

INTERVIEW

with

BENNIE HIGGINS

Principal  
Smith High School

December 28, 1990

by Goldie F. Wells

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By Goldie F. Wells

Goldie: I'm at the home of Bennie Higgins in Greensboro, NC. The date is 12/28/90. I'de like for you to tell your name and that you know that this will be in a report.

This is Bennie Higgins and I'm well aware of the fact that this is being recorded.

Goldie: Bennie, the research that I am doing is that I'm going to compare the roles and perceptions of Black high school principals that were principals in 1964, with principals who were principals in 1989. I know now that you are not in the principal's role but you served as a principal in 1989. So I'de like for you to tell me how you became a high school principal.

Mr. Higgins: I started off as a teacher at Dudley High School in 1965. I taught biology for four years and became Dean of Boys. That was a position that many schools, in this area at least, large schools in this area had because they did not have additional assistant principals so they had the Dean of Boys position. I held that for two years, left Dudley High School and went to Proximity School, which was a school with grades four through nine, as assistant principal for one year. That school was closed after that first year that I was there and then I went to Mendenhall Junior High School. I served there as assistant principal for one year and then was transferred to Smith High School as an assistant principal. I was an assistant there for three years and became principal in 1976, and until recently, August 1, I became Director of Secondary Education for the Greensboro Schools.

Goldie: Tell me something about Smith High School and the responsibilities you had at Smith. There are several things that I am going to ask you to address but just tell me something about the makeup of the school and the population, etc.

Mr. Higgins: The school had a student population of just over 1300 students. We had approximately 92 professional staff members and Smith High School--I used to refer to it as the All-American School because it had a broad array of students from many backgrounds. We did not have students--large numbers from any one socio-economic background. We had approximately 48% Black, 47% White and about 5% Asian. Our school served as the site for the EFL Program for high school students and English as a second language students from all over this city attended Smith. I think that the makeup of

our school, I refer to it as an All-American School because the students we had, some students from what you might call upper middle class, middle class, low middle class and low economic students so we had a great variety and I felt that it was a comfortable situation for most of our students and the students generally got along very well--Black, White and the Asians. We had a large number of our former faculty members who are now working in the central office and I used to take great pride in the fact that the makeup of the school and the way the students and teachers related to each other had something to do with many of the folks who received promotions at Smith.

Goldie: Would you tell me about the supervision of personnel and how your teachers were selected?

Mr. Higgins: Okay, I had three assistant principals and usually I would involve at least one of the assistant principals in the initial round of interviewing perspective teachers and we had to interview a minimum of three people and from that number of persons that we interviewed we usually selected two people that I would call back for a second interview by myself. And from there, would usually make the selection. I tried to do it in such a way that either of the two that we would feel happy with either of the two but since I had the primary responsibility for them I wanted it to be primarily my decision of who was selected. But whenever possible I would involve an assistant principal and also usually I would involve a department chairman because I sometimes felt this is something that I heard from an old principal one time. He always advised me and told me that he liked to involve someone in the interview process that the person perhaps who might have had influence but didn't have the final decision and sometimes that person might have been more open with them than they would have with me so in most cases, and most of our hiring was done during the summer, and if the department chairmen were available I would also try to involve them in at least meeting the people. It wasn't a formal interview but it was simply to let the department chairmen acquaint the person with the curriculum and the setup of the school--the classrooms and that sort of thing. I just refer to it as a social interview.

Goldie: Well, then after you made your selection of the one of the two then did you have to...

Mr. Higgins: Then I had to make a recommendation to the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel but before it went to that person it had to go before Linda McDougald who was an administrative assistant and she was responsible for maintaining racial ratios. What is the term I'm thinking of. I, m on tape and I can't think straight.

Goldie: That's all right. I remember that she had a title and she was responsible for--is it affirmative action?

