

PAMELA GRUNDY: At Johnson C. Smith University, interviewing Ms. Harriet Love about West Charlotte High School. I thought I'd just start off with you by asking, are you a Charlotte native?

HARRIET LOVE: Yes, I am. I grew up in the Greenville area of Charlotte. I have been here all my life. I have been fortunate enough to visit places, but I always come back home.

PG: Charlotte is the place for you.

HL: It is. It really is.

PG: Can you tell me a little bit about your community that you grew up in?

HL: Well, the community was a community. Basically, the street that I lived on and a couple of streets adjacent to where I lived, that was basically my community. Most of the people were older. There were children in the community that were the same age as me and my brothers and sisters. You were disciplined by everyone in the community, even if it was just a shake of the finger. They were there to kind of help you and guide you. It was very rich in that we had very creative kinds of things that we would do to entertain ourselves. I can remember my father was driving a truck at the time for a company, and they would have machines that had potato chips and things like that. And we built a store and a playhouse. I mean, we actually built a store and a playhouse, and we sold the chips for a penny. We would even cook things. We would get greens and cook them and get tomatoes out of the garden and chop them up. Boys and girls would do those kinds of things. Then in the afternoon, it was time for the running and the playing and baseball or softball at that time. And the bookmobile, which you have probably never heard of, was a library on wheels. That library on wheels would come

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once a week, and that was like a highlight for us. We would go up on White Street to the library. I lived on Oliver Street. We would go up on White Street and check books out of the library; and the next few days would be days of reading and sharing our books, which was always a lot of fun for us. Many of my brothers and sisters kept that good habit, and they still to this day do a lot of reading. I don't do as much as I should, but I do some.

PG: What kind of books were you reading at that time?

HL: Well, I guess we were young; we were in elementary school. We were just reading whatever we liked. That was the nice thing about it. It wasn't assigned reading. You could read anything you wanted to read. I can remember I was young, but I wanted to speak French. I got this French book, and I got real quickly that I could not do it just by reading it. I probably got one word or two words out of it. But my brothers would read books on building things and carving things. They could carve cars. They could build anything. Girls, we usually read stories about other children our age, going places, those kinds of things.

PG: Why did you want to speak French? I've heard a couple of people say that.

HL: I don't know. It just seemed like you were so mysterious. It was such a romantic language. It just seemed like something that I wanted to do. And I did take French in high school, and I did okay. We had conversational French and I can remember Mrs. Bowers was my instructor. One of the things you had to do; you had to write it and speak it. You would walk in the room, and she would tell you, 'You cannot speak any English today. We're only going to speak French.' God knows how I got through the class. I learned for the moment, which was a bad thing. I did not learn it for

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the lifetime. But it was very interesting, and I did take French, but now I want to take Spanish. That's my next language, and I'm going to try to go to a class. I'm not going to get a book.

PG: What makes you want to learn Spanish?

HL: Because our community is changing so. With the number of people coming in contact with, just right here on campus, we have people who are Hispanic, and it would be good for me. Some of them do not speak any English. It would be good for me to be able to hold a conversation with them. I feel like that's a must because I am a people person, and I like to talk to them. If they come up with a cut finger, and we want to tell them how to keep it clean. I think that's going to be something that I'm going to have to do, and then it's something I kind of want to do, just for my own sake.

PG: The languages are a lot of fun. I enjoy it.

HL: I'm sure they are. If I can master one, I'll be all right.

PG: That's really interesting. Did you always know that you were going to go to West Charlotte High School? Was that something that everybody in your neighborhood did?

HL: Yes. We knew, and we looked forward to it. I went to Fairview School in Greenville. When you left Fairview School, you knew you were going to Northwest, which was the first West Charlotte. And then when you left Northwest, you were to go to West Charlotte. There was never any thought of anything else other than going to West Charlotte. We always had an ongoing feud with Second Ward High School, which there is no more Second Ward. I'm thinking it's coming to the point where some of us have lied about how many games we won or how many games they won because--but we have

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embraced them because there is no longer a Second Ward, and that was a part of our rich heritage also. We had so much fun, and we would walk, save our bus money, and walk over to Second Ward for a game, and then walk back to the downtown. And the bus fare probably wasn't anymore than a dime. But it was entertainment for us, and it helped us branch out and meet other people, other than the people in our neighborhoods. But still in the neighborhood, you kept that closeness between the church and the school and the neighborhood. It was always close; you always knew someone; you always had someone to turn to, those kinds of things.

PG: Were there connections between the churches and the schools?

HL: Yes. Many of the church members attended West Charlotte where I went to church, C.N. Jenkins Presbyterian. But at the time, it was called Brandon Presbyterian, and it was in Greenville. Many of my church members were graduates of West Charlotte. I think people were--not everyone was poor. I was poor. But people were able to give something to West Charlotte--I get Johnson C. Smith in here--they were able to share things. Sometimes if there were games, maybe a person in the neighborhood would take a truckload of kids to the game. Maybe they didn't have children. Different little things. So, yes, I believe they were a part and very proud of it. Many of our neighbors did not go to school at all in North Carolina. They may have been from South Carolina or whatever. And many of them didn't have twelve years of education. But they were still in favor of us having it. I walked to school not because I had to but because we wanted to. We wanted to save our money and stop by this little store and get a pickle or whatever else you wanted, some junk. On your way to school, you were

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going to see people that you really knew and knew your family, all the way to school and all the way back. So it was sort of a protection there, in some way.

PG: How long a walk was it?

HL: When you're young, it's not long. It would take us about fifteen or twenty minutes. Not flying, just walking a nice brisk walk. It would be a group. It could be a group of four, five, ten, fifteen kids, just depending. On bad days, we would catch the bus. The bus would carry you to school for ten cents. You would ride the bus. But on pretty days, we would walk. Just about everyday, we walked home.

PG: What kinds of things would you talk when you were doing your walk?

HL: Well, we'd talk about the assignments that we had or boys, naturally, talked about clothing, styles, those kinds of things, hairstyles. Weight was never something anyone discussed. Never, never. At that age, that was never one of our interests. Whether we were going to the dance or the sock hop. Who did we like or who we didn't like. We had more of that kind of discussion than anything else.

