

Interview with Mrs. Lillian Kerley

Date: May 22, 2001

Interviewed by Dr. Rosalee Martin

RM: Thank you for coming Mrs. Kerley. It's always good to see you. Why don't you start off by telling us your name and just your relationship to education over these years.

LK: My name is Lillian Gray Kerley, and I've been in Austin since 1930. We moved here from Manor, off of the farm, a large family, and because of the Depression, you know, most of the people had to leave the farm. But I was born in Webberville, Texas, and finished the seventh grade at Manor High School and took the eighth grade at [L. C.] Anderson High School.

RM: That's Anderson here in Austin?

LK: Anderson here in Austin.

RM: So what year did you graduate from Anderson?

LK: I graduated from Anderson in 19 and 34.

RM: And then you told me you went back to Anderson as a teacher?

LK: I went back to Anderson, and I taught at Anderson High School. I finished in '34, and then I came to Huston-Tillotson [misstatement, she means Tillotson College – the merger with Samuel Huston College did not occur until 1952], had a job here on Huston-Tillotson. I swept the walk from one building to the other. We didn't have but two or three buildings, and I took that. Then I'd go out in the city and make money to help my family, because with my family the age they were, they could not do anything coming off of the farm. So I had to do that.

There were four under me, there were four siblings, that I had to help. I was the oldest one at home. The other sisters and brothers were married and moved off. So I'd have to go out after I'd do that. The second year I was here I worked in the curriculum lab, Mr. John Lewis. I was in school here. The third year I cleaned the room of Mrs. Lilly Wilson, who was the English room. I would do that and then go off after I'd get through here.

After the third year I decided that it was just more than I could handle, you know, trying to work and go to school. I had nothing like a school life because I had no connection much with the activities on the campus because of having to go out to help the family. Then I stayed out about five years and went back. I took a job. It was seventeen dollars a month—I mean a year—that I made.

I went up to Taylor to pick cotton and had to take care of my father that was there, cotton picking. Then I came back in the year '42. I returned. I had married. I married in '38, which I should have finished in that year from Huston-Tillotson. But by me staying out, I came back and then I went out in '42 and helped for about a week my father. We picked cotton, which wasn't but—I made about seventeen dollars, and I re-entered that summer.

RM: At Huston-Tillotson.

LK: Re-entered Huston-Tillotson and took a course in activities.

RM: Was it like PE?

LK: No, no, no, no. It wasn't in PE. It was in home economics. Miss Hines, Lillibell Hines, was the teacher of that class, which we had entered together as students together, but then when I came back in '42 she was professor over here. Then in '43 I came back, and that's when I graduated, in '43. Did my practice teaching. I lived in the practice house over there. I was married at that time. I did my practice teaching at Kealing Junior High School. It was a funny thing, the professor that was my classmate, he's dead now, he passed away, and he was in my class. We were freshmen together. But he was able to go on and get his master's degree, and he had to teach me. You know, I took a lot of science. Because of being in home economics, my minor was science. Hammond. I used to tell him every time I'd meet him after that—because he taught me biology in the science, you know, he was teaching. I told him that he used to be—we were classmates at one time. I said that used to be a classmate of mine, I said, and then he taught me. I said I used to be in the class with him. He told me that I was retarded was the reason.

RM: You know that wasn't [unclear].

LK: Yes. So anyway, we had a lot of fun off of that. Then I did my practice teaching at Kealing, and I had to teach there at [unclear] because I was in home economics, and naturally we took clothing and then Jewel Lee, she was going to be in foods, and I had to go into this business of teaching. Because it was another girl, Charlene Colt [phonetic], she was a little bit younger than I was. I was kind of an old lady at that time by staying out five years. Two of us was in home economics. Norma Carley [phonetic], who was a classmate of mine when I was in there. But the teacher that was in the foods department at Kealing, she went to Temple to marry—her name was Prior, Margaret Prior [phonetic], and she went to Temple to marry a Meredith and she didn't come back. Which Mr. [T. C.] Calhoun—at that time you couldn't get one of these special area teachers like a music teacher or home economics teacher, you couldn't get a sub back in there.

So I had to switch and go in to – Mr. Calhoun was the principal who taught me math in high school, taught me algebra. I don't know whether I learned anything or not, but he's the one. He said let me take over. He called me Gregg at that time but I had married. So they put me there and left us cold in that, and then that mean that Jewel, who was in the class, home economics with me, who was in the practice half, I had to teach her. They gave me one year of practice—I mean of—when I got ready to—they gave me a year of teaching. They released me from Huston-Tillotson and let me stay there for the six weeks that we had to practice.

RM: So that when you left HT [Huston-Tillotson], did you become a teacher eventually in the public school system?

