

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

ALMA ENLOE
May 18, 1998

→ ALMA ENLOE: Big school. You would have thought most of the teachers didn't know you by your first name, or know who you were, or anything like that, but they did. We took pride in our school. You couldn't come up on West Charlotte and drop paper on our school grounds. We had rival schools, Second Ward. Everybody was trying to get over to Second Ward. Somebody from West Charlotte dated somebody from Second Ward, or somebody from Second Ward dated someone from West Charlotte. Those were two rival schools. We just had so much fun. There wasn't no drugs. We didn't know anything about that. It was just having little get togethers and doing our own thing. We looked up to our school teachers and they looked up to us, too.

PAMELA GRUNDY: Explain. How did that work?

AE: They could just call you by your name. By it being such a big school you wouldn't think that was possible, but we all had a connection. With nine of us going to school, my brothers and sisters before me being my role models because I looked up to them. The teachers expected the same thing out of you, the way your sisters and brothers acted.

PG: Where were you in the line of brothers and sisters?

AE: The sixth one. My oldest brother came out in the class of '59. He was supposed to have come out in the class of '58, but when your birthday is late you have to wait. So that happened to him. My older sister Mary came out in '62. And then Florea should have come out in '61, but her birthday was late so it threw her back with the twins. So we had three graduating in the class of '63, and Case Gary. Have you heard of Case Gary?

PG: Yes.

AE: He just recently passed.

PG: Yes, he did.

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AE: He wrote about my sisters and brothers. He was saying not only do we have the Kennedy's running the White House, we got the Kennedy's at 2644 Ingar Street running West Charlotte. The twins came out and Florea came out in '63, and then I came out in '65. Warren, my brother that just recently passed, he came out in '66. And Gould who went on to become a professional basketball player, he's retired now. He lives out in Dallas, Texas. He came out in '67. And Henry is the baby. He came out in '68. So Case Gary wrote again. West Charlotte finally gets the last Kennedy to graduate. I tried to find clippings on it. My mother has them, but it's been so long ago. Anything that went on in West Charlotte we did it as a family. Even when other schools came and had football games at West Charlotte. If they didn't have a football field, they would use West Charlotte's field. Everybody in the neighborhood would come up to the game. Didn't care whose game it was. We were there. And some of the guys would try to sneak in up under the fence without paying. But we had these two tough policemen, Rudy Taris and this other, Costner. Honey, they used to run those boys. But every Friday during the football season they had a game we were there. I stayed right there after school at University Park, and you could just walk right through the path. And prom time, there's just so much that I don't remember, and try to remember. But you sit back sometime and you reminisce. I always said I wished I was back in my freshman year in West Charlotte because I was running with my sisters and brothers who were seniors at the time. And just because they were my sisters and brothers I could run with

them. But if you didn't have anybody, you stayed in your place. It was just like that.

Pop Miller, have you ever heard of Pop Miller?

PG: Yes. I'm going to go talk to him. His brother, I think, has been sick so he's been busy with that, but I'm going to go talk to him. Tell me about him.

AE: He knew everybody by their first name. Back then I think a pack of cigarettes was like twenty-six cents, and some of the girls were trying to learn how to smoke and sneak in the bathroom. He would bang on that door, "All right, come out! I know you're in there. You come on out of there." And I would be in there, but I didn't smoke. When I came out, "Kennedy, you ain't got no business being in there. Get on to your class." It was nobody getting mad because they did that. We knew they were doing it for our own good. We just had a good time at school, and sometime I wish I could just go back to that time, and sleep through all this time that's going on right now. We didn't have a whole lot of new books. Some of them got new books and by not being integrated we got books that the white schools had used. You'd get a book and it had so many people's names on there that had had the book before you. But we still had to wrap those books in brown paper bag, or newspaper. Keep those books and then turn them in at the end of the year and just start all over. It was just great being a part of West Charlotte. I talk to a lot of people today that went to school with me, but their children by them living in different neighborhoods weren't able to go to West Charlotte. But everybody wanted to go to West Charlotte. Everybody wants to be known that they were a Lion. We had the marching band. Did Sandra tell you about her brother Stanley?

PG: Yes.

AE: Yes, honey, they called us the high stepping marching West Charlotte band. They would keep us at the end of the parade near Santa Claus, because if West Charlotte had come first West Charlotte took the whole square with them. Everybody ran behind West Charlotte. It was just great.

PG: Did you participate in activities like the band when you were there?

AE: No, I didn't participate in the band. I was in the Glee Club and stuff like that. They had New Homemakers of America. Of course, my brothers and sisters participated in a lot. I had a brother on the basketball team, a sister in the chorus, and my oldest brother was in the band. He played the trombone. And the rest of them, we just went with the flow. But they knew who you were. They knew you by name. We had some good teachers then. A lot of them have passed on. Mr. Blake was the principal when I was going there. As you came in that was his house up on the corner right there at the church. His sister lives there now. I understand, I never had gone in it, but they say that all of the colors in there were maroon and gold.