PG: And would these be, would you be if you were thinking about who you liked or dating, would it be mostly people from within West Charlotte or would you talk about people--?

HL: Sometimes it was outside West Charlotte; it would be Second Ward or York Road. That was the other high school. But most of the time, it was someone at West Charlotte that liked you. We used to say when you were going to this thing that you go with John. You go with so and so. If they liked you, that didn't mean that you had made any contact. One girl in our group that was always the matchmaker, and she would tell some of them that 'You need to date him because so and so and you need to date.' And I

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never really listened to her, and some of the girls would. And one of the girls told me one time, she said, 'I never really liked him, and she just kind of forced him on me.' So we weren't able to make decisions for ourselves about who we liked to be with at that time because we didn't really do a whole lot of dating. On warm months or summer months when school was out, we would go up to the Double Oak swimming pool. But we didn't go to swim. That was where you met the boys. We'd dress up on a Sunday afternoon and go up there and go up on--they had a like an observation deck upstairs at that time. We would go up there and people would come and talk to you. And we would go across the street to the sundries and have a soda. We knew our place. We knew to have good manners because not that you were fearful that someone would see you, but always someone would see you. So we were pretty good girls back then that I associated with.

PG: It sounds like you went around with larger and larger groups rather than small.

HL: Yes, we did. One of our girlfriend's father had a car, and he'd occasionally let her have it. It was a big car. I don't know whether it was a Buick, but it was big. And there would be ten of us in there sometimes. Something like that but there was never any speeding or anything. You'd go get a burger or go get a coke or something or just ride, cruise. But our cruising was certainly different than the cruising now because we never would have blocked the driveway or obstructed traffic in any way like young people do now. But the population now, they have so many cars. We had, you're talking about one car you might get once a month. But it was still fun, and it was still something that we could do to entertain ourselves.

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PG: When you were at West Charlotte, did you feel like you knew most of the people at the school?

HL: I knew their faces. I knew the circle that my class, the class of '62 I knew those people. Some of the other people, I just knew their faces. I had brothers and sisters that attended West Charlotte. I would know their close friends maybe, but other than that I didn't. I was quiet back then. I didn't venture out as much as some people.

PG: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

HL: At that time, I had three brothers and two sisters. One of my brothers is deceased now. So I have two brothers and two sisters. I have a half sister, also. But I did not know her that well. I knew of her, but I did not know her. She was much older. We were very close. We didn't all go to school together. My brother Clinton, my sister Cynthia and myself were all in school together because we were '62, '63, and I think he finished in '61. '61, '62, and '63 we were right there together. And then my brother Jerome finished in '59. And Booker T. finished in '53. Frances, I believe--I was born in '44--so she may have finished high school in something like '48 or 49. So we were all there, or we had roots there. And one of the things that used to infuriate me, my instructors would say, 'Oh, you're Jerome Gentry's sister.' Or, 'You're Clinton Gentry's sister.' So one day I was feeling very bold, and the science teacher told me that and I said, 'I am Harriet Zoria Gentry and I'd appreciate it if you'd call me by name.' Well that was an insult to him and certainly he got in contact, my mother was deceased at that time, he got in contact with my father and my older sister and talked to them. And I was so proud because my sister supported me and she said and my dad did too. They said, 'We've always told them they have to express themselves, and she needed to express

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herself. But we will ask her to be mindful that you are the teacher.' So I guess both the teacher got what he wanted out of it, and I got what I wanted out of it. I never did it again, but I had just gotten to that point where I was only identified by my brothers or my sisters and I didn't want that. I wanted to be identified for me.

PG: Did you do any other things to sort of establish yourself? Not necessarily talking but activities or things you did with an eye towards?

HL: Well, I had always loved art. I would do dabble in arts and paintings and things like that. I was always an organizer, so I learned very early that teachers would use me even though it was my class. I was expected to do my assignments, but I was used to do other things that had to do with me organizing or getting a task done. If there was a party for the class, I was always a part of that. And to this day people still want me to do these things, which I'm involved in. But I think that was my big plus. I was very quiet at first, having lost my mother when I was thirteen. They helped me with my assertiveness, which was good. Many of these people knew my family and so that was a plus. Then I married very young. I got married when I was seventeen. I married the guy that I was dating at school, John W. Love, Sr. John W. Love and then we had a baby boy, who was John W. Love, Jr., who finished at West Charlotte also and my daughter finished. I always was a strong person, but I believe the reason that I was such a strong person, it was the way that our mother taught us. And as I look back, even when I was much younger, she prepared us for a life of meaningfulness. She taught us things. She taught my brothers how to iron and clean and cook. She taught us how to repair. She was basically a homemaker; she taught us how to repair things, to do some of the things paint and wallpaper and all that. So we were well rounded. And I always have said that I

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believe mother knew that her lifespan would not be very long. I was very young, but I had that feeling. But she prepared us to take care of ourselves. So I've always been, not outspoken, but I will always speak on an issue if I have to. I think that's because of her nurturing and guidance and my grandmother and my father and sister. They were all much older than me. That has helped me, and I in turn did the same thing with my children. I was a pretty good student but I worked for it. I didn't get anything very easy. It just didn't pop into my head. I had to really apply myself and read and do what I needed to do. Those things worked very well for me.

PG: Do you feel like the teachers at West Charlotte consciously tried to help you develop in that direction as well? Do you think they just saw your talent in that?

HL: No, I think that they brought--we all brought something to the table, but I think at that time we were changing classes so we had several different teachers. I think they really looked at each of us as an individual. I think they learned what our weaknesses were. It's sort of like a barrel of crabs. We're all in the same fix. We're all in the barrel. There were very few that were rich. We had some classmates' parents taught. Some classmates' parents that may have been a brickmason and made more money than the teacher. It was the fact that they knew that you wanted more than to just get a diploma and to get out. You wanted to be able to speak clearly. You wanted to be able to reason. I think, for me, each of my instructors was able to give me something to help mold me into a better person. I remember I had an English teacher, Ms. Bell. Ms. Bell was my homeroom teacher. Mrs. Bell would, she would, her expectations of you were very high. And sometimes she would just ask us questions like, 'What have you done with such and such?' 'Well, have you done your homework on such and such?'