Mr. Higgins: Affirmative Action Offices. Right! So Linda really would make a check on that before it went to the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and once she approved it then it went to the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and generally it was a formality but I think Linda's check was just as important or perhaps more important than the Assistant Superintendent so in a sense principals had total say so in who was hired because I never had a person that I recommended for employment to be turned down so it was more or less a formality. This year, however, the Assistant Superintendent, we have a new Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, and he is getting more involved, not from the standpoint of interviewing persons but as far as checking their credentials and their application. He really gets involved in that now and already I know of two teachers who have been turned down since he has been in the situation. And I am not directly involved with the employment of teachers but in these particular cases as Director of Secondary Education he informed me about the situations and made me aware of the reasons he turned them down so that as I deal with principals in the future I can let them know that he is going to be very particular about who is employed in Greensboro now.

Goldie: I see. What about curriculum and instruction?

Mr. Higgins: Okay. Our assistant principals were divided, had responsibilities. I had one assistant principal whose title was Assistant for Curriculum and Instruction, one for Administration, and one for Student Affairs and I usually met with the department chairmen twice a month. She met with them once a week and I would usually meet with them about twice a month with our department chairmen's meetings. I also served on the curriculum forum which is a group of administrators and teachers throughout the city who examine new course offerings and also made recommendations for the elimination and changes for various courses. So I was involved in curriculum and tried to be as knowledgeable as I could so that I would know that the teachers as I visited classes and talked with teachers that they were teaching the curriculum as prescribed by the school system. That is a big job and the assistant principals were involved in that too because of the way we had teachers divided up for evaluation purposes. But perhaps you are going to ask about that now.

Goldie: Well, did you have any input in the design of the curriculum for your particular school or does every high school in Greensboro have the same curriculum.

Mr. Higgins: Every school has the same curriculum and there are some differences, there are some courses that are unique



to some schools. But basically we have the same curriculum. Every school has the opportunity to offer the same courses but some courses are more popular at some schools than they are at others. Consequently they don't make but there are some schools that the teachers themselves have made recommendations for new course offerings and obviously those courses would receive a greater push at particular schools and I think that is what accounted for that.

Goldie: Now you can go on and talk about the evaluation of teachers.

Mr. Higgins: Okay, we have our teachers divided up into four groups for each of the four administrators. I was involved with all teachers--I evaluated all teachers who were in their tenure year. ICP's, however, my assistant principals if they happen to have the department that an ICP teacher was in that year they would evaluate them but if a teacher was reaching tenure then I had to evaluate, when I said I had to, that was a decision that I made because I would have to make the recommendation that that person receive tenure and for a time we had to present individual teachers to the school board before tenure was granted and it was somewhat awkward to go into one of those meetings and make a recommendation and then they might ask you specific questions and if you had not been involved in the evaluation it would put you in an embarrassing situation so every teacher who received tenure the year of tenure I will do their evaluation.

Goldie: Discipline

Mr. Higgins: Discipline was a shared responsibility with the four of us but the Assistant Principal for Administration and the one for Student Affairs had primary responsibilities. The third Assistant Principal and I were involved but not as involved as those two. But once again, teachers were assigned to us by departments. The same departments that we had for evaluation purposes. Those teachers when they had discipline problems would refer the student to their evaluator but as you know that person may not always be available. A lot of times because of other responsibilities I had I might even be available but the two assistants that I mentioned earlier would usually get involved so while I was involved in discipline I have to say that I was not as deeply involved as a principal as I was as an assistant principal.

Goldie: Well, would you say that I know that your school did have a high minority population. Do you think that discipline was your major problem? Did you see it?

Mr. Higgins: I really did not see discipline as a big problem. You know, you read and hear so much about discipline being a problem in schools in America today. Our biggest problem really was attendance which fell in the area

of discipline but as far as problems that were existant between students and students, and students and teachers, except for the routine kinds of things that you would expect in a large urban high school. But I didn't really feel that it was a major problem but I did feel that attendance was a major problem because students today because of some reason don't feel that they have to or ought to be in school every day. Many of them are looking for jobs and many of our kids at Smith had after school jobs and in some cases their employers would even call us and ask us to excuse them from school so they could work if someone were sick and they would want one of their part time workers to come in early and that just really upset me and of course the fact that students were easily influenced to do that because the prospect of making money for a 17 year old is much greater than the need for an education. At least they can't realize that until they are out of school.