LK: Yes, I became a teacher. I went to Manor and taught in Manor two years, and then I came back. I missed an opening that was here in home economics because of—I missed it because they hadn't gotten my transcript in to the public school, but it was an opening in home economics, which I was prepared for. But one of the teachers here, one of the professors, hadn't gotten all of my material in to public school. So I had to take a job in Manor, which I commuted back and forth to Manor. I taught in the primary department first, and then I went into home economics my second year.

RM: What year did you come to Austin as a teacher?

LK: I came back to Austin in 19—I did '43, '44—I came back to Austin in '46, and I begun teaching. I took a job, and I was canteen manager. It was called canteen manager. It's called student union now. I was manager there, Miss Luberta Hardin [phonetic], and that's when I began teaching here because she had the classes in home economics, and I had to take over. That was in '46. I worked in the student—it was called the canteen then.

RM: Now, this was for public school or Huston-Tillotson?

LK: It was Huston-Tillotson.

RM: So you worked at HT for how long?

LK: I just did that summer serving in Miss Hardin's place, because she had to leave.

RM: And during the year you were with AISD, Austin Independent School District?

LK: Oh, yes. I went to Austin Independent School District. In 19 and 47 I took over, and I worked at Anderson High School. By being in home economics, I could teach in any area of elementary, and I worked in most all the elementary schools. I did child development. But I was employed in Anderson High School, but they had what they called—I could work in the elementary schools also. I was with the Home and Family Life Education Program. Then I worked on the state advisory board for Home and Family Life for twelve years while I was connected with Anderson High School.

RM: And how long did you work with AISD?

LK: I worked with AISD forty years and two in Manor. That was forty-two years I served in the—

RM: Public schools.

LK: Yes.

RM: You retired what year?

LK: I retired in 1982 from Govalle [Elementary School].

RM: So that means that you were working for AISD when schools began to integrate.

LK: Yes. That has been an upset to me ever since. I'll tell you what, I went right into elementary. I got my master's in 1959 from University of Texas, and I mastered in early childhood education, which came through home economics. Am I leading you right?

RM: I'm listening.

LK: It was in home economics there. Home economics had a child development—

RM: —component to it.

LK: That's right, and that's what I mastered in. I got a double master, which gave me an MS and an MED because I began trying to go to university first for my master's, and they told me I didn't

have enough education to master in what I wanted to master in. So they sent me to Texas Southern [University], which at that time it was supposed to have been a master's. I didn't have enough—

RM: Credit hours?

LK: In education to enter the university. That's what they told me. They sent me to Prairie View [A&M University]. I went to Texas Southern for one summer, and I built up, I think, about nine hours in child development. Then I came back. But at that time it was kind of confusing to me because the Hispanics and all of those could go but I couldn't go.

RM: So was UT integrated in '57 when you went, University of Texas.

LK: Were they integrated?

RM: Yes.

LK: Yes. You know, that was when that Herman Sweatt [Sweatt v. Painter, 1950], all of that business, came out. Yes. But I started, but it was in home economics.

RM: So the question I wanted to ask you to focus on is when you were teaching in segregated schools, what schools were you teaching at?

LK: I was teaching in Anderson High School. I began at Anderson High School when it was over there on Pennsylvania. I begun teaching there. I helped to lay the foundation for the one that moved on Thompson, and I've been upset ever since they moved it and put it way out yonder and I have never been in it. But I helped to do that because it was—we formed a home economics room where I would have child development room there. By me being a home economics teacher, then they let us help design the new Anderson when it got ready to move from Pennsylvania. Because at that point, the child development lab, which I had to work in, was at this community center. The housing down Angelina, it had to be closed.

Kealing Junior and Anderson High School students would observe in there, the home economics students. They wouldn't come as a class; they would come one at a time, you know, at their off period, and they would observe. I have all the details and all the pictures of that.

Then when we got ready to move Anderson we had to have a place to have it. So we designed—a home economics teacher set up the groundwork for the place where they were going to put it up.

RM: So we're talking about not the Anderson High School that exists currently, not where it is now—

LK: No, no, no. We're talking—

RM: So Anderson High actually has had three locations.

LK: Yes, as far as I know. And I think they had a location before then, but I'm confused. I might be overlapping myself. But I'm confused now about them moving it and changed the logo. We were Yellowjackets – I brought the bag here.

RM: Yellowjackets.

LK: And they changed the logo. They're something else now. And then they put it way out there.

RM: Okay. So we're talking about when they actually closed—well, we always called it Old Anderson—and moved it to its current location when integration occurred.

LK: Yes.

RM: They changed the logo and the colors and

LK: Moved it out on Mesa.

RM: —and moved it away.

LK: And that has been so confusing to me because Austin High was rebuilt. My son finished from Austin High. But after it was rebuilt as Austin High they didn't change the logo. I can't understand why they did it, and then I can't understand why they took it out of the heart where the most black children and it's a black man that it's named for. I mean, why couldn't they have kept it over here, and these children that's in the lower income bracket, the project, they cannot go, they don't have the means to go, where Anderson High School.

