that I was just--it was just all psychological. So I said to them, "Are you saying that my doctor is not a," you know, "credible person? That he has no integrity? That he is just performing this surgery, you know, just to get the money?" I just threw it right back at them.

Well, then the next thing my physician said is that they called him and wanted him to agree with them that I needed to get psychiatric counseling. He said, well, I was the most together person he knew and he just--you know. And many [men and?] women, even now, they still use some of these tactics when women, when they're ill or have to be absent. I know a one there right now who has lupus and she is going through a lot of these same kind of thing. And so--

WL: It's a form of harassment.

YL: Yes, it really is. And what finally happened in 1970, because I even asked to be transferred away from Bell Labs back to Western Electric, because at that time Bell Labs got all of its important services from Western Electric. And I learned from a friend in personnel at the Wachovia building that they had sent something to my file saying that I was not to be considered for any upgrades or lateral moves. And I sensed this and I knew she was high enough up that she could tell--she could look at the file and tell me because I had no access.

Because everything was done on seniority and I had more seniority than anybody at that location among the women. And of course, that was another thing, so what they had done, not only harassment to the extent that I couldn't be transferred back to the Wachovia universe, neither could I be considered for any of the other openings that I was qualified to do in their universe. So, you know, a lot of that kind of thing went on.

Well, I--you know, you had a Bell Labs supervisor who had nothing to do with the administrative things. You know, you just did his work or whatever he wanted to be done. And the man that I worked for pretty much just took--I'm just not going to get involved in this at all, you know. But then they had a man there from Western Electric who was like over all of the Western Electric employees to administrate. And I mean, he really tried his best to beat me into the ground. I mean, punitive things that you just wouldn't believe, you know. I started having these migraines.

During that time, I remarried, and my husband taught at A&T. He said, "Well, why don't you just leave?"

And I said, "Well that's what they want me to do," you know.

And he said, "Well every morning when you get up and get ready to go to work you just get ill."

And I really--sometimes I just couldn't even--I had to force myself to walk

through the doors. And I'd only be ill when I was there, you know. But the harassment was just unreal.

And there were one or two, by this time, one or two females who were doing drafting. They were white women. And they were there as contract employees, not hired by the organization. And they were even experiencing a lot of this same thing. And I would often, you know, share notes with them. And they said, "Well, your's is more blatant because of your color, but I am experiencing a lot of that, like not getting decent assignments because not only am I a female, but I'm a contract employee," and they hated contract employees. The company had to bring these people in because it seemed that the workers had some way of slowing down the work so they could make the job run longer. You know, it was their job security. They were well versed in how to do this.

And I used to wonder how could these guys sit here and make these elaborate salaries and all they would do is sit up there all day long and talk about the ballgame or what was on TV all last night, who they were going to lay tonight and all that stuff. And then maybe one hour of the day they would dash off something for me to take to the computer center. And then they would sit--but they were all assigned to these various projects from these big--you know some of them was with Lockheed and different companies that we had contracts with for designing things. And so they just prolonged the job as long as they could.

And, you know, for women at that time, it was really bad for women in that setting. Now, the way it finally ended was after going through all of this and being told that "you can't be out anymore for any reason, for aches and--" I went through all of that fine. And apparently I felt, well, they wanted me out so bad that they just felt with all these restrictions that I couldn't make it but I did.

So then, what they finally did was they went all the way back to when I was in Winston-Salem. I had one maternity leave during that time that I was out like eight weeks and they said I should have come back at six, so they took those two weeks and made those unauthorized absences or something like that, and compiled everything all when my child was ill, and every bit of this to paint this really negative picture.

And they said, you know, to keep from having that follow me everywhere I could just resign. I said, "I won't, you'll have to terminate me," because I was determined to get the severance pay. But if I resigned I wouldn't, that was their policy. So I just rode it out. And I came every day. Every day I said, "Well, they're going to give it today." And it was almost like a game, you know, "she thinks we're going to do it today, so we won't do it today."