PG: Like the school. Tell me a little bit more about him. You were saying that he'd run by the bathroom.

AE: That was Pop Miller who did that. But there wasn't a teacher that you couldn't go and sit down and talk to. They took time out for you, and I know that the way the school system is it's hard for them to do that. I just don't know what went wrong with the way the kids are today. It was like when we were growing up any parent in the neighborhood could say something to you if you had done something wrong, even spank you, and nothing was said by the parents because they knew if another parent chastised you that way, they knew you had done something wrong. I feel for the kids

today. It's just so much peer pressure. It just wasn't like that when we were growing up. Nobody was trying to compete with this person or that person. Some of them had their little cliques, but we always came together when it came to supporting West Charlotte. We were together.

PG: Why was that?

AE: I don't know. I just looked at it as being just one big family. It was a lot of us that came from large families. My sister might know somebody in another family that had sisters and brothers the same age. It was just that we stuck together. If a fight or something broke out that was shocking. There wasn't no guns. There just wasn't nothing like that. If someone came up on our campus, we knew if they were a Lion or somebody else. We knew, and we just protected our school that way and took pride in it. It was just great.

PG: When you were in school what did the teachers talk to you about in terms of careers?  What were your ambitions? I know everybody had different ones.

AE: Everybody had different ambitions. The teachers were willing to listen to you and steer you in the right direction as far as what you wanted to do. I wanted to be a nurse, but I never did go that way. I ended up working for Bell South. But then the Lord turned it around and put me here caring for my mom Carey, and that was just like nursing so I still didn't miss my calling. I'm retired from Bell South now. I retired in '95 and haven't had my retirement party or nothing because of all of this that's been going on here. Teachers, if they saw you, you weren't in class, they ~~k~~new you weren't there,  "Where are you supposed to be?" "Well, I'm supposed to be so and so." "All right, get there." We went. There wasn't no talking back or nothing like that. And I remember

Daddy Townsend, he was a history teacher but he was also in photography. He taught that, too. He used to sit up at his desk with his eyes closed, and we thought he was asleep. He would give us exams, and he said, "You can cheat as long as I don't catch you." But see, we thought he had his eyes closed. But he didn't. I just don't even really know how to explain it other than being family orientated. We just stuck together and hung in there. Everybody wanted to be a Lion, and I'm proud to have been one.

PG: Do you think that any of that had to do with you all sort of feeling that everybody there was black and you were somehow together that way, or was that something that you thought about?

AE: Some might say, you know how some people are prejudice^d. Everybody they say has a little bit in them, but I've been around different colors all my life so I think it starts at home with the parents raising you the right way and teaching you the right way. Some might say, well, you know in order for us to have gotten more into being educated they had to integrate because we did go without a lot of things that the white school had and we didn't. Take, for instance, I was telling you about the school books. I think I can count the times I got a new book, but other than that they were books that so many people had had. And they would be stamped Guaranty High School and (), or whatever that was on there. But that didn't stop us. We wanted to be educated. The parents were stronger then. I don't know what it is now. It seems like to me not with just the black race but all races, it seems the parents are afraid of their children. Our parents coming up then, we didn't have to do nothing. They gave us the eye,^w and we knew. Get yourself together. I can't say really what it is, but I do know in order for us to get the education everybody was getting. Some people would look at us and say when we were just the

blacks by ourselves, at least we knew who the enemy was, saying white people. But now, everybody is together and don't nobody know who's the enemy or what, so everybody is just fighting everybody. You just can't say anything to these kids today, and I don't. I don't know, I just don't understand it. It is strange, because, like I say, my mamma, honey, could look at us, give us that eye, and we got ourselves together. It's sad. That's the way now. And the only one that I know that can fix it is the Lord, because people got all these different kinds of attitudes about it and instead of trying to work it together, we don't have that togetherness. Everybody is just pulling apart, and it'll never work that way. The Lord to me is the only one that's going to have to fix it.

PG: It seems like it's gotten bad.

AE: It's gotten worse.

PG: I ask everybody, and everybody sees it, but it's so hard to figure out how it came to be.

AE: And you just wonder. I worked with a lady, Pat Benoy. We were talking one day, and she's white. She's a best friend to me. She was the first one that greeted me when I went to Bell South. We were talking about going to school. She brought it up. You wouldn't have thought that the whites was interested in West Charlotte back then, but she said, "Honey, we went to the parade just to see West Charlotte Marching Band." She said that when people standing on the square left, she was right behind them too. So it's always been a great school, and it still is. But the people in it are going to have to keep it going to make it still great. One time they said something about closing it. I said, "Close it! Not West Charlotte!" I hope that doesn't happen because it's a landmark. Did you know Northwest used to be West Charlotte?