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They knew what track you were following as a student, if you were a junior or senior or whatever. Then Mrs. Barbara Davis was one of the most sternest teacher, but yet she was one of the kindest people I'd ever met. She was helping us and nurturing us. And to this day, I saw her at the beauty shop. She could name people. It's amazing. She could name just about all these people that graduated from West Charlotte. Different classes. She will say, 'Well how is so and so, he was the class of such and such and how is this person?' She taught English and she was a very good teacher. In fact, all of my teachers were. Mr. Bill Lindsay is deceased now. He made me have a special love for Shakespeare. It was the way that he would interpret a story or interpret a poem that it just brought so much meaning to what you were doing. I do dabble and write my poetry. I haven't published anything. But I do that. That's a part of me. And I know when I get ready to do whatever with it, I will. But I think that they saw us as individuals, and they didn't group up like 'This is Ms. So and So's child. She's a teacher so I've got to do this and this is Ms. So and So.' All of us were grouped together but we were looked at differently, and they knew those weaknesses. People say that I've always had a--I can write. I'm not saying all the grammar's correct now, but I can write and put things down. I like to see myself as the back of the clock. I like to be back there working and make it work and look and say this is wonderful. I told someone--they said something about me speaking doing some speaking at a particular event. I said, 'Well I really don't want to do that. I make kings and queens, I don't want to be one.' So I'm still making kings and queens. I enjoy that creativeness that I have about those kinds of things.

PG: Well, I'm interested in your teacher, you said that he interpreted Shakespeare in such a wonderful way. Can you think of any particular example like in terms of a play or something?

HL: Well, let me say this. This is something I remember. The part when, not so much Shakespeare, as all things. I'll take this one statement. When he was telling us Caesar made his speech, and Caesar said to the people, 'I give you,' Whatever he gave them. 'I give you the rain, and I give you the sunlight, and I give you the grass and the people, 'Yeah Caesar. Caesar, mighty Caesar.'" And he says, 'Yes, stop and think about this. How powerful was Caesar?' And we're all sitting there thinking, 'Gosh, you know he's really powerful.' And then he said, 'He cannot give you what you already have. But the people got so caught up in the moment that they believed that he could.' He used that to tell us that we get caught up in the moments of things, and sometimes we're very successful when we do that and sometimes we're not as successful. So he let us know that when you get involved in something. He could take anything and bring something out. When you get involved in something, remember that it is--you can go both ways depending on how you are thinking on that. And the other thing he would say little rhymes he would say. He would say this one. 'Men don't forget your raincoat because you never know when it's going to rain.' He would say, 'Ladies,' what. He would say, 'Ladies, you can always ask for someone's health card.' For years I didn't know what the man was talking about. But actually he was saying, 'Guys if you're going to be sexually active, you need a condom.' And the women he was saying 'If you're going to be sexually active, you need to know your partner.' He would say that every Friday. And for the longest, no one would say anything about it because we didn't talk about condoms

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and he didn't either. But he did say that and later I learned--well that's what he meant. He was such a clever person. He was a small-framed man. He was an English major. He played the piano, I mean, beautifully. He died some years ago, about ten years ago. He was just a good person, and he offered you so much. That's what I liked about those teachers. When I sit down sometimes, I can name them. I can remember that Mr. Blake was the principal when I was there. If the boys, usually it was boys, every once in a while you might get a girl, get in trouble or fight or whatever. But usually guys, you know how guys are territorial. He would take them in the office, and he had this paddle. He would paddle them about three times or something. I don't think it was that bad. But part of it, when the young men would come out, it was just like it was the story. It was like there was pride in being paddled. That's the way it came off to me. It was like, 'I was bad and he paddled me and I took it like a man.' That kind of thing. But actually he didn't do any more than any other teacher was doing at that time. But the fact that they were in the principal's office, that esteemed some of them, regardless of what they did. Well, one of the things we used to do that was fun. I didn't do it because I didn't know how to play cards. But I think if I remember, if five bells rang, that meant that there was a fire drill. I think if it was four bells, I could be wrong with the number, that meant it was a teacher's meeting. It was an emergency teacher's meeting for whatever reason. Whatever class you were in, they would say, 'Please stay in your seats. Read chapter so and so or do whatever.' All the instructors and they would leave. The teachers, I imagine most of the students would give them time enough to get to the office. Boy, then they would start pulling out the deck of cards. They would play cards. They'd play (), and I never really learned to play cards until I was in my thirties. But that was something that

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some people could just do it. They could just play. They'd try to teach us, and I guess my interest wasn't there. You tried to stay out of trouble at that time because you couldn't get into trouble. You'd go someplace else to another classroom, and here's your teacher back, and you're not in there. So those kind of things but it was interesting.

PG: What would they have an emergency teacher's meeting about?

HL: They didn't do it too often. It may have been something that came from, I guess, the board or something like that. Or something they were trying to implement. Usually I remember teachers meetings being in the warm weather. And see, they would have they didn't call them assistants. They may have somebody in the room. But we didn't pay--and there'd be a substitute, but we didn't pay them any attention. That was a joke way back then. It's like it is now. But it was just interesting that we would do some things like that. Everybody just sort of did their own thing at that time. I knew to stay close to my room. And you'd have someone watch and, 'Here she comes.' And everybody would get back in their seat and read. But it was a lot of fun. There was a lady, Mrs. Lane, I think it was Mrs. Lane. I never wanted to be in Mrs. Lane's class because she was a chemistry major, science and chemistry. She would take these cats and get these cats from where they kill them. Wherever the name of the place. They would boil all of the fur and hair and bones, and then you would mount the cat, which was an educational experience. I never wanted to be in her class, and I wasn't. But then when I went to nursing school, I had to dissect a cat. Well, that wasn't so bad, but the fur was still on the cat. I don't like animals. I had to dissect it, and they said--they told us you know, we had little kits and everything with our gloves. I had two pair of gloves on. Oh, I just couldn't stand it. I couldn't stand looking at the cat's face, so I had to cover it

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up. I just don't like animals. But they tried to prepare us for the things that we were going to come across. Little did I know--I wanted to be a nurse--but little did I know I was going to dissect a cat, but I did. Worm and a cat or a () and a cat or something.