It was really interesting that some of the managers that were there at that time--I mean really top people, and they had to sign off on this. And it's almost like any organization where the top management will say "Well, a subordinate doesn't really--it's not fair what they are doing, but because they are managers, you know, we give them the freedom to manage in however--in whatever way they want.

Of course, I've had occasions since I've been away from there to encounter some of those top management people in other places, and most of them remember me and know me well. And I--we had a time, a chance to talk about that. I said, you know, "that was probably one of the better things in life that happened to me, because at that time I thought that all of my life revolved about coming here--coming there and working for you and there was no other world out there. And I got out there and I found there was another whole world where I could really move, and that people did appreciate my abilities" and all of that.

So it was one of the better things that happened to me, although I didn't see it that way at that time. They even said to me, "Hey you are married to a college professor now, so it shouldn't bother you at all. You can go home and you don't really have to work." You know.

WL: Did this whole experience--in this whole experience, did you think about your situation in primarily gender terms, do you think, in terms of this environment of men, or was it a combination of racial and gender?

YL: At that time--at that time, I hadn't quite reached that point. I guess the whole civil rights movement was what made me be able to look back on it and put it in that perspective, because we began then to look at all of that sexism and racism as parallel to each other. I think it certainly had a lot to do with the kind of work I am doing now. I became very aware in other work settings not to let these kinds of things--I mean, I was really naive during those years and just having all of these personal problems, you know, I felt, well, I just had to take it no matter what. And they--as long as they let me work and I got a paycheck--and it was after that, and I think--I have said to other women who work there now, or have worked there since that time, when they've told me other kinds of things they've encountered. And a lot of them have said to me, "Well, we wished that we had been strong enough to walk away the way you did."

I said, "Well, you could have; you still can. Nobody has to be--." And, you know, since that time I worked at the Center for Creative Leadership for six years. That experience with Western Electric did not hurt me at all in getting employed there. I went there to do just a part-time job. That's all I wanted to do at that time, because I was kind of trying to decide what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. And I was thinking about getting back in school. But at that time, when I went to the center and I worked part-time, the job just grew and grew. I really went first to work for the Smith Richardson Foundation. And then the center recruited me over to their side. I saw a lot of this kind of thing there but more subtle. I was very disappointed in that because--just because of what they are about there.

For instance, they still--they didn't have then and still don't have any black female professional staff. They do have one black male, but they've just gotten him in the

last year. And I've talked to him, you know, and how he was recruited. One black female is telling me now that they are kind of talking to her trying to recruit her, and you know, and she's asking me about it. I said, "Well, you have to make your own decision. If you go I would say go there as you would go to any job and maybe be very selfish about it. What does this job have to offer me?"

It was really amazing to me when I was there. And I really carved out my niche there. I have good relations still with the center in many ways, but it's because of my experience at Western Electric and I decided I won't let this happen to me at another place.

When David Campbell came there, I don't know what he recognized in me, but he began to put me on various employee committees that he set up. And I was not a professional staff. And every time, you know, I brought in whatever he wanted for that committee, he would give me another assignment. And my responsibilities really began to grow. I had a lot of informal power when I worked there. And I mean, I'm not saying that with any arrogance at all.

WL: What exactly did you do there?

YL: I went there first just to run like a reproduction center for them. The president's secretary at that time was a very powerful woman there. And she became my friend and taught me everything about that organization. She knew that she was going to be leaving at some point. She was going to--she was married to a local chiropractor, but they were divorcing and she was going to marry this psychologist there and they were going to Hartford. And she really began to confide in me and was preparing me to assume a lot of the things that she--I mean, nothing went on there without her involvement. I mean, she was just so smart in every way.

A lot of her responsibilities--although I didn't work for the president--began to come my way. So then the business manager gave me a lot of the responsibilities that he didn't have time for. So I became their procurement agent, which was really a pretty powerful position to have, because every program--everything that they do, something has to be procured for that.