PG: Right. Yes. Do you remember when they moved?

AE: I was young then, but my mom Carey graduated from West Charlotte. We were living in University Park, and I remember when they started building the new West Charlotte. A lot of people don't know that though, that Northwest was really the first West Charlotte.

PG: I had talked to someone who had said that they had had a parade from the old school to the new one when they went up to take over the school.

AE: Um hum. Yes, it was really something. And even today, I'll be fifty-one this year, anything that goes on at West Charlotte, if they're having homecoming parade, if I'm there, I'm there to watch the parade just to see the band. That's how everybody did up there. By our staying in University Park, there was so many of us that had big families, we would just all gather and go right up to West Charlotte.

PG: You would go in big groups.

AE: Yeah. If we didn't go in a group, if you got up there, there was the group. You got over there. We all hung together.

PG: From the neighborhood?

AE: Um hum. And even from the other neighborhoods. I never did ride a school bus. Some of them that came to West Charlotte had to ride city busses.

PG: Because they didn't have school busses then.

AE: They had city busses that would go in the neighborhood and pick up the students to bring them to West Charlotte, but I always lived in walking distance. (). It was just great. The different teachers, you could pass them and they knew your name. That's unusual, to be at a big school. I graduated in the largest class at West Charlotte

until it was integrated. A lot of my classmates, a lot of the guys died in Vietnam. I can go in my yearbook and just pick out the ones that have passed on. I think it was last year I had two classmates, one, it was Evette Roberts. Her last name was something else. I can't remember what it was. Her close friend went to her funeral and died. That's how close they were. Died at the cemetery. You would think going to school years back and you're still best friends, and that close. But that's how it was. I have a girlfriend that went to York Road. She says, "You know everybody." I'll say, "Honey, with nine of us going to school, and my brother knew this one's brother or sister and it just went on down the line." You just knew everybody and got along. I'm not saying it was a perfect school. They had their ups and downs, but we worked it as a family, sticking together and making the school work.

PG: Can you think of an example of that where a problem arose and everybody worked together to solve that, to work it out? Can you think of anything specific that happened?

AE: Well, I can't. Nothing, other than West Charlotte sticking together and Second Ward sticking together, and since they were rival schools we fought. Not only just the football team, but it went on down the line. The cheerleaders fought the cheerleaders, because somebody on that team was going with somebody at West Charlotte. We were just two rival schools doing the Queen City Classic. I wouldn't go to the games because I thought maybe if they started fighting, I wasn't fighting, so I was always baby sitting. But like I said, sticking together is what we did at West Charlotte.

PG: That's such a nice experience to have.

AE: Oh, it was. I hope it's still that way, but I haven't been up there. It hurt me when I went to West Charlotte one year. They had all of the alumni, all of the classes together. They're going to have it this July, they have it every three years, and they take you on a tour of the school. I went one year, and I was just shocked to see West Charlotte like it was. Some of the lockers were hanging off the wall, and I said, "This is not West Charlotte." I don't know how it looks now, but I was just shocked to see that. You couldn't come on our campus and drop paper. Everybody just stuck together keeping our school, West Charlotte, the best of all the schools.

PG: Do you remember coming in as a freshman? Do you remember what the feeling was like when you first came to the school?

AE: Well, I left Northwest going to West Charlotte. I was excited, and then afraid, too, going to senior high school. Like I said, I had sisters and brothers to kind of help pave the way in. I always wanted to hang with the older classes. I've always acted grown. The only way I could do that was if my brothers and sisters allowed me to do it. They kept me in my place though. It was just excitement. Looked down and saw my report card, and it said graduating to the tenth grade, West Charlotte Senior High School. Running around the campus down there at Northwest, "West Charlotte! West Charlotte."

[Both laughing.]

AE: It was something. William, Mrs. Garret's son, went to West Charlotte, too. He was a Lion. I just don't really, really know the words to explain what West Charlotte meant to me and the school teachers, other than they were there for you. Today I think teachers don't have time to do a one-on-one thing with the students, but we had that. We had that one-on-one with our school teachers.

PG: How did the teachers make that time back then? How did that happen?

AE: Staying up there. Going down the halls. Stopping. "I want to talk to you." They told you when you could come. We would be in little groups sometimes, and we could voice our own opinions. They made the time for us.

PG: What kind of things would people talk to the teachers about back then?

AE: If they were having problems in some of the courses they were taking. Sometimes relationships, family problems. Anything. It was just like when you left mom and dad, you had mom and dad there at school, too. Mr. Blake was just like everybody's daddy. They just made the time for you, and they were strict. Of course, they were lenient in some things, but they said, "If it's going to be this way, it's going to be that way." But then we were allowed to voice our own opinions about it, too. We would have all the classes come together in the gym, because we didn't have a auditorium then, and just have a question and answer session, or something like that.