They moved all the best black teachers and whatnot and all of that. So I can't understand why they did that. Why couldn't they leave it here? It's plenty people living in this project. My husband was the first manager, as you know, of the project there. And when we had this there I had to give up the room that we had for the child development lab. I asked Mr. Stewart, who was manager then of the project, and he let us move in the two buildings across the street to have our child development lab where the children could just walk across the street. Because we had to give up that room to Mr. Breeding [phonetic] for a class. He had a class that had to meet as a class, and he didn't have a room. We had to get another place, and I'm the one had to get it.

RM: So when the kids were in segregated schools, all the teachers were segregated, were also African-American in those schools?

LK: That's right.

RM: When you think about segregated schools versus integrated schools, what are the major things you think of in terms of education for the kids, in terms of how they learn, motivation versus integrated schools' education motivation?

LK: Well, if I understand your question right, I have been kind of—I don't know. I don't know. I feel, when I look at it now—I feel that most of these children have been robbed. I think integration was good. It was time. I've worked all along with people in integration, but I really feel that the minority, the black students, I should say, have been kind of robbed of something that they needed, and that was a strong person that could look at them and tell them—you know, that could be kind of like a mother or father to them. And I think they've fallen behind.

I'm really opposed to this TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Skills] test. I'm opposed to that, and I tell all of them in the—officials. They didn't have it. They didn't know what it was. TAAS is something that's kind of—it locks children, and you can say "test" and sometimes it scares them if you don't call it a test. And TAAS test can't tell what's up here. There's no test can tell what you have up here. There's no test, because I've seen the children that didn't have the TAAS test, when we were coming up, and I've worked with them and I see them. They're professors, they're

doctors, they're lawyers. They probably didn't have it when you were coming on, you know, and they're doctors and lawyers, got to holding good positions and holding down jobs, but there wasn't nothing like a TAAS test. I think this TAAS test has really retarded some of our students because it's a scare.

When I went to the university out there, those professors out there would hand me a piece of paper, and they wouldn't call it a test but it was a test. They were trying to tell, to see whether I was ready to go to school out there at the university. I imagine you know what I'm talking about because you went there yourself, because I recommended it. Well, anyway, they didn't know. They said, "You can answer those questions if you want to." If they had told me it was a test, I would have frozen, because I'm not a test—I can't take tests. I can run my mouth and talk, but I cannot put it on paper. So anyway, that's what I'm feeling about some of these children.

RM: So there are other ways of testing the abilities of students?

LK: That's right. That's right. That's right. That's what I'm feeling.

RM: So do you think that the tests were created after integration?

LK: I think that's what it was. I've never heard of it.

RM: What do you think the purpose of those tests are?

LK: Well, to do what it's doing. That higher echelon is going on. And in most of my classes, even when I was down there at Manor, and when I went to Manor school, I had to walk so far, but they would always—I was a little bit advanced because I learned a lot from my parents at home and my sisters and brothers. When we were in a room where there wasn't but—the teacher had three or four different classes. That was when I was back there in school, first, second, and third grade. They would always give me a little group that I could work with while this teacher was working with somebody else.

And I did it out there at Brentwood [Elementary School]. I worked at Brentwood four years. I didn't have a black child in my room the full time I was out there. They pulled me from Norman [Elementary School] and from the east side and sent me to Brentwood. And Brentwood didn't have a black child out there the four years I was there. And I took some of those that was a little bit advanced and let them work with the ones in this new math and whatnot. If they'd catch on, then I'd set them aside and let them have three or four. Because sometimes they can do—and that was helping them, too. We didn't just push them on and let them get up there. Because sometimes they get up there, I've seen them fall flat, they feel that they're so far above the others.

And I'd go back to the university when I was out there, I took a class under—it was statistics, where we had to—and I had a Dr. Fulcker [phonetic]. His name was Fulcker. He was smarter, so smart he had the ticks. But he couldn't teach it, and there was ninety in my class, and there wasn't but one—I was the only black in there. He couldn't—he was so far above us, and he didn't get down to our level. And they had to pull him and made him a consultant, which we would do our work in little groups, when they pair off in groups, four, five, or six of us in a group working on a problem, and they couldn't get—I had to be in one of those groups, and we would go to him, being a consultant. And I think they had these interns that was doing their internship that would be working with us, you know, and then we would carry it to him. I made an A in the class, but I wouldn't have made anything in the class had Fulcker stayed there.

And then the world turns, when we went to University Junior High. My son was in University Junior High, and he was a parent, he and his wife were parents, PTA. You know, they'd work together as parents. And then, my husband was co-parents. We had to work with them. And that's the way the world turned. So I had a chance to talk to him because of, you know, our relationship as parents and co-parents.

RM: So—I'm sorry.

LK: Oh, no. Go right on.