Goldie: Transportation.

Mr. Higgins: Transportation in Greensboro has gotten much better at least for the administration because transportation to a large degree is handled from our central office. Director of Transportation, his assistant and then he has a number of lead drivers that they have full responsibility. At one time one of the assistant principals at the high school was responsible for the transportation and supervision of the bus drivers but that is no longer true in Greensboro. Each high school has a lead bus driver assigned to it and that lead driver is responsible for supervising the drivers so except for just passing on concerns and complaints that we might receive we really were not involved with the transportation system as we used to be.

Goldie: Very good. What about cafeteria management?

Mr. Higgins: The same thing. The cafeteria manager, we try to give her great support as far as supervision of the students but as far as supervision of her staff she was in charge of that. I had the supervision of the manager herself and also technically her staff but she did the evaluation for her employees, I did her evaluation and we supervised the students in the cafeteria but as far as staff was concerned the cafeteria manager was fully responsible for that.

Goldie: Building and grounds

Mr. Higgins: Building and grounds. That is a real problem because of the low wages that we pay to our custodians and our maintenance workers. There is quite a bit of turnover in some schools but I was very fortunate at Smith. During the time that I was there, at the top of my head, I can't say how many people we changed but the bulk of our employees were there when I started as principal and were there when I left.

Smith was a unique situation. It was our newest high school. It was fully air conditioned and consequently we were called upon to host a lot of outside activities as well as the many activities that we had in our school. We were close to I-40 and I-85 and a lot of times when groups were meeting in the city of Greensboro they would always request Smith because of its close proximity to Four Seasons Mall and hotels and so we were constantly hosting outside groups and our custodial staff I was always real proud of them because they took a lot of pride in hosting these groups and the comments although they didn't receive any money for it they were very proud of the fact that people always wanted to come back and the hospitality, the custodial staff was always cited for the way they took care of people so that was a little feather in our cap I felt.

Goldie: What do you think the relationship is between Smith High and the community?

Mr. Higgins: That is a funny relationship. A funny relationship in that Greensboro while it is a rather large city it is still small town in a lot of respects and students who attended Smith, many of them if their parents were natives of Greensboro, their parents attended Dudley and Grimesly primarily and to some degree, Page. So the last couple of years that I was at Smith I was finally starting to get students whose parents attended Smith and that sort changed the relationship that the school had with the community because many parents who had attended the other high schools had a strong loyalty and kind of felt that Smith was not their school because they would always refer to Dudley and Grimesly and as I said to some degree to Page. So that was starting to change because we are now getting the children of parents who had attended Smith but when I first went there that was a real problem. Smith was sort of looked upon by the native parents as a stepchild. They didn't want their children to go there. They wanted their children to go to their high school and Smith was not their high school.

Goldie: How much administrative power or control did you think you had over your school site and your responsibilities.

Mr. Higgins: Well, I thought as much as perhaps a principal could have. That is definitely the emphasis of Dr. Everhart, our Superintendent, who has been here about four and a half years now. He is really big on site base management. It has really received quite a bit of emphasis. As a matter of fact, just two weeks ago we had a workshop for our principals on site base management with the Senate Bill 2 money. Of course that has received a great emphasis from the state and he personally, not just because the state pushes site base management, but it is a personal philosophy of his. In addition to that Dr. Lewbo, who preceded Dr. Everhart, used



to say that he wanted principals to have autonomy but Dr. Lewbo was a general former honor man and a general in the National Guard and I kind of felt that he didn't really believe in what he said. He liked to run things himself. But at least he said that. I really felt that I did have a lot of autonomy. The central office made me responsible for those things that went wrong and I think gave me credit for the things that went right so I really felt quite autonomous.