PG: What would that be on, for example?

AE: Bettering our school, people going to college, just anything. Good school counselors, we had that. But to me every teacher was like a counselor. It was just family orientated. That's how it was.

PG I guess the teachers stayed there a long time?

AE: Yeah. They put their time in. It was just like you went to school, and you didn't care what time you left to go back home. Sometime you hated to go to school, but I don't think there was a day that I hated to go to West Charlotte.

PG: That is nice. What subject was your favorite?

AE: I liked English, and Daddy Townsend made me like history, because he would pound that in us. I took data processing, and I wanted to take either French or Spanish but during that time I had it on my schedule but they had gone and hand picked different students to set up this data processing class. It was Miss Fitz then, she's married now, taught that class. I was hand picked, and then it really helped me when I went to Bell South. That was good that they did that. But I was mad because I was wanting to learn a foreign language. I knew they had changed off my schedule. "I'm not going in no data processing class. I'm going down to Miss Rice's Spanish class." I was sitting up there. She never did call my name. There was a lot of us in there. She said, "Well, do I have anybody in here whose name I didn't call?" And I raised my hand and some others raised their hand. There's this other teaching^{er} coming in, Miss Fitz, calling off, "You're supposed to be in my class." I didn't get to take a foreign language.

PG: How did you get picked for that data processing class?

AE: I don't know how they did it. They just told us we were hand picked. They just went and picked some out of different classes to make up a class for data processing. We changed classes just like they do today. But I enjoyed that. Really enjoyed that, reading the data card.

PG: Because back then it was the cards.

AE: Um hum, with the punches in them. I went to work and saw that and said, "This was what I had at school," so I was able to relate to that.

PG: You said you came out in '65?

AE: '65.

PG: There must have been at that time some beginnings of the Civil Rights activities, back in the early sixties. Was that ever something that people talked about at West Charlotte, or that anybody did anything related to at West Charlotte?

AE: Yeah, they talked about it. I remember my church. People were so mean then, when you weren't used to that. We couldn't go to the parks. A lot of things we just couldn't do because of segregation. They meant for us to stay in our place. As far as going to the drug store, sitting down, we couldn't do that. It was just unbelievable. I was in the NAACP and took a trip to DC, Washington, and I met Bobby Kennedy. Shook his hand, and I was saying, "Lord, I won't wash my hand again." because his hand was just like cotton. And they called you than "N" word and all of that. It was just terrible during that time. But we stuck together. We didn't go just by ourselves because you never knew what was going to happen. We didn't know nothing about weapons and drugs and stuff like that. We'd sneak together beer or something like that, but too many didn't do that that I hung out with. It was frightening during that time, looking over your shoulder⁵ but you didn't have to look over your shoulder at West Charlotte because you knew you were at home. Now, you might have looked over your shoulder when you went to another school.

[Both laughing.]

AE: Because they knew you if you didn't go to their school, because we would cut class sometimes, sneaking. We did little things like that, but it wasn't nothing about fighting or just getting in real trouble. We'd go over to Second Ward and the guys would say, "There's some Lions." They were Tigers. They would come over to our school. York Road were Wapatees. A lot of the guys had cars, but a lot of them didn't. We got

around on the bus or we piled in together in somebody's car and went different places. It was kind of rough during that time. They call us the baby boomers anyway. There were so many of us in our class. My class picture had to be two pictures instead of just one. I can't remember how many it was, but we were the largest class at West Charlotte until they integrated.

PG: It's big now.

AE: Oh yeah.

PG: How many were in your class?

AE: I can't remember. It was over eight hundred.

PG: Really? Wow.

AE: I have my tee-shirt, but it's at my house in Shelby where we had our thirtieth year class reunion, and they put everybody's name on the back of the tee-shirt. We had the largest class.

PG: I hadn't thought about the baby boom.

AE: I'll tell you, it was a bunch of us.

PG: Did you know each other from church as well?

AE: Yeah, from church and just living in the same neighborhoods. Like I said, your brother knew maybe my sister or went to school with my sister, and it just went on down the line with different ones so you knew everybody. Not only just at West Charlotte but at other schools.

PG: Everyone was real close. Would you ever walk downtown to Second Ward to go to any of those events down there?

AE: Yeah, we would go. They would have dances at the "Y" and that was over in Brooklyn Bend, that's what they call that area. We braved it. We went. I remember my mom telling me that she lived in Brooklyn, and this guy had come over from West Charlotte to her house. Well, the Second Ward guys found out that he was coming over to her house to see her just because she lived here. They call this the West Side. He told her, "You call a cab." When the cab came he was running, and he told the cab to catch up with him because he didn't want them Tigers to catch him. It goes way back that those two schools were rivals like that. I dated a guy from Second Ward and I said, "There wasn't nothing like that Tiger meat." I didn't even look at nobody at West Charlotte. That's how it was. The girls were going to different schools getting the guys over there, and the guys were coming to our school to get the girls over here. We had our little rivals and had our little fights and stuff, but we still dated each other. That made it good.