RM: Okay. So—

LK: Because I'm rambling. I don't—

RM: You were in elementary school, teaching elementary school, when desegregation occurred?

LK: That's right.

RM: Okay. Desegregation for elementary school occurred much later than for high school.

LK: Yes, it did. Let me see, maybe about—I think I went into elementary in 1960. I went directly to Sims [Elementary School] in the third grade. I went—got out of home economics. And I went there when I got my master's in '59. Then we took over in 19 and 60. Then I think it was 19 and—I don't know when it was—1970 we were fixing to go into Norman. Norman was a new school. It was named after Mr. Norman, Glocus Norman's [phonetic] daddy, and it's over on Heflin Lane, way over in that area. And we just had gotten in there. We went in January, and they would send all the most experienced teachers with that new principal. Mr. Allen was the principal. That's when they called me. At the end of that I had to go to Brentwood because they had a teacher in the first grade, a black teacher. They were integrating teachers, you know, begun integrating teachers.

RM: And that happened before they start integrating the kids?

LK: Yes. It was before they integrated the kids because there wasn't a black child out there then. So I went there, and as much as I regretted it, I would be on the third grade because that's what I dealt with all the time after I went into elementary.

RM: So you were an experienced teacher, a master teacher, been in the field longer, a long time. And they took you from the black schools and sent you to the white school.

LK: The white school, where there wasn't a black child.

RM: And so, did they also send some of the white teachers to black schools?

LK: They sent a white teacher that—she—

RM: To black schools?

LK: They sent a white teacher. She'd been three years. She had three years teaching, had been out three—

RM: So she didn't have the experience that you had. They sent her to the black school?

LK: Sent her to Norman. There wasn't a white child out there, nothing but black, to Norman. She had three years of teaching and had been out three years with a baby, and they sent her to Norman.

RM: What are your ideas about that kind of crossover in terms of [unclear]?

LK: Well, I really felt that it was one of the worst things that they could have done. You see what I mean. Before I started teaching or while I was teaching, I worked in the schools, and I was a mother. I had to bring them children home with me. Zachary Scott's daughter and this Lance Armstrong's father. You know, what's his name? His name was Bob Armstrong. He was a land commissioner, and they had that Armstrong Johnson Ford there? Well, that's Lance Armstrong—that you hear Lance Armstrong, that's his father, and I have materials and things that he—I'd have to bring him home while Bob—Bob—

RM: While the parents were working?

LK: While the parents was off on business, because they owned that Armstrong Johnson. It's called Leif Johnson Ford now. But that was Armstrong Johnson Ford. I'd bring him home with me and keep him. And I worked with the Steadmans [phonetic] when they had that place, and the Neeks [phonetic]. You know, I worked in their homes and had a chance to work with these children. We were more of a parent. Lucy Johnson of old LBJ [Lyndon Baines] Johnson, I worked out there on his farm, Lyndon Johnson's farm, with Lucy and that child. You see what I mean? We had a chance to be and know the different cultures. And when I was in the University of Texas, I had to have a course in child development, and I had those children that I had to observe and blah, blah, blah. We had this sort of thing that we could—but when they come over there, they don't have that sort of thing.

RM: [Unclear].

LK: That's right. They don't have it. And I was at Brentwood out there. When I was at Brentwood, I wish you would see. I brought you some of the material that I want you to see, the stuff that they wrote. But while I was over here, it was just like nothing. But it's the experience that I've had working in the homes when I had to with the children and know the—and with the parents. And the woman that was over me out at the university there, she's sick now, Mrs. Upright, Dr. Upright, Margaret Upright.

RM: You have such a good memory of names.

LK: I stayed on their farm. That's where I picked cotton. And I moved from there here, and I have to work with her sister now, Ethel Davis, Ethel Upright Davis. They're the ones that we have a connection with out there on the farm. And when I'd go to her, she was over the Home Economics Department, we'd talk about nothing but Manor and the Upright farm. Their daddy was down there. I'm skipping a whole lot of stuff. But I had all of this kind of connection with them.

But when you send these youngsters that haven't had to deal and mother black children, and she's just—she's too young. She was too young. So they profited out there.

RM: By having you there?

LK: That's right. And I had some of the children, their parents would want to fight me—I mean, want to whip the children about the question that they would ask when I was observing out at the university. We had to do an anecdotal record on some of them. I had four in my little group. They would ask him about—you know, we'd have a little group. It was about six blacks out there taking child development through the summer.

I had this little guy, and he was a little white—all of them were white, but I had to do it on David. One record. I had to observe everything they did and let them play on down. We were in child development lab. They were thinking of a game, we had to let them do the thought, say what they wanted to do. I had to keep a record of everything.