Goldie: Could you tell me about the utilization of funds?

Mr. Higgins: Once again, that was a decision that was made technically by the principal but any wise principal would involve staff in the way funds were distributed. With our instructional budget as an example, we allotted money to departments based on enrollments. That created some trouble so I would always keep some money off the top so that some of the small departments, especially fine arts, would be given money in addition to the ratio that they received money based on the number of students. I also had some money held in reserve for them because they could not possibly buy the things that they needed based on the enrollment in those classes. But our money was basically the determination of how our money would be spent would be made by the departments. Once we assigned the money to the departments than we gave them sort of a free reign in how they spent it. With capital outlay money, the amount that we received was small and we had to send in our recommendations for capital outlay projects in the spring and once that money was allocated in the fall then it had to be spent for what you indicated the previous spring that you were going to spend it for. But once again that amount was really small because the bulk of the capital outlay money was kept for major projects for the school system. But we usually I think had around seven or eight thousand dollars that we could spend. Custodial allocations of course we had that totally and the head custodian alone with my assistant principal for administration made decisions about that. I tried to give the assistant principal as much autonomy as I could give them too because I wanted them to have the experience hopefully when they became principals of having some sayso and knowledge about various budgets and the full operation of the school. Which is another thing that I have been somewhat proud about because I had quite a few of my former assistant principals who are now principals today so that was a source of pride also.

Goldie: So you consider yourself a mentor when it comes...

Mr. Higgins: Yes.

Goldie: Because some principals don't give the assistant principal a chance to -- they work in one area so long and then when they go for an interview they have no knowledge of



the other.

Mr. Higgins: Well, I was fortunate in that the principals that I worked for gave me a lot of autonomy, in fact, Mr. Brown, who was the principal of Dudley High School where I started my teaching career, who hired me for my first job, made me Dean of Boys, and directed me and told me what to do to become prepared to be an administrator, which you know he guided me into some things that I didn't even really realize what he was doing to prepare me to become an administrator because I was young and naive and would have been content to stay there with him forever but little did I know a lot of the things that he was giving me the freedom to do and sending me to meetings and workshops and things and preparing me to become a principal and like I said, I didn't even realize what he was doing for me at the time.

Goldie: How do you think desegregation of schools affected your role as a principal?

Mr. Higgins: Well, desegregation of schools probably made it easier for me to become a principal because when I first started in Greensboro the schools were segregated and the number of opportunities were limited. So the fact that the schools were integrated gave me a greater opportunity to get into administration quicker than I probably would have. There were some bad times and some bad experiences and some parents of the majority race who resented a black being in authority position but over the years in Greensboro especially, came to accept that and while some of them might not like it they did come to accept it and consequently overall I don't really feel that great an impact as far as desegregation on my career. I do realize, like I said, that the fact that it happened for me quicker probably because of desegregation but I don't feel that desegregation itself affected my performance or my ability to move and to perform in the school system. I just came out of school at just the right time and, like I said, Greensboro is a unique community, strange in some ways, but in one respect Blacks in the school system have had pretty prominent positions and have been able to move and I don't feel have been hampered as a result of desegregation.

Goldie: Do you consider yourself a community leader?

Mr. Higgins: Well, not like principals of old. Greensboro has grown so. When I was a student here in Greensboro myself the principals definitely were community leaders but as Greensboro has grown and Blacks have become more prominent in other professions the principal does not have the prominence, I'd say, that principals once had. But still to some degree we are looked upon by a lot of people as being community leaders so to some degree yes, but certainly not as much as principals used to be.

Goldie: Did you enjoy your job and if so, what?