PG: What kinds of expectations did the teachers have or did you have about what you would do once you graduated?

HL: Well, that was something they would ask you, what do you want to do? They would try to make sure that you were getting the correct--you were either college preparatory or you were wanted to be a laborer or a technician at something. If you were college preparatory, they made sure that you had all the classes that you needed in order to go into college. Most of us were college preparatory in my classes. They would make sure you knew--at one time I wanted to be a physical therapist. I kept talking about it and talking about it and talking about it. So I guess everyone was beginning to understand that I really wanted to do that. I did not become a physical therapist, but I'm a registered nurse. So I'm still fulfilled that I'm in the medical field. I think they guided me that way. Then they began to give you information when they realized that you really were serious about what you wanted. They began to give you information and make suggestions of schools and things like that.

PG: Did you come to Smith after that? Where did you go?

HL: No. I went to--first I went to Central Piedmont. And then I got my BS in Health Care Administration from St. Joseph's College in Maine.

PG: Okay, so you did go away?

HL: Yes. I did go away.

PG: Why did you decide to go so far away?

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HL: Well, actually I didn't go right after graduation. I went to Central Piedmont. First, I went to Central Piedmont and I became an LPN, a Licensed Practical Nurse. I liked it so much. Then I went back to Central Piedmont, and I became a Registered Nurse. I was working at, where was I working? I was working at Carolinas Medical Center, and I got a job with Fruehauf Corporation, which was out in Arrowood at the time. I was getting ready to go to UNCC, and they had this program. And they were willing to let so many people be in this program and no one wanted to do it. And I said, 'I'll do it' because see I was making preparations anyway. So that's how I got to Maine. It was a very good program.

PG: Well, we're kind of, we're sort of moving a little bit now, where you've graduated and gone on. I gathered that, how many children did you have?

HL: Two.

PG: Two. Did they both go to West Charlotte?

HL: They did.

PG: When did they graduate. What were their years of graduation?

HL: Oh, I can never remember years. I'm sorry. My husband is the date person. I have a terrible thing about dates. John, my oldest, graduated in '78 and Jewel graduated in '79, I think. '78 and '79. And both of them went on to college. John is an actor.

PG: Oh, I know him. John Love. Yes.

HL: That's my son.

PG: Okay.

HL: Okay, well you know him.

PG: ()

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HL: Thank you. Thank, you. I don't have to say anything else about him. He's into many things. He's very creative. He is extremely creative. My daughter, she, they were both truly involved in school. John was the, at one time, he was the mascot. He was in the band. Jewel was a letter girl. They both were in Order of the Lions. He was class president. She was, was she class president? I think, she was class president at one time. They were very active. Not because we pushed them. They were just good at what they were doing. Outspoken, John was definitely like his mother. I never had any trouble. Never had a bit of trouble out of either of them. Thank God. They, I was very young when I married, me and my husband. But they have respected us, and we have respected them. We have told them our expectations of them were for them to get them an education. They have done that. They have both been very successful doing what they want to do. I'm very proud of both of them.

PG: Now, where were you living in Charlotte at the time when they were at West Charlotte?

HL: I was living on Crawford Drive. And then I moved from Crawford Drive to Plumstead Road where I live now. We've been there about thirty years. That's where we were living. I think on Crawford Drive when John--No, I was living on Plumstead the whole time they went to West Charlotte.

PG: Did you always, did you want them to go to West Charlotte? Was that something--?

HL: Yeah. It was kind of a thing. At that time, everyone wanted to go to West Charlotte. We just happened to be in the right neighborhood. Just thinking back, I may have even lied to get them there because it was just a pride kind of thing. There's just a

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lot of pride in the school. It's a very good school, and it has helped turn some people around and made them feel whole and complete. When, no matter where we go and we talk about West Charlotte, people know about it. We're getting ready to have our sixth triennium, the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. I'm serving on that committee as chair for the reunion. It's just wonderful working with people and seeing how many people are going to participate. There's a lot of pride there. We give out a scholarship. Not only does the West Charlotte Alumni Association, Inc. give out scholarships; the individual classes give out scholarships. So helping young people and encouraging them is something we do. Some may fall by the wayside; some don't. But certainly it's a good feeling to know that you were able to help a young man or a young woman to get some books or pay something so they can go to school.

PG: When your children went to West Charlotte, it had changed to some extent. They had integrated.

HL: Yes, that's true.

PG: Was the school, did you feel it was very similar to what the school had been when you were there or that it was different?

HL: It was different in that you had a diverse number of students. It was the same in that they were young and their ideals and their desires weren't a whole lot different from what we had. There was not a lot that I knew of. There was not a lot of bickering. My husband and I were active in the PTA. It seemed as though everyone was pulling for the same thing, for the students. It wasn't about me or it wasn't about the other parents. It was about the school and the students. And at that time those years that they were there, I thought they were very good years. There were not a lot of incidences. And

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I'm sure there were some that I never heard of. But as far as a racial kind of blend, I think it was successful. I really do. And I think it is a very, very good school. We got a black eye as you know a few months back, a year or so ago, because of some things that were going on there. But I think that had the staff, and faculty and school board listened to what the students had to say, I think making a decision would have been so easy for them. I think it became so political and people were pulling and didn't know what they really wanted. That's the feeling that I really had. I can say now that I think that it's over with and you'd like for things like that to stay over with. Students express themselves. If you'd see a student if they were at church or if you knew one that was at the mall, you knew they went to West Charlotte. That was a topic that they talked about. 'We're okay. Let us do how we're doing. We're doing fine.' So that was the time for some upset because we didn't really have a lot of racial problems. This seemed to be more of a political kind of thing that happened here a year or so ago with the principal and some of the teachers.