PG: So were there couples who would then get married and they'd have to () sometime?

AE: Yeah, that's the way it is now. A lot of them got married that way. None of my brothers and sisters married anybody from West Charlotte. They all went to other schools and married somebody there.

PG: That's interesting.

AE: Yeah, isn't it?

PG: How did that happen?

AE: I don't know how it happened, but my older brother married a girl from York Road. My older sister married a guy from York Road. One of the twins married a

girl from Second Ward. It was just like that. Nobody really dated. They had fun, they dated, but then you had your eyes looking over this way and looking that way. Then how that happened was that you went to church with them. I tell you, I could go back during that time, some of it, and just sleep past all of this time that's going on now.

PG: Maybe it was like if it was like a family, it was more like just dating your sister or something like that.

AE: Yeah. And if you went anywhere, if they had something going on for the younger ones my older sister and brother they had to take us. I remember my sister was mad because she had to take me up to West Charlotte, and she didn't want me tagging along with her. They had a football game and during the half-time they had all the children bring their own hula hoop. My sister had to take me. I don't think she really like that but she had to take me anyway. We had some good times. We still sit around and reminisce about growing up and going to school. We started out at Double Oaks School. I went to Double Oaks. Then they had Fairview School. Everybody just grew up knowing everybody.

PG: What did your parents do?

AE: My mother was a housewife, and my father worked at Southern Asbestos. Then he retired from there and then he did janitorial work at Guaranty. I remember I felt like we were the Waltons. It had snowed so hard one time, and my daddy didn't drive. He drove. He had a truck, but it was the company's truck, and we didn't have a car. Everybody got around on the bus. If you didn't on the bus, then you walked. It wasn't nothing to walk then anytime of the night. Nobody bothered you. It had snowed so hard. It had snowed every Wednesday. I forget what year it was. We worried about my daddy

because he was working at Guaranty. He had retired from his regular job and was just doing something on the side. The busses stopped running, and he couldn't get home. Mamma sent my brothers out. When I watched the Waltons when John Boy was looking for his daddy one time, and my brothers went looking for my daddy. Do you know where Guaranty High School is?

PG: Yeah. It's pretty far out.

AE: Yeah. So you know where Beddes Fort Road is. My daddy walked from there. I remember when he walked in that door, and we all stripped his clothes because he was frozen cold. We had our fireplace and a fire and wrapped him. We were a close knit family anyway. I often think about that. I used to call us the Waltons.

PG: Well, I'm sure you all had to all pitch in with nine kids.

AE: Yeah. We had our chores. My mother and father they dressed us. We talk to people today that know us after we've grown up and they say, "Honey, your mamma and daddy worked, and they dressed you all." We came home, and we got out of our school clothes and got into our play clothes. I don't remember really going without anything. I do remember one time I wanted a baby doll, and I didn't get a baby doll. I didn't get my first baby doll until I got into seventh grade. I'm sure it was hard times then, but I never did really see them. We had the love and affection from our parents, and we just stuck together. I just lost my brother. He was the first sibling to go. My daddy died in '77. Warren predicted he was going to be the next one to go, but it took twenty years. That was hard. I'm still trying to adjust to that now. You're just so used to everybody being there. We're still a close knit family. If anything happens we all are

there. I live in Shelby. I've got one other brother, we call him Goo, he's in Dallas, Texas, but all the rest of them are here.

PG: My parents live in Dallas.

AE: Oh, yeah? Goo left here and went on to play pro ball when it was the NBA and the ABA. He wasn't making no kind of money like these guys are making now. He's retired from that. Now he works with children with behavioral problems. He's real good with that.

PG: Well, I guess you did have quite a bit to say.

AE: Well, I got to talking.

PG: You started to remember things. Could you tell me just a little bit, I've been interested, these people have been mentioning these football games, when you're walking up to there. Can you describe what that was like to walk, just how you would walk to the game and what it would look like, and that kind of thing? Can you remember?

AE: Most of the games that we went to were on Fridays. Everybody just knew when to go when it was time for the game. We would all just come out the Park. People would come from across town. Even if you didn't pay to go in, you just stood outside the fence and talked to everybody and watched the game. Just to go up there. Anything that happened in West Charlotte, we were there. It's still that way. They have the track meets and stuff now, anything. My oldest brother and one of the twins, they leave right out of my mamma's house right up there to West Charlotte. It's just that we did that. Sit on the banks. But like I said, someone tried to sneak in without paying, Rudy Taris and this other policeman named Costner, they didn't play that. Now they've got all of this stuff, child abuse. There's just so much of that going on now. Back then when they

chastised you, the teachers had paddles, and they would hit you on your hand or something like that. You can't touch these kids today, and some of the need to be kind of spanked because talking doesn't do it all for them. It wasn't like that when we were coming up. No. Like I said, give you that eye. You knew how to act.