Mr. Higgins: I did enjoy it. It was frustrating and there was more to be frustrated about perhaps than the enjoyment but I enjoyed seeing our former students do well. I think I had a lot of influence on students although I don't think the students recognized it. I tried to do some things for students that had been done for me because I had a real good experience as I grew up in Greensboro and wanted to be a teacher from an early age because of the influence of my former teachers. I have a unique situation even today in that some of my junior high teachers, my wife worked at the junior high school that I attended when it was segregated and that group of teachers they still meet twice a year because my wife worked there, she is a part of that old faculty and because I went to school there, the spouses are invited. I'm invited so I get to see many of those teachers who are now retired and I hope that I have had the influence on students that I have dealt with that they have had on me because I have a great deal of respect for them then and still now. And just think that they were great people and it feels good to me to have students come back and say something that I did did help them in some way so that was the greatest satisfaction I guess. And it doesn't always happen a lot. I think even because I'm guilty of it too of really telling someone who meant a lot to you how much they meant to you and so I know that there are a lot of students who have not said that but when one does say that to you it really makes you feel good.

Goldie: What do you consider the major problem of your principalship?

Mr. Higgins: Major problem of my principalship? That is a good one! The major problem I guess is to have a staff as large as we had at Smith and to have all teachers to feel about the school the way I felt about it. My family probably suffered as a result of the time and effort that I put into the school. And I expected everybody else to do the same thing and some people quite frankly looked at teaching as a job. It is a job and it shouldn't be a person's whole life but I couldn't understand why some of our staff members were not more involved in the school than just the five classes they taught because I think that to really be effective with students they have to see you in more than just one role, they have feel and see that you really care about them and as I look at the staff I think we had more people who really cared and put their all into the job than didn't but I felt we could have been more effective if everybody had really given it 100% rather than coming and taking the position that I'm going to teach the class and it is up to you to learn. Some of our folks didn't feel that that was necessary and I did and that was a real frustration for me. Another frustration was I guess was that many parents were not more

involved with the school. Their attitude was my child is at high school age now and it's time that he start being more independent. I always felt that the support that the parents gave kids at the elementary school should have been transferred to the high school. Because I always felt that elementary kids are eager to learn and to do exactly what the teachers and authority figures tell them to do and the students needed more guidance as high school students than they did at elementary school and all the parent support goes to the elementary child and once they reach high school it is kind of thank goodness and now you are on your own and I thought that that was a big mistake on the part of many parents.

Goldie: Did you have any way to weed your mediocre teachers?

Mr. Higgins: That was another frustrating thing too. Perhaps it was my weakness or failure on my part as a principal. My desire was always sincerely to try to help a teacher improve. That was a real battle because a lot of teachers felt that if they admitted that they had deficiencies the principal was viewed as the enemy and I never looked at myself that way but it was hard to convince teachers that I was sincere. That what I talked to them about improving things the first thing that they thought about was well this is the beginning of him trying to get rid of me. And my sincere effort was to try to improve. Because over the course of the years I only had one or two teachers that I really thought should have been out of the profession. There were some that I thought could just change the way that they were doing things to become better teachers but that was misread a lot of times so that was a constant fight. And then there were one or two that I felt should have been out of the profession altogether. Perhaps should have been dismissed and fortunately they left the Greensboro system but I didn't feel good about that because in most cases they still went to another school system and I felt that I didn't do my job so to speak that they should have been gotten rid of.

Goldie: What do you consider most rewarding about your principalship?

Mr. Higgins: Once again, going back to something I said earlier the relationships with students and parents and teachers. The feeling of being a team, the feeling of having some influence on the success that students have had. There were some students and some teachers and some parents who relied on the advice that I would give them and would seek that out and that had to be--the relationships had to be the most rewarding thing I know.

Goldie: Well, the two groups that I am interviewing, the 1964 group - at that time there were over 200 Black high school principals and last year when I sent to the State



Department to find the number and the Black high school principals in 1989 there were 41 on the list. But some of them are in alternative schools. So that means that there are less than 40 that have graduating classes as high school principals. If you had to give some advice to a Black young person who was aspiring to be an administrator of a high school in North Carolina, what kind of advice would you give them.