PG: That's interesting how a lot of people were talking. When the school first began to integrate, obviously the children were in the lower grades at that time. What was your feeling about the process of integration? About what--.

HL: Well, I wanted my children to have the best possible education. And I also wanted them to be able to look eye to eye with anyone regardless of their color, regardless of their beliefs. I always told my children how very, very special they were and how sharp they were and intelligent they were because it was the truth. Not just to boost them up. So here was an opportunity for them to be in a situation, a learning situation, and it could've been positive or negative depending on how I looked at it and

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my husband looked at it. The way we resolved it, we were involved parents at that time I was working three to eleven and my husband was working seven to three. That worked out very well when our children were in school because I could get them off in the morning, and he had them in the evening. I remember there was one incident. My daughter Jewel could read and count. She could count when she was five because my husband worked for the *Observer* and a lot of times they would have a lot of change and things. She learned to count. Both of them learned to count very early and read very early. I would send her to school every day, and I have to admit I'm one of those mothers that if I've got a boy or a girl, they're going to dress really nice. I'd dress them and put in the little bows. The teacher was a very young teacher, and I felt like she was a little bit too young to teach my children. I thought, she was in the first grade, this lady, she's been to school. So the teacher sent home her report card, and it wasn't a bad report card but it wasn't a good report card. And she had on there, she had all these comments about Jule how sweet she was and how pretty she was dressed everyday. That infuriated me so, I went to school and I talked to the teacher and I told her, I said, 'I don't need you to tell me how pretty she is; how well she's dressed. I need for you to tell me what is she doing in school.' That was important, and once I established that, she knew my expectation she knew my husband's expectations then it was so much easier to do. I wasn't rude to her but I was firm and I was assertive. She understood, and then I could see a change in some things. I would always tell my children, you have homework every night because my mother told me that. They would say, 'Mommy, they didn't give us any homework.' I said, 'You read what you read in school that day. That's your homework.' Every night. That's the way my mom did, and that's the way I would do. I think children do need

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homework. I don't think they necessarily need it every night, but I wanted mine to keep up their reading because I felt like if they could read well, they could do anything. That proved to be correct for them.

PG: Do you feel that that teacher just wasn't paying attention?

HL: I just feel like that teacher was young, and I feel like no one had said anything to her. They accept it. I really and truly believe she thought she was doing what was best. But after I let her know my expectations, we weren't at odds. We pulled together to make sure that certain things were getting done. It worked and that's just what I used with all of their teachers. 'Don't tell me all this good stuff. Tell me what they need to do. Where do I need to help them?' There weren't a whole lot of areas where I needed to help them. Of course, talking. I think everyone tells them to be quiet in school, but they loved to talk. It was just that kind of thing. Because most of the time, the students that my children went to junior high and high school with, they also went to kindergarten with, many of them. We all knew each other, and the parents knew each other. When the children got old enough to go to games and things, there was always a carpool; we never had to take them all the time. It was always a group of us that had children in school, and they could carpool, and it gave the parents some free time. It was some very, very good experiences back then. I think that it would help more people if they gave children less cars and spent more time. Just riding in a car and talking to your kids, you can learn a lot. But see if they've got a car, there's not time to talk to you. When they come home; you're asleep. When you get up; they're asleep. So there's not time to be a family. We always used the kitchen as our room for talking over dinner. Issues that we didn't want to talk about, they didn't want to talk about, and issues that we do. Punishment, we handed

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out punishment. Punishment was when they became teenagers, if they did something we were not proud of, then they could not go to a particular function. My daughter was always the one that would come back, 'Oh please I'll never do it again. Just let us go.' She was always the one to come and talk to us. My son was laid back about it because most of the time he wasn't in trouble. But at least we kept that communication going, and that was very, very good.

PG: So you felt also, well I'm going to move a little bit on this subject, kind of a continuity between your experience and theirs?

HL: Yes.

PG: There were similarities?

HL: Yes. I think the difference in my children and myself, we knew our place in school. You did not say certain things to the teacher. You, 'Yes ma'am, no ma'am.' You were extremely respectful. Having taught my children to express themselves, they were not rude, but they did not hold back on their opinions as much as we did. Now, that was definitely a difference. I just would have to remind them sometimes, 'Well, yeah. What you said was right but put yourself in that person's position. That's the principal and they need to know blah blah whatever.' I think it helped them, and I think it helped them become aware of what they were going to say. Also, I think it helped make their character better because you do need some guidelines when you're fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen. You need guidelines. People think you don't, but you do. You work better. Young people work better if they know the rules and regulations. If there are no rules and regulations, they tend to kind of do as they please. So we did have rules and regulations in my household.

PG: I was interested when you said, you said that the children they'd gone to kindergarten and junior high and high school with the same group. Was there a time when they were, I know that people were getting bussed all over the different parts of Charlotte.

HL: Yeah, but they lived pretty much in the same area. And when you lived in the same area that would happen. You may have missed some of them in elementary school. But for some reason when you got ready to go to junior high, whether it was Piedmont Middle School or whatever junior high, they came back together. Then everyone knew that if you went to Piedmont, you automatically would go to West Charlotte. So all their little friends and my children went to Piedmont, which was a wonderful experience for them. That was very good because they were introduced to so many different things. Even in counting, how they did counting and various things that were different. I remember one time, I kept telling my husband I said, 'Now you're going to tell me how a skiing trip is going to make a difference in my daughter's life.' But it did. I don't know everything that they did but I had to go out and buy her a ski suit and all of this. Of course, we say, 'Black people don't ski.' She said, 'Mother, they really do. There were black people there.' That was, Piedmont offered that kind of change. They had teachers that were very energetic, wanted to introduce things to you in a new way. I thought that was good and that helped prepare them for West Charlotte because when they got there, no one's going to stand over you and make you do. And when they got to college, they didn't have problems in college because they had a good foundation. I attribute that to all of the schools but especially to West Charlotte. I think it really prepared them for going to college.

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PG: Now would this have been part of the open school then, the open schooling that they had at West Charlotte at that point?

HL: Yes.

PG: So that's the kind of program they had that you were talking about?

HL: Yes, right.