So I sat in on a lot of professional staff meetings where they were designing programs. I introduced a lot of new business methods that I thought could, you know, help things work better. Not getting an awful lot of credit for it, but--and a lot of jealousy from some of the white women who were professionals. And it was very interesting because they would write these nasty little notes to the business manager about me and he would share them with me, and say, "Well, what do you think about this?"

But it was very difficult when one time he went to India for two or three months on some project and left his secretary kind of in charge of his office. And that was when, you know, the women really began to gang up against me and go to other males in the

organization who, in turn, would come and say, “Well, So-and-So gave this to me and, you know, I just don’t understand what it’s all about.”

I said, “Well, I do.” You know.

He says, “Well what should I do?”

I said, “Well, you know, I can’t tell you what to do. Apparently you are in charge in someway and my boss is absent.” Of course, I had the kind of boss who didn’t want a whole lot of this coming to him all the time.

And I just began to see that--by this time I was enrolled in Guilford--one of the committees I had sat on, that they were trying to set up a tuition reimbursement thing for employees. And we got that implemented, but I think everybody thought it was for the white males to use. And I was one of the first ones to sign up. And of course, I recruited a lot of other white females. My boss didn’t even think that I was going to sign up.

But I think David had a--you know, he was very fond of me, and we still correspond and all. But--and I think because of that relationship that David and I had, it kept me there a lot longer than I would have stayed, because he really saw that the other responsibilities I had--well, by this time, their printing had mushroomed and we were no longer just a copying center. So I had to do all the research for setting up a new printing department. And it’s moved twice since then.

But [pause] I go out there once in a while. But a lot of the things that I laid out [and] had researched had been implemented. All the mailing operations---when David Campbell began to say what his projections were over the next five years, I could see that a lot of this was going to mushroom, so I began to go to the post office and talk to them. And the center even sent me to Miami, Florida, to a big postal kind of thing. So it was like there was one side where people were saying, “Here Yolanda, take this and run with it.” And other people were saying, “No, you can’t do that. You’re not a professional.”

Then [pause] David decided that employees should also have a chance to go to their training programs at no cost, and of course I jumped on that. So in addition to my other duties--and by this time I had a staff of about four or five people, two or three running the print shop, a courier, a switchboard operator. But all of this stuff is things that I used to do, and as it grew and all of it, you know, was just like--and by this time I had an office about twice as big as this room and had all of these people. And everything was going beautifully.

But because I was going to school, all kinds of barriers--and I had every intention of remaining there after I finished school. So the first move was that they began to take some of the things away from me and give it to one of my employees, you know. But I would still do the procurement and all of this. But then they said, “We want you to--we want her to handle all of your administrative leave and stuff”--just reversing our roles really. And she was very uncomfortable with it, because I had really hired her.

But, you know, I said, “That’s okay,” because I needed to start looking in another direction. So I went to school at night for one semester and I decided--well, I didn’t want

to go to school forever. I just wanted--and they said you could go in the daytime as long as you made that time up. So there was a couple of classes I needed that overlapped my lunch hour and maybe another hour during the day, and I could just make it up at the end of the day. You had to make it up in that pay period. But they didn't want me to have that. And I said, "Well you can't have this thing for one person or for another whole group and deny me that opportunity."

But, you know, they tried to rationalize and say "But, you know you realize that some people are dependent on you during the day and if you aren't here, and what if this comes up?" And by this time I was approving all of the bills that were being paid for the stuff that was bought. But I had all of that under control. But it was like, "You aren't going to be here to supervise these people and we can't let them be here unsupervised."

And just a lot of things--I remember I ended up writing a letter to John Redd[?], who was the president, detailing a lot of this stuff and how I was denied a raise one time because I wouldn't, you know, acquiesce to whatever it was. And, you know, I said, "I will not stand for this. I think you really need to talk to my boss about this kind of treatment." So, you know, I just really had to always be fighting those kinds of battles.

So I just finally decided, I told my husband, "I'm just going to bite the bullet. I'm going to write this letter. I'm going to resign and I'm going to go to school full-time."

And he says, "Well, you have to do what you have to do."