Mr. Higgins: First of all, they ought to get involved in all facets of the school. They ought to learn as much about the school as they possibly can as a teacher. There is a real shortage of men, Black and White, and an even greater shortage of Black men, there was an article in our local paper last week about the shortage of Black teachers generally. So Black administrators and Black teachers are truly needed today. I would say get to learn as much about the school as you possibly can as a teacher, volunteer for as many things, get involved in as many committees in the school as possible. Get yourself involved in every facet of the school. I want to say it is easy and in a way it is easy for a Black male to get into administration because there are so many school systems who are looking. So the thing I say to young Blacks is to learn as much as you possibly can so that when the call comes you are going to be ready. And one of the worse things that could happen is for a Black to get the opportunity, not only a Black but we are talking about Black administrators, and not have the background and experience. And then not only are you going to hurt yourself but you are going to hurt the future Black administrators, even the ones who are really competent if you aren't ready and let's face it, the way our society is we're looked upon that they don't expect us to be able to be competent and to be successful and because the opportunities are out there for Black men if a Black man who is in education and he wants to get into administration if he prepares for it it is going to be relatively easy for him to move to the top.

Goldie: What are some of the skills that you think are absolutely necessary?

Mr. Higgins: Some of the skills are verbal skills, people skills, a person who is able to make fast decisions, to judge situations and be fair, a person who is competent and is viewed as competent by students and teachers, a person who presents himself well. He doesn't have to be a fashion plate but you know the dress of our teachers today is not what it used to be and I think that first image before a person says anything the way he looks is going to be very important and then once he passes that test he has to present himself well verbally and has to have something to say. Not just saying something for the sake of saying it.

Goldie: Any other words of wisdom.



Mr. Higgins: Well, we're on the firing line so to speak and I think for Black children you are going to be--Black administrators are in a tough situation because you are going to be seen by many Black kids as a part of a system and some Black kids make an assumption that because you are in an administrative position and even as a teacher that you are part of a system and that the system opposes Black kids and there have been so many things that have happened in our society to make Black parents think that that is true and to know that it is true but we need Black teachers and we need black administrators to influence our black students so that they don't throw their lives away because I see so many Black kids rebelling against the system that they don't really realize that they are playing into the hands of those who say that Blacks can not, will not be successful and I see so many young Black kids just playing right into the hands so we need some Black teachers and Black administrators to try to turn them around and that is a tough job as I said because of your position you are going to be viewed as the enemy so to speak. And that is a really, really tough job but I think once you get in there and they see that you are sincere and they see that you can help them, that you will help them, that that will turn around but there are not enough of us now I don't think. So we ought to get some more Blacks and that is getting harder and harder to do.

Mr. Higgins: Just start over with one of the problems that I see for us and one thing that concerns me for Black children and Black educators is an attitude that some of our Black teachers have in a desegregated situation. A feeling that more principals and especially Black principals will cater to white teachers at their expense. And it has been difficult for me to get our Black teachers involved in leadership roles that they ought to be involved in for the benefit of our students to get them to serve as advisors for clubs and organizations, to take the leadership for things like American Education Week, to be in positions where they can influence the number and the involvement of Black kids in extra curricular activities which to me are just important as a formal education because students get an opportunity to experience leadership opportunities that will augment what they get in the classroom. But it is difficult to get many of our Black teachers to give that extra time in working with young Blacks or to work with the kids in general and indirectly to help the Black students who need that. And then there is an attitude toward Black principals. And I have talked to some other Blacks and they've felt this too. A feeling that the Black teachers feel that Black principals cater to White teachers. But it is a matter of if you are trying to do something it is better to have people who volunteer to do something than to make a person do something. And as a principal, sometimes you can direct a person to take a responsible but if they don't have their heart in it it is not going to be successful. And I would much rather have

teachers who volunteer to do something. But then when you call for volunteers the volunteers are generally White. And then the Black teachers feel that well you let them do everything. Well, it's not a matter of letting them do anything, it is a matter of they volunteered to do it and my feeling is once again that it is better to have a person to volunteer to do something and you only result to appointing people when you can't get people who genuinely want to do something. Did you notice a pattern where there was a Black teacher in charge of a club or an advisor or club that you had more Black participation.