PG: Even at West Charlotte would they have a paddle sometimes?

AE: In Northwest they did. I don't remember getting paddled at West Charlotte, but at Northwest when I was in junior high school we were taking the California achievement test. Mr. Reed told us, I'm stepping out and no talking. So I guess we were going to test to see, so everybody whispered. He just walked back in the door, "All right, get in line." They had the guys make the paddles in the shop. He would just sting your hand, but you would get mad and everybody would bust out laughing. There wasn't no abusing you or anything like that. He was just telling you you didn't do what I told you to do so you've got to suffer the consequences. All you did was hold your hand out and turn. You didn't want to see it. He'd just smack you, and you'd go back to your seat. I can't remember them having paddles at West Charlotte, no. Everybody carried themselves like they were supposed to carry themselves. They had little fights. I saw two girls get in a fight one time, but it wasn't nothing. The next day they were speaking to each other. It was about a boy, but it wasn't nothing, knives and guns, and stuff like that. There wasn't a thing like that.

PG: When you were there did they have a girl's basketball team?

AE: Yeah. They had a girl's basketball team. They played, too. You might see some of them in those yearbooks.

PG: I'll look through these. It looks like you've got a lot of people writing.

AE: They wrote stuff, and you don't realize how many people wrote in your book until you go looking at it. Like I said, all nine of us went West Charlotte so you can imagine how many yearbooks we have. If somebody dies, or somebody gets sick, or they saw somebody and you can't remember the name, we head to mamma's and pull out the yearbooks. She said, "Look, you all take your yearbooks home with you now." So I just recently brought those two home this year. They had a girl's basketball team. They had a tennis team, football.

PG: I talked to a couple of years ago Miss Blake, Alma Blake.

AE: Yeah. She stays right up there. That was Mr. Blake's niece.

PG: I guess she coached the basketball.

AE: Yes. She coached the girl's basketball team.

PG: When you were there did the girls play Friday and then the boys, or did the girls play at another time?

AE: They played at another time. Sometimes, I think, the girls played early and then the last game would be the boys. They've done it like that, but mainly it was all about those guys. Oh, they played some ball. My brother, honey, all of them played that ball. They won the championship. Was it in '63 or something.

PG: It was one of those years.

AE: It's up at the library. My brother is in that picture up there at the library. They wouldn't be in those books, because that came out in '63 and that's '64 and '65.

PG: All these folks with their cakes.

AE: Commercial dietetics. They would cook and we would be standing at the door, "Bring us something out." Then they would feed the football team every Friday night when they had a game.

PG: Was it a bigger deal to be on the football team or on the basketball team, or was it just the same?

AE: Both. It was the same, because everywhere you went you were a rival school with somebody, Torrance Lighter and the school from Gastonia. I can't even think of the name of that.

PG: Highland.

AE: Highland, um-hum. J. H. Gunn and some Stevens school. It was about West Charlotte, football games, basketball games. You went to all of that.

PG: How about to be a cheerleader. Was that a big deal?

AE: Yeah, it was. You had to really know how to cheer to be a cheerleader, or to be a majorette or a letter girl. Sandra's twin sisters were letter girls. Every leg would go up at the same time. They were just high stepping. And then the trumpet line. The guys could do the trumpet like that. All you could hear was "Here comes West Charlotte." And everybody just running right behind West Charlotte, and they still do that.

PG: It sounds like being in the band was pretty important.

AE: Oh, yeah. It was, and that's Stanley right there.

PG: Right here, the drum major?

AE: Stanley Jones. He was high stepping. See how those girls put their legs up that high? That's Sandra's sister Peggy.

PG: Okay, right there.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

PG: She went to Second Ward.

AE: Um-hum. I don't know what school. My daddy was from Allendale, South Carolina. He went to a school there. But my mom Carey went to West Charlotte and then William, her son, graduated from West Charlotte. Her husband was from Texas, so he didn't go to school here. That's not the son that you brought up, is it?

PG ← AE: Yeah, William. That's him right here. That's the last picture.

PG: Was he living with you when he was going to West Charlotte?

AE: No, he was living with his parents here.

PG: Oh, with his parents. Okay.

AE: And I would baby sit. This wasn't the first house. When he was a baby they lived off of Statesville on a street called Cole Avenue. It doesn't even look the same over there any more. Then they moved to this side of town. William was about eleven or twelve. He wanted to go to West Charlotte, too. So he had a chance to go to West Charlotte. He graduated from West Charlotte and went on to Morehouse. That's where his father graduated from college, Morehouse.