And not really knowing how I was going to pay for it. But I went on and enrolled for the fall semester. And right after I enrolled and I had paid--you know, that was paid for. And it--I kept putting off, you know, giving the letter of resignation to my boss. And really, what he had done effectively was put this other person between me and him, where he and I had really--and I never knew his reasons for this. It was like this man that I had this wonderful relationship with [and] apparently somebody somehow had sabotaged that. And it all--it had something to do with this time when he was in India so long. And I don't know whether he felt well really all of these things were done by me in his absence and he had been wrong or what. But he effectively put another female between me and him so it was very hard to talk to him. And, you know, when I would even make appointments he would put them off forever and ever and he was too busy and all of that.

So I decided, you know, it's time to go. So one day, I just went in one morning, and I took the letter and left it on his desk. And oh, he came to my office right away just so upset, "Well, what is wrong? What do we--" You know, all of this.

I said, "Well, I just really need to go to school full-time."

He said, "Well, why don't you take a leave?"

And I said, "No, I would prefer not to take a leave. If I come back I'd rather be hired in another area."

And it was as if, you know, everybody was so sad when I quit and [saying], "What are we going to do?" And even after I left, they were calling me all the time,

"How do we do this and how do we do that?"

Finally, I said, "This just can't go on." And I told them that I would prefer that they let this other person handle it all, because they had moved her into that position. And what had been happening really was I was really covering her so she was looking good, but when I was gone--so they have sent her to a lot of training kinds of things since. She's still there and, you know, I still--

Whenever I go out--I've been out there recently for the executive women's program, and they have been very supportive to me in this position. With some of the bigger programs we've had they've worked with us, you know. So I've really tried to capitalize on the good parts of that relationship and not get bogged down, because I figured getting all of the training in their various courses--a lot of that was preparing me for what I'm doing right now.

WL: Do you--let's just go back a little bit before this period and talk about the impact of the civil rights movement. We talked about your experiences when you were at Immanuel Lutheran and the kinds of things that you saw downtown. [pause] Do you have any memories of the way the change came? You know, just on a day-to-day kind of level in Greensboro?

YL: In the community?

WL: Yeah, in the community.

YL: Yes, I do. You know, I--

[End Tape 2, Side A--Begin Tape 2, Side B]

YL: Okay. I remember, you know, the black community really coming together. I rode the bus a lot in those days. And people would--from all walks of life--would, you know, get on the bus. And especially, the people who--I'll just use Irving Park as an example--the people who worked there. They would talk about what their employers had to say over dinner or at breakfast, and how they felt about--and some were supportive and some would ask them, "Well what is it that you all want? Why are you acting this way?" And, you know, a lot of that good kind of conversation went on just riding the buses in the mornings where I would be transferring to go to Merritt Drive.

And to see people from all income levels and class backgrounds begin to say, "Well, we are going to see this thing through." I never, because of my children, never got to come downtown and participate in the marches. But I did a lot of things on--like one of the things I remember at my church, we had a white minister at that time and he was very active in this movement. And he would go to the jail--I'm sure some of our own members

were jailed--and he would come back and tell us how all of these women would be just in one room with no sanitary facilities, and just things like the church getting together boxes of sanitary napkins even for the women. They were--there was nothing, you know, no toothbrushes, no, you know, all of this kinds of things that we just found very deplorable in our society.

Then I guess as an outgrowth of that, I got very involved in the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and the Greensboro Citizens Association. [I] did a lot of things educationally with them to make people more aware of their rights, of what the laws--changes in the laws were going to be, or what it is that we were even working with. I was really involved more in that way during that time.

WL: This would be--this is after the marches in '63?

YL: Right. This would be in the late sixties--

WL: The late sixties?

YL: Middle to late sixties.

WL: What sort of changes came to downtown after--

YL: Well, you know, I remember--I'm trying to think was it the S&W Cafeteria that was in back of Belk building? And then the Mayfair [Cafeteria] was down the other corner where First Union [Bank] is. And I think the Mayfair just closed, you know, it was integrated as I recall. I don't remember going there to eat, but I remember that, you know, after--because what would happen is when the blacks would come to eat in these places, then the whites would stop coming for a long time, and so business would get really bad.