Mr. Higgins: Yes, you had more Black participation but you see my feeling was even when I had Black and White teachers if it is a White advisor you are going to have more White kids to gravitate, if it is a Black advisor you're going to have more Blacks. But I would insist as much as I could that we have equal participation on the part of Black and White kids. Some of our Black teachers if they were in charge of something they would stack it with Blacks because they said that was what White teachers were doing and I was trying to get both sides to not do that. I thought that it was important for the student body that every organization in the school as much as you can without being totally artificially to try to get Black, White and Asian kids to participate. As a result my last year at Smith I started because I saw the need for it again. I started the old Human Relations Committee that we had years ago when integration first started. And while I opened it to all students I went around and I spoke to Black, White, and Asian kids because I was going to ensure that I had a broad spectrum of students. And the funny thing when the other students saw this then kids would volunteer. The Asian kids would feel comfortable coming because they knew there were Asian kids and the Black kids felt comfortable and as a result I got some good participation. But for some reason, it was hard to get our teachers, some Black and White, to see that. That they did not feel that they needed to make that special effort and I always did. I used to say that you've got to guarantee success and you guarantee success by doing some little behind the scene things to make sure that whatever you're trying to do is successful and let's face it. We've been integrated here in Greensboro twenty years but our students still come from homes and they come largely from neighborhoods that are still segregated. So if we don't do things in the schools to let the kids see that it is all right to be involved with Black kids outside the classroom and it is all right to be involved with White kids outside the classroom. We have to model that and the same thing in the cafeteria. It used to bother me to go the cafeteria and look at one end of the teacher table. All the teachers would congregate. One end would be White and one end would be Black. And I talk about that in faculty meeting. I can't make you all be friends but I think we need to model some things for our kids. How can

we ask the kids to get along, Black and White, when they can look at us and while they don't see us fighting they can see that something isn't quite right and those kinds of things I think are important but there are a lot of teachers, Black and White, who don't feel that that is their responsibility. And I do feel that it is their responsibility. I think using a seating chart in a classroom. One reason I think the teachers used to use seating charts is to separate the "bad eggs". But I like to use seating charts because I want to integrate the classroom. I don't like to walk into a classroom and see the Black kids sitting on one side and the White kids sitting on another side. Once again, this is America. People are free to sit where they want to sit and that is true but once again I think that the school system is the place that this country is going to be changed. If we don't have the right people in the leadership and positions in the schools then it is going to take longer to happen. But then some kids are smarter than some of the adults. They do it on their own. But once again, you can't expect a student to come from a situation, a neighborhood that is segregated, a segregated church, segregated every phase of their life except school and then expect them to all of a sudden integrate and have friends of the opposite race. But I think if we set up situations where they get to know each other then I think the country is going to change.

Goldie: Did you see some progress with your teachers?

Mr. Higgins: Well some. Some Black and White had the same feeling, philosophy that I did and some didn't. And once again, the faculty was split in that respect. Some people that you could go in their classrooms and you--you know it is funny and maybe it is because of my belief that I am saying this but I thought the most effective teachers academically had the better relationships among their students. You could walk in and you could feel and you could see something in their classroom, the relationship between the teacher and the students, and the students and students, and I just felt more learning was taking place in that classroom. But when I walked into a classroom and I saw the Black kids on one side and White kids on the other side I felt that the learning in that classroom was being affected because if the teacher were not wise enough to see that that was not a good situation then I would think that she would be wise to see and understand a child's learning deficiency and help him/her overcome that. So that is my belief. So whether it is true or not I don't have anything to prove it but I believe that.

Goldie: I've really enjoyed this interview. I thank you for sharing this with me. It was quite interesting.