PG: They had to take the responsibility for their own learning then. Were you concerned about that since that was so different when they first sort of encountered this curriculum?

HL: No, because I knew my children. I knew that they wanted to succeed. John always said that he wanted to be in the theatre and has been and enjoyed that. And Jule always said that she wanted to be a businesswoman and she is and she's enjoying that. I think that that's what I kept telling them that 'You can be anything that you want to be.' Now John is such a bright young man; I had hoped that he'd be a doctor or lawyer at one time. I know he would've been a fine one. This was his choice and we supported him and supported my daughter in this choice. He went to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and she went to Chapel Hill. Both of them picked what they wanted. He never gave a complaint, nothing. He went to school and loved it. She got up there and cried the day, her daddy, we were leaving her up there and wanted to come back home. She came home every weekend for a whole month. So finally I said, 'You made this choice and for one semester, you must see it through.' Then after that one semester, I couldn't get the girl to come home. She liked it so much. It really, I let them know when you make choices, 'You've made the choice so you've got to see it through.' John plays the piano. She wanted to play the piano because John played the piano so when he asked

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me, 'Mother I don't want to play the piano anymore. I want to stop.' I said, 'Okay.'

When she asked to stop I told her no. I said, 'No. You wanted to do it. You have to see it through for a certain amount of time. You can't play it--.' He can still pick out certain things and play. Jewel never liked it and just wanted to do it because he did. Can't play a thing.

PG: There was a period during that time in the early years of integration where there was some talk maybe about West Charlotte being closed. After Second Ward was closed, there were concerns that this was going to happen to West Charlotte too. I guess I'm interested in your perspective or experience with this sort of time period of concern. Were you concerned?

HL: Well, I imagine there was some concern but not that much for me. I guess the reason being that we had a very strong neighborhood around West Charlotte. Fred Alexander was a city councilman, I believe, very good person for the community that would speak out. I think these educators and various people in the community really said and pushed the need for West Charlotte. I think it was very simple. People may make it complex, but it was simple. We needed it; we're going to stand behind it; and we're going to do what we have to do. I think it just worked out. I think it was one of those blessings in life that you just get. Of course, even up to a couple of years ago we were hearing something like 'Oh they may close West Charlotte.' We have a very, very, very strong alumni--.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

HL: They decided if they wanted to close West Charlotte, it would not be an easy task. They would have a good little fight on their hands because the community, and you're talking about people that are retired; they're not working anymore; they're saying, 'This is a fine school. I graduated in nineteen forty something and I'm not going to see it go down.' But there will always be a West Charlotte somewhere. It will have a to be. I can see it as a very special place for all students, any student. I just hope it does continue and does continue to turn out as many fine young men and women as we've seen in these years since I've been there. I think it's just--I think it's marvelous. And you know, I work on this college campus so I'm around young people a lot. But you know it's not really a very noisy school. Have you ever had a chance to walk through it when all the students are there?

PG: Not when the students are there. No.

HL: When you get an opportunity, do it. It's not like people think that teenagers are loud, noisy, and wild. Some are wild, yes. But we need all of that. We need the serious ones; we need the ones that are mediocre; we need the very smart ones. We need all that to make them well rounded. I think that's what the world is made up of. I think it's a fine school, not just because I went there but because it truly is. I think most of our schools are very good schools. But I think you always have to have teachers that are truly concerned about the students as individuals. That's the key, I believe, and I had those kinds of teachers.

PG: Your children had--.

HL: I think my children had those kinds of teachers. I don't remember all of their teachers' names, but I certainly remember them being there for them and supporting them and guiding them. I think it was a very good experience. But teachers like anything else, just like nurses, people have changed. People used to be truly dedicated to certain things. Some people are as not dedicated as they should be. I believe teachers are underpaid. I think they should get more money. Nurses should get more money too, by the way. But I really do. I think they work very hard, and I think in these times they have to not only be the teacher, but in many cases they're the sociologists, or the doctor, or the mom or the whatever, or the dad. I think we need to look at that because they control some of the things that our future will be guided by, which are our children. Teachers are not esteemed enough; I think they need to be more esteemed.

PG: Do you think that their job is more challenging now? Is that what you're saying?

HL: I think of those that want to learn in a classroom; it's okay. I think the teachers can handle that without a problem. For those that don't know whether they do want to learn, I'm not saying they don't. They just don't know whether they want to learn or not, I think that's when the challenge comes in. I think when they're disruptive. I think when there's the fear of danger or guns or knives or fights or whatever. I think all of those things disrupt the normal day for the teacher in the class. I think if there was a way we could bridle those kinds of things that learning would be more interesting for our students. We've got to remove the fear. There's a lot of fear now because young people have guns. We know this from the news. Young people do get angry, and they express themselves. They do not know how to channel how they feel. They'll take abuse out on

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anyone. I think teachers over the last ten years, you've heard in the news about them being abused. But there's verbal abuse and physical abuse, and I think if once you can get that under control, we will have mastered the art of teaching and young people learning.

PG: To turn a little bit to another subject. When you mentioned thinking about the school and teachers and the sort of role of the school in the community, it seems at the time of integration there was an idea amongst some people that by integrating schools, you could create a new and different community. I'm interested especially in whether that was realistic and whether that worked beyond the school.