I remember the S&W at first going through a little of this but they just stayed and hung tight. And when I worked at the Wachovia building that was a place lots of blacks and whites seemed to choose to go for lunch. But finally, you know, I think what happens is things go through these cycles and you get a lot of people coming, and then all of a sudden people say, "Well I can go anywhere now." So people were going wherever they wanted.

One of the sad things to me is that once we as black people began to be able to go anywhere, our own institutions began to die. Our own restaurants--I remember a lovely, lovely bakery on East Market Street. This woman ran Evelyn's Bakery that really had wonderful food. And I think they tried to relocate to Gorrell Street for a while. And they finally had to close. Some of those things like that that we lost as a result.

I can recall my oldest son who is now vice chancellor at North Carolina Central [University] being in maybe in the second class at Smith High School when it opened.

And at that time it was the freedom of choice days. And he decided that he would go to Smith to high school. And he and I'll say maybe ten other kids in our southeast Greensboro neighborhood--there was one school bus that picked up all the kids who went to Smith. They were picked up somewhere near Richardson Hospital. And he had to walk over there every morning to catch that bus or else he had no way to get to school.

And he began--and I had always been very, very active in every PTA [Parent Teacher Association] that my kids ever went to at school. One time, I think I was in four in one time [laughs] and holding office in all of them. But I hadn't--you know, that's what got me active at Smith. And he came home and started telling me this story about--again, very much like what I had experienced at Western Electric--all these black kids being made to sit in the library each day, while all the other kids went to classes. Well then they placed all the girls, and all the males still had to sit in the library every day.

WL: All day?

YL: All day long. I mean this is not like two or three days. This is weeks into the school year. And I said, "Well what do you do?"

"We don't do anything."

"Are you reading any books?"

"No, the librarian just acts like we're not there except to tell us to keep quiet."

Well, I decided, "Well, you know, I'm just not going to stand this." And somehow I got hold of an announcement of the--I don't even think it was the PTA. I think it was the PTA executive board was going to meet probably about "what are we going to do with these black students?"

Well, I went to the meeting. I don't remember if some teacher told me about it. I guess my reputation for not minding authority, you know, just go to these meetings. And I sat there and I listened and I listened. And they were talking about all of their plans for the year. And it must have been like an executive meeting because there was probably no more than twenty people there. And I finally--you know, some of the things they were talking about I had a lot of experience in.

And I began to say, "Oh, well let me to tell you how we handled that at Caldwell School." Well, you see, Caldwell School went through all of this--you probably heard about Gillespie School and Caldwell. Then they closed Caldwell and then they made it a black school. And that was about the time I came to Greensboro to live. And my children's first school in Greensboro was Caldwell School. So we--I remember that we had to organize this brand new PTA for the first time. So here Smith is a new school trying to organize a PTA. So I wanted to share some of my exper--and you know, they didn't even want to let me talk. I just had to be--I would try to be patient. I would say, "Well, let me tell you how this was done in another school." Well, it was like these kind of dirty little looks and, you know, "be quiet and know your place."

But I was very insistent. And I said that there were a number of black families that the parents would make wonderful members of the PTA if they would only be invited. And it was--well, you know, it wasn't really like "we really don't want to," but "if you would go out and recruit them."

And that was a hard--I said, "Oh yes." And I was surprised at the people who turned me down. They said, "Oh, Yolanda, we don't--we would like to be, but we don't--it's just, it's just too painful. We can't go through that. We just--you know, our children chose to go there. We didn't want them to go there. We wanted them at Lincoln and at Dudley."

Anyway, I gradually began to get a few converts. And I said, "Well just come one time," or whatever, you know. I didn't have a car so I'd say, "Well, will you pick me up and go with me?"