So one little boy said, "Well, let's play this game." They were thinking of a game that they could play. I didn't have but four that I had to watch after. And this one of them said, "Let's play cowboys and Indians." And one other suggested some kind of game. But this David that I was supposed to have been making the [unclear] record on, he told them, he said, "Let's play Shoot the Niggers." Well, this woman heard it, the supervisor. She was close enough to hear it. I didn't say anything. So she says, "How did that make you feel? What did they say?"

I said, "They were trying to think of a game that they wanted to play." I says, "And one," I called the little boy's name, "He said let's play cowboys and Indians then another game." I said, "But David spoke up and said, 'Let's play Shoot the Niggers.'"

"How did it make you feel?"

I said, "I had no feeling at all," I said, "Because he wasn't associating me. He's heard that word." I said, "But he doesn't know." I said, "Because to me, if you look in your dictionary, a nigger is a low-down person." I said, "And he could have been talking about his mama," I said, "Because that's what a nigger is." I said, "And I'm not low down. He didn't look at me. He didn't associate it with my color." You see what I mean?

RM: The supervisor did?

LK: Evidently she did. Evidently she did. I said, "He's heard the word." You know, they're just innocent. They don't know what they're saying, and that's what I—

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

LK: — I says, "And that's a dictionary word, and somebody needs to look it up." I said, "I think you all are doing a good job out here." I said, "I've had that. I've had to live with it. But when you look it up, he couldn't have been talking about me because I'm not a low-down person." I said, "And he wasn't thinking about this." I said, "I've worked with children."

Mr. Neeb [phonetic], he was a professor at the university there in English, and I used to take care of his children. He traveled around a lot. He was connected with that Concordia College when it was an all-boys' school. I worked on that campus, a dollar a day, and all of them homes, the Steadmans and whatnot. And Mr. Neeb, they lived out there on 38th Street, 38th and a half you know, on Red River, close to Red River, and I'd have to keep those children. I'd take them to my house. I was in a one-room house on Singleton Avenue. I've got a picture of it. And I'd have to take them there. And I had an old zinc tub that I had to bathe in, and I'd take them while the Neebes were traveling around.

And I'd go back, and when I—Marty, they'd work in the Lutheran thing there in Chicago. Both of those boys are professors now, and I get them on television. It was Marty and Larry. But the baby boy looked at me one day, I was out there at their house, and they called me Jackie, and if you called me anything else, now, but Jackie, old man Steadman, one of the—Martin Steadman is still living, and he told me, said, "Jackie, if you'd bathe in our tub," they had a bathtub, and he knew I had this old zinc tub that I've still got to remember, he said, "You'd get all of this dirt off of you." He knew I was a—everything else was just as human as he was, but I had dirt on me and I needed to wash in that tub.

RM: That was your skin color.

LK: That was my skin color. He knew that I'd spank his thing that he sat on if he'd get out in the street. I had to be his mama. He slept in bed with me out there in that one-room house.

RM: Ms. Kerley, as you are reminiscing and thinking about these experiences, what role did family, church, business all play in the segregated community that you were part of?

LK: What role did they play?

RM: Yes. How did they all interact and intermesh?

LK: Well, it seems that the churches have gotten away from a lot of the stuff that they used to play. The churches were more or less like a family. I know Reverend Marshall—I'll talk about him—General Marshall's great-granddaddy. You know General that worked out here?

RM: Yes.

LK: It was his great-granddaddy. He was pastor in Webberville, down there. That's where we were born, and most all of my people went to Webberville where Reverend Route [phonetic] is now. And I used to teach Reverend Route. And I played around in the dirt and whatnot because I was born right there in Webberville, where Reverend Marshall was the one that was pastoring that church. He would come by and what he would do, he came to David Chapel, and I've been in that church under him, but what he would do, he kind of played a father role to my father and all the other men. He would tell them what they should do. He wasn't getting the money that you get now. You know that. Twenty-five cents a week, if we paid that, we were doing good. They played more or less like a father to the—

RM: Congregation?

LK: —congregation. They didn't set themselves aside and get up on a big horse as in all of that. We had all kind of—and he would tell them—my father was named June—"Now, you and Lee—" that was my uncle. All of them were deacons around that church—"You all need to get your family a place to live, get you a home." That's the kind of information that they would give. They seemed like more or less a father figure to the families. They got down with the families.

And they weren't greedy for everything that they could get. They would get chickens or whatever we had. You might give them food or whatnot, but they weren't the people that were grafting after money, because money wasn't too much available at that time. I think our church has now gotten kind of away from that sort of thing.

RM: So do you think that, as you look at the experiences that we had during the segregated period, do you think those experiences helped to make you the person you are now?

LK: I really believe that. I thank God for it. In other words, what I'm saying, it seems as if—because I guess I'm different from all the other people, I've been able to take it or leave it. You know, I've been that kind of person. I've just been one of these human persons that I could — because I remember when I was sweeping walks here, before we were integrated and I was sweeping walks, children would come by and say something to me about sweeping the walk. I said, "If you wanted me to hurry up and get through sweeping this walk—" It wasn't but two or three walks here that you would have to knock the dirt off of and that's all and I was through. I said, "You would go get a broom and come out and help me if you don't want to see me out here." See, I've had this kind of thing. And that was before we were integrated. See, I went here before we—before boys, before it was coed I went here.