HL: Well, I think some of it was realistic and some wasn't. I think what happened with integration for some, I don't know exactly where it started or how it started. But I think there were some people that felt like this is an opportunity for me to be forgiven for all my sins of treating people and my family had slaves. For others it meant, I can change the world I can--give me young boys, black and white--I can change them; I can mold them into wonderful people. I think everybody went in there with a set of rules and regulations for themselves. I don't even know whether it was really said other than getting a better education. I don't ever really remember anyone ever expounding on why we needed integration other than it was a mandate, a law to do it. It was to get a better education. I think that our teachers--it's like many things--it was thrown in their laps, and they had to deal with it. And overall looking back, I think they dealt with it very well, considering the training and planning they had for it. Because you're not trained--you're trained to teach, period. You're not trained to integrate people and make them get along and know all of their problems and concerns and things like

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that. You're not trained to do that. When you have an all black or an all white situation, it becomes a little bit easier. At least it was years ago. I don't know how it is now. Years ago, a little bit easier because you could just about look in that classroom and find at least three students that you knew the families. And if you talked to the others, you'd find someone that knew them. It was just, you were given a little bit of information. Now, you've got students from all walks of life so where do you begin? If you say this, you offend this one; if you say this, you offend another one. If you say something else, you embrace that group. So I think that there needs to be a re-emphasizing the expectations of teachers in the classroom. I think the people that can do that best are our retirees because they've been there. They worked with little or nothing, many of them. When we were in school, we always heard about we got the used books and things of that nature. In some instances, they were used. But that was not something that they harped on in the classroom. We were wanting to learn and they were wanting to teach. Everyone likes a new book, but the main thing was we had the books; we had the tools to do what we needed to do. I think that schools now have all these tools, but they don't have something in place and that's that sociology kind of mentality so that they'll know each group. That's almost too much for a teacher to grasp in nine months time. You know, you've got nine months and you've got all; you've got Asians; you've got Hispanics, African Americans, whites, Greeks; you've got everything. You barely can say their names. But I think that's a little much for teachers right now to have to do all of those things and teach. Whether she knows it or not; whether she teaches no language, she's still bilingual; or he's still bilingual because they've got to communicate. That's something that's causing a lot of frustration among teachers and parents. I think that every parent,

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they want what's best for their child. I don't care what the background is. They want that child treated fairly first of all, and they want to make sure they get in a good education. Well, I know in order for that to happen, there's a role that I have to play as a parent outside of the classroom. And then there's a role that I have to play as a parent supporting the classroom. I think that that needs to be conveyed to parents also. Not about getting that report card in May and learning that the child hasn't done anything the whole year. It's about being there and giving some of your time when you can. Attending teachers' meetings, I've done it all. And that's one reason, I worked three to eleven when I first, my children first started school. So I would be there to get them off to school, and my husband would be there to get them in the evening. They saw both of us, and we would do our things together on the weekend and all that, but at least they got a good send off. It wasn't rushed or pushed. They weren't frustrated, and I think it takes all of that. I think it takes planning when you have children. You've got to plan for their future as well as your own.

PG: It seems to have worked very well.

HL: Well, thank you.

PG: It's interesting to--. Again I'm asking something I'm asking a lot of people related to West Charlotte. One of the things that I find very interesting about West Charlotte is that it's very unusual within Charlotte in that it's a historical institution that has stayed in the same neighborhood, only one move. It has been there for more than fifty years. There are not many things in Charlotte that can make that claim. I'm interested in what that means or what the significance is to the community in having this institution that has this kind of history to it.

HL: Well, for one thing, it belongs to us. It belongs to the community. It belongs to the West Side if they want to call it the West Side. It's West Charlotte. Many people don't have children, but they still support what we're all about. When we support the school, we're not supporting the black students at the school; we're supporting the students. When the band needs something, when the football team needs something, when the choir needs something, we're supporting the school. The alumni association came about because they felt like there needed to be some point of interest that was historical. The auditorium was named after Mr. Blake, and I'm sure there are other areas on there. They're getting ready to do a Wall of Fame, and that Wall of Fame is going to be right down in the lobby area. I think there's just so much pride. I think there's so many successful people, really successful. Not poor little old me, I'm talking about people that are lawyers, and judges, and doctors, and teachers, and all that stuff, and have their doctorates and all that. They came through West Charlotte. Anybody can tell you back in the forties how the situations were. People were poor all over the world. But still, that was something if people could get to school and get an education. The parents pushed it. You cannot, not have a feeling about it even if you didn't get to go there. Right now, I have a niece; I have a great-nephew and a niece. I have a niece at West Charlotte. Sherrill Courtourier, a very bright young lady. She's just getting promoted to the twelfth grade. It's just like when we found out she was going to West Charlotte it was like, 'Yes!' We have a great-nephew and hopefully he will get there. It's just so much pride because I think they didn't forget. And sometimes you can get around and start talking to people and they begin to reminisce about their teachers, and how things were, and how they'd go to school, about how they wore their hair or pull out a yearbook. Some old yearbooks,

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people will crowd around you and 'Oh, that's so and so. Look how we wore our hair then. Look how they're wearing it now.' But it's just so much pride. I guess in a way, you're just saying thank you. 'Thank you for making me become a whole person. Thank you for helping to make me see some good things in my life, positive in my life, and we're just returning the favor.' And we wish we could do even more. We have a number of organized classes. My class is organized; we're very involved. I think most of the classes are that way. Some of the older classes may not be. A couple of them, or one of them I know, is not as involved. But most of the classes from the beginning up until-- now you don't usually get the kids out of the eighties yet. They're not ready. They can join but that's not what they're thinking about right now. They're thinking about doing other things, having their tenth reunion or whatever something like that. But it's a wonderful, wonderful experience and you have a camaraderie. You can talk about things. It's just a part of the community and if it's not there, it's a void. There's a big hole there. It couldn't be anything but West Charlotte for us. It just has to be. And we just believe that it can be and will be and shall be. That's just what we have to just keep telling ourselves and we have to support and embrace and work with the school. We have done that very positively. We have not, in my opinion, been negative at all. We've always been able to come to the table and talk about what they want and how we can help. And as an alumni association, we've been able to do those things.

PG: Were you part of the original organizers of the alumni association?

HL: No, I was not. No. I was not. I think that was the class of forty something. They, many years ago, were sitting around talking. Someone else may be able to give

you that history and they came up with the idea. But the minute my class learned about it, we were already organized as a class. We just became a part of the incorporation.

PG: I guess the alumni association is nice too because it draws people from different neighborhoods and churches I guess. It brings people together.

HL: It does. In fact, like I said, we're having our triennium this July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. We have people come from all over because it's just something they want to do. They pay their money and come. Well, we have a speaker and a luncheon and all that. We're roasting, I'm calling it a roast. We're having a lunch, and Leroy "Pop" Miller is going to be the, I forgot what we were calling it. Anyway, he's our person of choice for this year, this time. We're just really looking forward to that. Because he was there when I was there. He was there when my brothers were there. He was a very colorful person.