And the full-fledged first PTA meeting that I remember going to there may have been ten black parents who came. The auditorium was just full and I think--you know, no PTA usually has a full attendance like that unless it's a Christmas program or something, visitation of the child's room. And I think they came out because the word got out that the black parents were coming. Well, we began to also talk about the situation these black boys were still in. I mean this is maybe October and these black boys still hadn't been placed. So they began to put them in classes first if they could find a class that didn't have many white girls in it. You know, they'd put them in a class and it would almost be an all male class.

And a lot of that kind of craziness when on. As the parents got more, you know, got stronger and began to speak up--because I said to each parent, "You'll have to speak out for your own child. I'm only going to talk about mine. So I'm not going to do this for your child. You're going to have to come and do it for your own child."

So gradually that was remedied. And my son was somewhat of a leader, and he began to, you know, join things and make friends with the white guys, and he was a bus driver. It was really interesting, he had a route where he picked up all white kids. The old Spring Street School where Weaver Center is, he picked up--his whole route was, you know, in the white community. And he did that, you know, all his senior high years. And the other bus drivers who were white they used to come to my home and visit and so he would go to their's. It turned out some of their parents worked at Western Electric so it kind of brought us together in that regard. [pause]

There was something else about--oh, one other thing about the Smith High School thing. Because Robert, you know, was a joiner and pretty gifted academically, he got involved in some of the student clubs. And I remember that at that time it was kind of a tradition, at least in white high schools, to have kind of a midwinter formal kind of affair. So this was the first year for it at Smith. And I think there was some apprehension, too, that the black kids were coming. As it turned out I think only Robert and one other girl went. And, you know, she wasn't even anybody he was dating but just another student

there and they went. And I can remember her mother bringing her to my house so they could go together. And she and I had known each other a long time.

But what happened at this dance that became a really significant event, so far as civil rights is concerned, is that Robert and one of his bus driver pals, they changed partners. So this white boy was dancing with this black girl and vice versa. And immediately, the principal closed the dance down and told them to be in his office on Monday morning. This was a Friday night thing.

So Robert was just devastated. He wanted to know what he had done wrong. And I told him nothing. And he was very apprehensive about going to the principal's office and I said, "Well you have to go." He really wanted me to go with him. And I said, "I won't go at this point. First, I will have to see how it's handled." And over the weekend, you know, we talked about everything from being expelled from school to whatever. And I said, "Well, it's possible that he may do that, but on the other hand, I feel that he's going to try to handle it very carefully within the school setting, because he will not want this publicity." And so it never hit the papers but it was well known through the Smith School family. And I had pretty much said, "Well if he says this, you say that," and so on. We had gone through that about all weekend. I said, "You know you can always call me if things go badly and you are going to be expelled. You call me. I will be there."

So he came home that day and I was very apprehensive because I didn't hear from him but I rode it out. And he said, "It was pretty bad." He was accused--you know, it was like he initiated this; he made this happen and so on. And because of this, he had a really rough time with the principal out there even though he was really a good student and all of that.

Of course now, this principal is retired. And I can't even remember his name. But every once in a while, we'll be somewhere and he'll come up and he remembers me, and of course he sees me from this job. And he asks about Robert and so, you know, it gives me a lot of pleasure to tell him he's a vice chancellor in the university system.

But, [pause] when he--I remember when he was applying to various colleges and universities. He [the principal] wouldn't even write him a--because he was recruited by American University in Washington, and one of the things he had to have in all of these papers was this excellent recommendation from his school principal. And, you know, he wouldn't write it. So he ended up--Fisk had recruited him also, and he ended up going to Fisk. But you know, just a lot of these kinds of things. They, when you think about them, they all kind of come together in different ways.

WL: He was--your son was under obviously a lot of pressure. And it was a stressful year for him, no doubt?

YL: Yeah, well I think the whole three years probably was, but less so with, you know, because with passage of time. He never really got in the principal's good graces. But by

this time a number of other black students had come, and I had been real insistent about this placement of my child in a class. And other parents began--because see, basically, kids were having a ball, they weren't having to do anything. But, you know, I told them I expected more of my child and I expected more of them and I expected them to help him meet his--whatever his goals might be. So, you know, I just found a lot of that had to be done.