RM: As you're thinking about—let's look at today, as we move up in terms of the educational system. What would you say are the major problems that we're confronted with as a race to educate and preparing our students, our kids, for the twenty-first century?

LK: Well, the thing that I see now, the thing that I see, I'm thinking, and I might be wrong, When they moved—and I'm saying this—and they put all the strong stuff that we had going for us—I'm thinking about black, now—they put them down to the office, gave them those positions, that pulled them away from the children, which is so valuable. I could have gone in as counselor. I've got my counseling degree. I've got a degree in cosmetology. I got a degree in typing because I had to type up all my reports. And they wanted to pull me into counseling, but I felt that I could do more by staying with the younger children because that's where, if you give them a footing, and I found that out—if you give them a footing, if they can get through that third grade and do it successfully, they've got legs to stand on.

But when you pull all your strongest stuff out and put them down there in that office, and that's what happened, what are they doing? Nothing. They're away from the children. They have no connection with the children. The children are the important thing that ought to be. Anything can sit up down there in an office, but what are they doing? They're all bosses and whatnot. But they did that in —our people, I get so sick of them because they—they like a title. I don't care nothing about a title at all. It don't mean nothing sometimes if you don't know what to do with it.

RM: So that you're saying one of the major problems is that the strong, master teachers, many of them were "promoted" and taken out of the classroom and placed in administration?

LK: That's what I'm saying, and these new ones coming in—they want me to come back now, but you know they'd put me in jail. They want me to come back now and work with these young teachers. That's what we used to do. And I'm not—I'm kind of—I'm mad at that administration that did this.

Teachers used to work—if I had something that would help me work with my children when I was working with children in elementary, I'd pass it on to you. We would work with each other. But when they pulled me out and said, "You're an outstanding teacher," I'm not going to share with you. I'm going to continue being the best teacher. But I think all of us are in there for the—you know, we weren't given that much, and teachers need to share with each other. That's what we did.

Every new teacher would come into that public school, come in there, and if I had something that could help her—they'll tell you—I passed it on to them. I said, "You might can profit by this if you can." When you find something that will work, teachers should work together, but now you have them strung out pulling against each other because that teacher wants to be the best teacher.

RM: Do you think discipline played a part in students performing well?

LK: I really do. I did. I heard just today where at Webb [Junior High School]—I don't know whether you heard it or not, but it came on the news today, on the 10:00 o'clock—it happened at 10:00 o'clock. I didn't get up until around 9:00-something, and it happened at Webb Middle School. One fourteen year old stabbed another fourteen, and this thing is still going on. They were investigating it when I left.

I don't know whether you all heard that or not, but it happened today at 10:00 o'clock at Webb Junior High School. One fourteen year old stabbed another boy, and they're still investigating it. They don't know what happened.

I can walk in this school, down in any of these places down here, [unclear] I'd say right down there where I go a lot, and those little rascals, their mamas and their papas and whatnot, they can be giving them all kinds of trouble. They don't obey them at all. And I can look at them—I think some of these parents come lock my eyes or knock them out, one, because I'll look at them and give them the dirty eye. And do you know they will stop if they're throwing things down in the store, just to look at them? And I go out here at HEB a lot, and they can be hollering, screaming, and crying, and I'll look down on them, they'll stop. You know, I'll just look down on them, as good as say, "What on earth are you hollering and crying about?" You see what I'm talking about? It just takes that sort of thing.

But when I look at now, because your children will be different because of their atmosphere and because of you, your grandchildren will be different. We don't have anymore grandmas. The grandmas are out there popping or doing whatever they want now. You see what I mean? I see them down there. And when these parents — Our morals are low. When these parents, and I see them—I saw some yesterday, and it was kind of cool yesterday. I had on a little jacket. When I see them come down here with halters just right around here and nothing up here, all of their buttocks out and that sort of thing, it tells me something. The children don't have the grandmas like your babies have. They don't have the pastors like Reverend Lance is to his children and whatnot. You see what I mean? And something's got to be done. Our morals are gone.

RM: So that when you were in—let's say when you were teaching in segregated schools, you worked very closely with the parents, the parents worked with you—

LK: That's right.

RM: —and the parents gave you permission to discipline the children.

LK: That's right.

RM: And what would you say about kids now in school? Are the parents working with teachers to—

LK: I'm just telling you now. They're not working with them because of what I'm showing you. They're not working with them. And these parents in this area, they don't have the resources where they could get to the schools, even.