PG: What do you remember about him?

HL: I remember, he would say 'Gentry, come here girl.' I would just be like, 'Oh, he just gets on my nerves. I don't want to--Yes, sir.' That attitude. He would always see you when you didn't see him. He would always catch you when you were wrong. But he was never rude; he was never mean. He was always a very, very kind mind. I was short for a very long time. I'm only five-two now. I think, his height intimidated me a bit. He's just as friendly now when you see him. He never forgets a face. He was just a very good person. He taught shop. I remember that class. I didn't have a class under him but everybody knew Pop Miller. Everybody knew Pop Miller. I remember my husband, well he wasn't my husband at the time but John said he had built something in shop. And John said, 'I had done a fine job and Pop gave me a C. And this other guy had done something, and it was awful looking and he gave that guy like a B.' And John said, 'I

don't think it was right.' We talked about it. Then he talked about it wasn't right. And years later, I said, 'He knew you could do better than a C. You should've done A work. And that other guy, that was the best he could do, I guess.' But he was good and he was fair. He was always colorful, and he was always around. I guess that was his job back then to be around because he was every place. He was every place. He had a very strong voice. He knew so many names. But he would call you by your last name a lot. 'Gentry come here.' I'd go like, 'Oh please' but when I'd get to him I'd 'Yes sir.'

PG: Now did your parents participate in school activities much when you were there?

HL: No. My mother went to Second Ward and my father went to like the seventh or eighth grade. He was from South Carolina, Spartanburg, South Carolina. But my mother graduated from Second Ward because we only had Second Ward then. We didn't have West Charlotte back then.

PG: I guess when you were in high school when your mother had passed away.

HL: Yes, she had.

PG: Would your father come to events?

HL: Yeah. He would some but you know not a whole lot because my dad worked two or three jobs. His main thing was providing for us, which he did a good job with. My sister, my older sister would support us in a lot of things. And we always had representation there. My older brothers and sisters or sometimes my grandmother would be at something, if we were in something.

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PG: Well, I think that was pretty much kind of the things that I was interested in knowing about. Is there anything else that you think is important to know about the school or about your experience or anything?

HL: Well, I think overall my experience was a very rich one. I wouldn't give up not one minute of the good things or the bad things. I think that most people that went to West Charlotte, my husband for one, can name just about everybody that went to school there. I just think it's something that's a part of our lives, and we'll never forget it. Some of the most important years of our life, or my life anyway. And I think those years were very important for my children. And should I not be blessed with any grandchildren, I never have anyone else really that close to me to go to West Charlotte, I'll be okay. But if I was to have children and they were living here in Charlotte, I would certainly want them to at least try. I know they'd get a good education anywhere but to let you know how we feel about it, for this souvenir book we're doing for the luncheon for Pop Miller, we all did advertisements to pay for the book you'd put in an advertisement. I put in there something in reference to a long line of West Charlotte graduates, and I had all these people, my brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews and things that had graduated that had, my nephew Thurston Frazier is a lawyer and he finished Andover in Massachusetts. He went to prep school, but I had him in there the year that he did attend West Charlotte. Cause they tell me once attending, you're always an alumnus. We're very, very proud of that. Not just because it was a black school. It's just something that I think we pick up on that we want to continue as a family, have a legacy of some kind. I think it's sort of like. It's sort of like a fraternity or sorority. You know there's a bond there, and you kind of reach out to people and do what you can for them. If they need

you, if someone was to write my class and say I'm in desperate need of even though they may not have been in my class, we would support them. We have done that in fact, one of our classmates mother and father's house burned down in Double Oaks. We had already made out our monies for the year, but we were able to give them a small check just to say maybe this can buy you some cosmetics or something that you need. But I think it's there; I think it will always be there. But the thing about it is, we don't ever hold it against classmates that don't come around. We keep trying to get them to come and be a part of. Keep trying to get in contact with them. Got a newsletter going out. It's just so much fun when you get together and talk about things, reminisce and see their children and their grandchildren and those kinds of things. If you're involved in a school, the school will survive. If you're not involved, the school will die. So it takes all of us to make it work for the community.

PG: One thing you said that I wanted to pick on, you said that there's a very important lot of years in your life, which I think high school is an extremely important time. If you were to think of yourself, the person that you were when you went into West Charlotte and the person that you were when you came out, how would you compare?

HL: I think the person going in was shy, was not a great decision maker, possibly could stand her ground some. But the person coming out was strong, proud, able to stand her ground and able to speak out on issues and let people know that I felt important and I was just as important as the next person. I also would say that I came out with a lot more knowledge than what I went in with, a lot more book sense and common sense. That was one thing too, common sense was important. It was fine to be great and make all As, but if you couldn't come in out of the rain then that was not too good. So I think I came out

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of there with a bag load of positive things and positive characteristics, which made me a better person.

PG: Would you say that was similar to what happened--would you say that everyone had that journey or similarities?

HL: I think there were some similarities, but I think everybody had their own journey. Some of my friends wanted to be married. Some of my friends wanted to teach and many of them are teachers. Some of them didn't succeed in teaching. They learned that was not what they wanted to do. I think all of us succeeded in life in raising our children well, in understanding how things work, in giving the other fellow a chance to at least speak on the issue whether you're going to believe it or not. At least give them a chance and try to hear the other fellow. I think we came out of there with that. We know that you don't get anything for free. You've got to work at it. If it's a book, you can't hold it on your head and tell me what's in it. You've got to read it. Those things are very clear to me, and I think they're very clear to a lot of people that all the time you spent in school was preparing you for something that's worthwhile. You cannot doubt it. You hear about people that came from such and such a place and the self-made millionaire. Well, that happens once in a while. It doesn't happen every day. I think that anyone now you have to have some kind of foundation. I believe if I wanted a career change right now, I believe my foundation is strong enough from West Charlotte and the other schools that I could, it would be a rough road probably, but I could go out there and make a go of it.

PG: This is wonderful

HL: Thank you.

PG: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me.

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END OF INTERVIEW.