PG: That's in Savannah.

AE: Right. And my mom Carey graduated from West Charlotte, and she went on and got her bachelor's from Johnson C. Smith, and her master's from New York University. They were Lions, honey. William was in the marching band, too. They had

the glee club. They had little social clubs, too. You can look in there and see those pictures. We were something else. And we go back and laugh, "Look at your hair style!"

PG: It looks like there are a lot of good pictures. It must had been good photography.

AE: Mr. Townsend was in photography.

PG: The newspapers. You all stayed busy.

AE: Yeah, we did. They had cosmetology where the ladies learned how to do hair. They just had so many things to offer you then. I don't even know if they have cosmetology in schools now.

PG: I don't know either.

AE: I don't even think they have that. We called it distributive education, DE, where you worked and went.

PG: Here it is.

AE: I don't know if they call it that today or not, when you can leave school early and you had a job that you could go to.

PG: These are wonderful pictures.

AE: That's right here. The bunch of twins that went to school.

PG: Oh yeah, these are all twins.

AE: All of them are twins. That's Peggy and Patty. Those were Sandra Baker's sisters. This one is deceased now. She got killed in an automobile accident. Vivian and Vera, they were in my class, the class of '65. These two were in the class of '64. They were in the class of '66. They were in the class of '63. These two here were in my class of '65.

PG: Did you have nieces and nephews go to West Charlotte?

AE: Yes. Charlese went, Vonnie and Vinnie. I think three. The other ones went to Harding or Independence because it was the neighborhood you stayed in. I used to tell my sister, "You're going to let your kids go to Harding? You're not going to let them go to West Charlotte where you went?" I said, "Give them mamma's address," so they could go. But, no, they ended up going to Harding. It went on down the line. I guess one of my little nieces or nephews tore the yearbook, because they were always looking in them, too. We wanted you to be a Lion.

PG: Did your nieces and nephews as you were following them through school, did they have the same kind of experience in high school that you all did?

AE: No, I know they didn't. I don't think I ever talked to them. I didn't have any children to go, so I don't know. If they did they discussed it with their parents. They used to have good old peanut butter cookies. I thought maybe they were still making those same peanut butter cookies like that, so I gave my niece some money. "Bring me some of those cookies." I bit into it, and I said, "No, honey, this is nothing like we had at West Charlotte. Nothing like that." Things change.

PG: Do you follow the school much now?

AE: Well, I hadn't, because I've been here. I haven't stayed in my house in three years because I stayed here to care for my mom Carey. I was going to some of my class reunions. My class reunion is one of the active classes. They really have stuff going. We won as queen this year at the ball they had during Valentine's, right after that. My class queen won. I'm going to start back going. I'm just trying to adjust right now and

get myself back to doing something. My life has been on hold. They keep in touch with me. They send me the letters and everything.

PG: Well, what would you say if you were to think about it, just to kind of finish up, your hopes for the future of West Charlotte and the future of schools. What would you say that you would hope for the future?

AE: They just need to get it together. It takes not only the students, but it takes people with backbones like your parents to initiate and encourage kids. I'm sitting here talking about what we did. This is what I would have done if I had a child. To teach him what we did, and he could carry that on to somebody else, but if all the parents could only do that and have that closeness with kids. I know a lot of them work. They don't have the time. Our parents, a lot of them didn't work. Most of them were housewives. The husband worked, the mother stayed at home. You had that connecting thing. Going to PTA meetings and doing stuff like that. I say today the kids now, it seems like they're out of school more than they're in school. When we had teacher's work day coming up, we were in school when they had those teacher's work days. The parents came to the school to see how you were doing, and you were there. "There's your mamma. There's your daddy." It's not like that. I guess it's so big now it's just impossible to have it that way. It starts at home. You can't expect the teacher to raise your child. You teach your child at home and pound it in your child, he'll carry it on with him. That's the way we were raised. We've never been in trouble or anything. I just don't know. Starting at home, because when you're young you don't know. You might have a black friend or a white friend or something like that, but so many people got so much prejudice in them. They teach it to their children. One thing happened to me in the grocery store. It was

this little white girl. Pretty. Had beautiful blue eyes. Her mother was in front of me. Now this was a tiny little girl that wouldn't know about color unless somebody had to teach it to her. So she looked at me, and she smiled, and I smiled back at her. I said, "You have the most beautiful blue eyes." Her mother said when she was born that's the first thing they noticed when she came out and she opened her eyes. She had those big, pretty blue eyes. So the little girl kept saying, "Mommy, mommy." The mamma was trying to pay for her groceries. She said, "What is it?" She said, "She's not dirty."

PG: Hum.