I want to tell you an incident that happened out to Brentwood there when I was there. This was my first year there or my second year. I believe her name was Julia. She was heavy. She was white. And the worst thing could have happened is—I had thirty-six in my classroom. The worst thing could have happened is to give a third grade the first period to physical ed, and my reading should have come first because that is a tough subject with them. Or some of my heavy subjects should have come first. Don't give give them —give some of those fourth—I mean, the fifth and sixth—they had fifth and sixth grade there then. Give them the first period. But when you have a third grade class, and that was my first year there, they begun wearing these short shorts. She had, I remember it was a little blue green and white stripe.

RM: Was this a teacher?

LK: No, this child. And she had on a skirt that would button down the front that she could pull off. This gym shorts was made in one piece and had—that's the first year they—she was the only one, and she was so heavy, she was just a chubby, just fat, fat. They went to physical ed. Well, the next period, when they came from physical ed, we had to go to the assembly, all the grades go to the assembly. And she wouldn't go back and put her shirt on. She wanted to go in there with just the little short shorts. I said, "Julia, you wore that skirt to school but you pulled it off to go to gym, which was okay." I said, "Now, you can go back in there and get it and put it on you because you're going." And she was the only one that had—they were just beginning to let them do that. And she just was going to start crying, just going to holler and cry because I wouldn't let her go, and I held her.

So Mr. Isabel buzzed me from the office, and I just let some of my children, I let Leslie, Leslie Poor [phonetic], I let her carry the group on around. I said, "Take them on," I says, "and I'm going to stop by the office, and I'm going to let Julia call her mother. If her mother permits her—" her mother was working in the office at Reagan [High School] or somewhere. I said, "If her mother will let her go in there looking like this, there ain't nothing I can do." I said, "But as a teacher," I said, "She wore it to school, and she went to gym. Now, when she goes in there to the assembly where all those other children, she needs to put her shirt back on." So we stopped by the office, and I talked with the mother. I said, "Julia wants to talk with you." I said, "I'm having a little problem," I said, "Because she don't want to put her skirt on." She said, "Well, let her stay there in the office, and I'll come by there and put it on for her."

RM: It shows how parents and teachers work together.

LK: Yes. I didn't have another problem out of her. I said, if mother let her go in there where she could be exposed to all the other children, they'd be laughing and cutting up about her big fat self being out, if she let her do that—but if she wore it to school, it was my job to see that she put it on when we go to the assembly. She went to gym, which was—they let them do that. So I'm feeling that that has something to do with it, but it's not too many in there now.

RM: [Unclear].

LK: That's right. They go—I know they put them in jail or shoot them or something.

RM: During the fifties and sixties, where you had segregated communities, what kind of businesses did blacks own?

LK: Well, back there now, right next to my—up on St. Bernard where my—right next to my—it was a Whitley [phonetic], Mr. Whitley owned that place, and he had a printing shop there. He had a good business there. A dentist down on Sixth Street, Dr. Hammond and Dr. Gibbons and all, they had offices on Sixth Street.

RM: At one time they said Sixth Street, that we call Sixth Street now, which is the entertainment street, part of it used to be owned by a black.

LK: It did. It's really did, practically all of it, and that was during my time. They had the offices there. And then we had—let me see, a black owned a lot of offices, a lot of businesses, out in the—Mr. Whitley owned—that Dr. Roberts owned up on St. Benard, there where that big brick building is, it was his office. He had a clinic there, Dr. Roberts, Mrs. Roberts.

RM: A lot of that property now is gone.

LK: That's right.

RM: Was it sold or do you think it was taken? What happened to it?

LK: I can't understand it. Dr. Hammond had this big house. What it is, I'll tell you what's happening. The older people are dying out, and these younger people are moving into these affluent areas. But that's what's happening in the middle of the thing. These children that's coming on now, the grandchildren and the great-grands and whatnot, they don't care. Some of them gone out of the city, that lives in another place.

For instance, these are cousins of mine. They used to own so much property down Miram Street. One of the girls is in San Antonio. One's in New York. One's in Las Vegas. One's in Ohio, Dayton, Ohio, and one is in Oregon. Those were the three. He had all these girls, and not a one of them—now days—I wish you'd see Miram Street where they had—but all of that street, the parents paid for it. Their father was a double first cousin of mine.

See, that's what's happening. And now, when we go out—we went out to this Molly Barrington—not Molly Barrington. What's her name, that they just put that school way out there? She worked with me. She's the one I got that hamster from. She works with me, and she's worked with me. She was over the teacher retirement. Well, anyway, they put that school way out yonder, near Manchak [phonetic]. It's one black family there, and that family is—the daughter got a—he's kind of mixed. The girl got one of my scholarships last year, Perez, Pierre. He's related to Reverend Snead [phonetic], and he is the custodian. The other families out there don't have children. That's what's happening in these nice areas.

RM: Yes. So you mentioned the scholarship that you were given. One of my final questions will be to ask you to talk about the scholarships that you have which you're giving to kids who are going to college.