WL: There weren't any--I don't suppose there were any black teachers at Smith?

YL: Not at that time. Not that first year, I don't think. Maybe the last year I can remember one or two kind of, you know, like with sports or something. Because he ran track and I can remember going to the booster clubs meeting and even to the banquets and making these other parents come. And I think during that time I remember an assistant coach. But that was kind of the way things began to open up.

WL: Did the attitudes of white parents change very much over time?

YL: Some of them did. I remember there was a--well, I don't know if you've ever heard of Andy Gottschall. He's deceased, but I think he was with the American Friends Service Committee and he was a [unclear]. And he had a child that was in my son's class. I mean, things were so bad, let me tell you what. As a result of this dance situation, some of the parents in Rolling Roads--that's where he lived--began to get together. And I remember going and another black parent attended. And we began to talk about this situation and what could we do outside of the school setting to make things better for our children and help these kids really--I mean what the whole thing was all about: freedom of choice. And then ultimately integration of the school system was coming down the pike. So what could we do for these children who were really pioneers to help them make it easier for the ones who are coming.

So we started having small kinds of things in various homes: parents' meetings back and forth across the community; dialogue; picnics and some of those kinds of things with our children. And to make it more comfortable, the picnics and things were always in one of the white homes.

Finally, we got so bold we thought, "Well, this thing is still festering. Why don't we invite the principal and maybe the assistant principal or somebody to come." Well, by--oh, they absolutely refused to have anything to do with it, and went so far as to tell us that anything that we were doing like this was illegal outside the school system, because it was involving, you know, it was an outgrowth of something that had happened at the schools. And I think Andy ended up telling them to try to enforce that, he would get an attorney. So it was just basically dropped. But--

WL: So your son graduated from high school when?

YL: Let me see, when did he graduate? 1967 I think it was.

WL: Sixty-seven? So this would have been the midsixties?

YL: Right.

WL: So in sum, you got nothing but--you didn't get much preparation from the school--

YL: Absolutely not. Not at that time. But I think because of what went on there I also got--at that time the League of Women Voters did not have black members, but they would have study groups and I was invited to be involved in one of those.

And, of course, one of the things that the NAACP was advocating for was integrated housing, with the idea if the housing is integrated--and of course then we still had neighborhood schools--then through housing, kids would go to school with each other. And the League of Women Voters was doing a study on that at that time. And I remember that a woman named Beverly Mitchell who worked at Cone Mills, who later on--I guess she was putting herself through college then. She went to work with the North Carolina Human Relations Council in Raleigh and subsequently to law school, and is now an attorney in Winston-Salem.

But she and I were invited to join this study group that the league had, you know, on the housing. And these meetings were always held in Starmount or in someplace that we had a hard time finding, but we always got there. I also remember especially meeting in a young woman's home named Cathy Roberts[?]. And these women were very much in favor of this. But their way of doing everything is through studies and making these recommendations and all. Well, we felt that that was a very important thing to do.

And of course then the next thing was that, I guess, through the court cases and everything, I guess, that it began, you know, the mandatory integration of the schools. And I was involved in a lot of meetings in communities, you know, trying to assuage a lot of fears that people had surrounding--and I remember all that very vividly.

WL: Those were the forums that were held--biracial forums?

YL: Right in the early, early seventies when this took place.

WL: Right before massive desegregation, comprehensive--were they successful, you think, on the whole?

YL: You mean the forums?

WL: The forums.

YL: I think the forums were very successful. I can recall that--well, First Lutheran Church used to be right across the street here where that securities building is across from the post office, and a lot of them that I attended were held there. I can recall the first few times that, you know, the blacks kind of sit over here and the whites sit over there. And it was hard to get any conversation going. Hal Sieber was with the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce and they were very involved in helping these things happen. Gradually, over time, they did begin to be open. I'm sure we went through a lot of ventilating and all of that anger that had to come out first before people could really talk. And this even preceded having a human relations department.

WL: What sort of fears did people have about desegregation?