AE: And you could have bought the mamma with a penny. I said, now how does that child know that? It had to be told to her that people of my color are dirty. I was just standing there. I felt for the mother. She just didn't know what to say. She couldn't say anything. And I didn't say anything. She just said, "Mommy, she's not dirty." I know it was embarrassing for her. That's why you have to watch what you say to your children coming up. Teach them right from wrong. Like they say, if you don't teach them they'll embarrass you, and that's what happened to her. Just starting at home with them, instilling in them that they can be somebody no matter what color they are. And I don't think you should ever tell a child growing up that he's bad. Even if he acts up, never tell him because the minute you tell him that's going to stick with him, and he's going to always think he's bad, and he's going to do bad things. It's just that way. When we were coming along in school if you did something in the first grade it went all the way to the twelfth grade because that teacher done told that teacher how that student was and it carried on. It starts at home.

PG: I guess you would have known from your older brothers and sisters how that would have worked.

AE: Oh yeah. I know one day I was at Double Oaks school. I've always ran my mouth. I'm just outgoing. I don't meet a stranger, I don't care what color. It means nothing to me because some of the best friends I have are white. My sister, Florea, came home, "Mamma, you need to talk to Alma Lilly. She just embarrassed us. She was sitting up on her knees in the cafeteria running her mouth all over the table and everything." So, mama got on me. It didn't happen no more. Somebody always told on you. You just need to start at home. I think parents today, you can do anything you want to do. With these kids coming up today you need to make the time. Sacrifice the time, and think about your parents sacrificing theirs for you. You do it for your kids, and you've got to get involved with them to let them know that you're interested in what they're doing and where they're going. But the parents are not like that today. Some parents today, I've seen it, they act like they're scared of their kids. I say, "Lord have mercy. That wouldn't have been in my family coming up." It's sad. And you wonder when will it stop or when will an end come to it. You've got to do that. You've got to start at home. You should never expect a teacher to raise your child. You do the raising. You get that support from that teacher. A lot of them think that's what they want the teacher to do. Really. It starts with that parent.

PG: There's been the bussing in Charlotte for so many years, and now there's talk that they may stop doing it with this new court case and all of that. What do you think about that?

AE: What, bussing kids? Well now they've got so many integrated neighborhoods. I know it's hard getting kids up early and bussing them this way. I don't see anything wrong with it. I can say that because it never happened to me. But in order to get the education that everybody deserves they've got to do that.

PG: You think still now they need to do that? You think it's still important?

AE: Yeah, in a sense, but over on this side of town it's predominantly black. I wouldn't say not bus to another school in order for that child to get the proper education. Not that they won't get it here. Back then they had the neighborhood schools. If you lived in that neighborhood you went to that school. I don't see anything wrong with the bussing. They bus some of them too far away, then by the time the kids do get there they're worn out from riding. If by not being segregated they can offer every child everything that child's supposed to get and not look at color I can see staying in the neighborhood. They're not going to do that. I don't think they will. But, like I said, there's a bunch of white kids out there who want to go to West Charlotte. It just seems funny because you never did see whites on this side of town. You see more of them now than you see blacks. That's because they want to go to West Charlotte and do everything they can to get there. To me it's a powerful school. They've just got to have a little bit more teachers sticking together and parents sticking together, and parents not expecting the teachers to raise their kids. Do I talk too much?

PG: No. This has just been so wonderful, and I really do appreciate your taking the time to do this. I'll just say unless there's anything else that you feel like we haven't covered.

AE: Well, I can't think of anything. It will probably come to me when you leave.
No, I just can't think of a thing right now.

PG: I want to say this because I didn't get a chance to say this at the beginning.
This is Pamela Grundy, and I'm here interviewing Miss Alma Enloe. It is the eighteenth of May, 1998, and we're in Charlotte, North Carolina.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW
TRANSCRIBED BY SHARON CAUGHILL
SPELLING QUESTIONS

PAGE ITEM

- 1, 20 Sister's name: graduated in 1961 Florea?
- 1 Author: Case Gary?
- 1 Street name where Kennedy family lived: Ingar Street
- 1 Brother's name. He was a pro basketball player: Gould?
- 2, 14 Names of policemen at school: Rudy Taris and Costner?
- 3, 16, 18 Name: Sandra?
- 4&6 Mom: Carey?
- 5 Guaranty? High School
- 5 Woman's name: Pat Benoy
- 7 Name: Evette Roberts
- 8 Name: Mrs. Garret (her son's name is William)
- 10 Name of school: York Road
- 10 Name of York Road's teams: Wapatees?
- 11 Area of Charlotte downtown: Brooklyn Bend?

- 12 Where AE's father did janitorial work: Guaranty?
- 13 Beddes Fort Road
- 15 Miss Blake's first name: Alma?
- 15 Name of schools: Torrance Lighter; J. H. Gunn?
- 17 Cole? Coal? Avenue
- 18 Niece's and nephew's names: Charlese, Vonnie, Vinnie?
- 20 Alma's middle name: Lilly?