YL: Oh, the usual things. I mean, after all we had seen what had happened in Alabama and Arkansas and those places, and very fearful that that would happen here. I remember especially Gillespie School and the mobs that were out there and tried to keep, you know, maybe they didn't try to keep kids from entering, but yelled obscenities at these little children, as I think that was an elementary school at that time.

WL: This was earlier in the--

YL: That was when the--this was when the, it was the integration, the actual integration. Every night I remember watching on the black and white TV what went on at Gillespie School that day. And I mean that was very close to where we lived. Because, see, at that time, Asheboro Street still had a whole lot of whites still living in this area. And I lived on Brooks Court right behind the old fire station at that time. So that was very close proximity. Caldwell School hadn't been opened yet. It was just closed. And then they opened it, you know, right after that same time.

WL: How did black people feel about the 1971 desegregation, about busing? Was there a feeling that--

YL: I think our expectations of it were different from what it actually turned out to be. Mine certainly were. And a lot of times I think about it and wonder if we really accomplished what we--I wish we could have kept the neighborhood schools with the housing patterns changing. But we didn't even consider, I don't believe, what role economics would have and all that.

My youngest son went to Page [High School]. Let's see, we were in the Dudley

area, but there were just a lot of problems he was having at Dudley. So I went to the superintendent's office and made a request that he go to Page. I was working at the Center for Creative Leadership, so I could take him on my way out there and drop him off at Page. And he really thrived there.

WL: This was what year?

YL: Probably in the--maybe seventy-four, -five, somewhere along in there. And then he rode the city bus back in the evening. Well, of course, the bus that he would ride was the bus that went all through Irving Park, you know, and picked up the maids and all. And he said to me one day, "Momma, I never knew that people lived like that in Greensboro."

And I thought, "Now my child has not just been isolated from everything." I mean, we had taken trips. But I realized he had missed something that had been a part of my growing up years. I had seen middle-class blacks live affluent lifestyles. And he had seen a little of this in Greensboro, but he had never seen people who lived in mansions.

He said, "I thought this was all Hollywood kinds of things." He said, "I only thought people in Hollywood lived like this." And it was very interesting that he said, "Well, you know, I'm really going to have my own home one of these days." This last July he just bought--they just bought their first home. Which I was, you know, I was reminding him of that.

And he said--well, interesting enough, he did not go to college. He said--this was during the time, you know, when all of the college grads were out here making hamburgers and stuff like that. And he said, "Well, I don't want to go to college." He said, "It doesn't pay."

And really, he's done quite well. He's with Westinghouse, and before that he'd been with Maness Electric. But, you know, he was making more money probably than a lot of them that did go on to college. He said, "Why waste all that money and then I'm going to come out and work in a factory or something. I might as well get in there now while they're hiring."

But he, you know, he has done very well. And they seem to be quite happy. And, you know, he's going to be thirty-two--in fact he just turned thirty two. A lot of people age thirty-two have not bought their first home. So I was really pleased for him.

WL: Do you think in retrospect that--well, what do you think in retrospect have been the most important changes in race relations in the last say twenty/twenty-five years in Greensboro?

YL: I think first of all that blacks and whites have a better understanding of each other. There is certainly room for a lot more about cultural kinds of things. But I think by and large--and I just think about when I'm out shopping, a white woman would not hesitate to come

up and say, “Well what do you think about this?” Or I to her, just something like that, you’ve never even spoken to one another.

I don’t think that on the whole people have any concerns like they did at first when blacks moved into their neighborhoods and crosses were burned and that kind of thing. And you may go to another city where I think sometimes in the more urban settings like Chicago you would see more of this being a problem than around here, which is another interesting commentary on the situation. I think that [pause] for minorities who have the economic base, it’s been a lot better. I think for poor people, the goal is a long way from being reached.

I deal a lot with organizations that work with children who live in public housing. Their value systems are much different. We often talk about how material things are more--because they want to be like others, or at least what they perceive others’ lifestyles to be. And I know that most of those parents--[phone rings] excuse me.

[End of Interview]