LK: Well, I got a scholarship. It was in honor of my husband and myself, and I brought you a copy of it. I want you to see it, the one we gave last year. This year we're giving sixty.

RM: Of \$500 each.

LK: Of \$500 each. As long as the students in there—I had a person from Garza , you know, Garza [Independent] High School. You know where it is, where L.L. Campbell [Elementary School] used to be. She came to me. She met me at this funeral and she came to me yesterday, and she said, "God sent me to you." She gave me three yesterday, and she picked up another. She knows what I want, and she brought it. She's a counselor. I got her name—

RM: Tell us just briefly, the scholarship started out with you doing it in honor of your father—of your husband.

LK: It started out with me doing it in honor of my husband.

RM: And the first time you gave out how many scholarships.

LK: The first time I gave—up to 19 and 96 I gave one at a time because we didn't have much money. I began it when they honored him as Father of the Year from David Chapel. And then I had a lot of people—he was manager of the Booker Pritarius [phonetic] project. He worked in Luling, and I had a lot of his friends, they were white, they gave donations for him when he was honored. And I took it and put it in there. Me and my son decided that we would start this scholarship. Up until 1996 we weren't able to give but one at a time. That would have been nine, about \$100. All right. And the next year we were able to give five, \$500. The next year we were able to give sixteen. I think that was '97. '98 would have been sixteen. In '99 we gave thirty-six. In 2000 we gave forty-seven.

RM: And this year you're giving sixty.

LK: This year we're giving sixty.

RM: That's \$30,000 in scholarships.

LK: Thirty thousand dollars in scholarships, and I just got a check here that I brought with me that I got yesterday.

RM: And this money comes from people across racial lines?

LK: That's right, mostly all of it. And I just got a check yesterday for \$1,000. This is this girl every year. Some give me five dollars. Some will give me ten dollars.

And I brought you something I wanted you to have, too. I don't think you have one of them. I want you to have—this is from last year.

RM: The final question. First of all, I know how much you love education, not only as a teacher, but also now as the director, the CEO or whatever, of the scholarship foundation that you have shows once again how you're reaching out into the lives of others. What words would you like to give to students, teachers, and administrators? What would you say to them in terms of how we can better prepare our students to be the people we need, the workers we need, in the twenty-first century?

LK: Well, the best that I could say, I really feel that, as teachers or as administrators or as anybody that has any kind of—is to try to get with these younger parents and get to them.

See, I used to work in home and family life education. I dealt with it. It'll tell you on that—in that book there. The parents in the projects and the lower income, and get with these parents because these children and the teachers in these schools can't do no more if they don't have the parents to work with. And our parents are the ones—or grandparents. We used to have to make home visits. We made home visits. We saw what the condition looked like. And I would say we need more parenting, more parent education, because it ain't nothing this teacher can do unless she have the cooperation or have the parents to protect her.

I saw a parent no later than yesterday. It was a black one. She came in there with something on, half her buttocks out, a young one, had rings in her nose, all kind of tattoos on here and a little bobtail dress on, and she had three kids, right down there at that store. And the nine year old was giving her—all kind of people, was hollering and crying right there in the store. It was something she wanted. She grabbed her and threw her so far it was pitiful, out the door, and I knew what she was going to do: she was going to catch it when she got home. But that's not going to help that child. You see what I'm talking about?

Really and truly, I would like to see them doing more parenting, working with the parents, these younger parents. Say for instance you've got your baby there, and she's—they're very well grounded because of what you did for them. And you are still around to kind of help with them. But these children don't have nothing. These younger parents don't have the stuff that we had, and there aren't the grandparents, they don't have the grandparents that we had. Because the grandparents are out there popping, too. They're just about as bad as the parents.

So I really feel that Austin Public Schools should get back to working with parents more to help them with the children in the home. And I could stand here and talk to you and tell you incidents that I know. And I'm so glad that I'm able, at eighty-some years old. I don't get it all together, but I have had a lot of experience. And I used to go out in these homes and take care of the children while their parents were going around. They stood by me. They admired me for what I did for those children.

RM: So you worked beyond the school period.

LK: That's right.

RM: You were more than just a teacher in the white school.

LK: That's right.

RM: We call that a holistic approach these days.

LK: And then, too, another thing I'm going to say: We didn't get away from school with the children. We stayed around there, and if that child didn't do what he was supposed to do, I would call that parent. I said, "Well, he's going to be with me, and I'll be around here."

RM: You helped him after school.

LK: I'm going to help him after school until he does his work. And they would appreciate it. I said, "And if I have to, I'll bring him home." I'd let them know that that child was—and I want you to run off one of those and give it to him, too. I'm so glad he's sitting up here listening. You're a papa?

RM: Yes.

LK: You are? Well, am I telling the truth?

Unidentified Speaker: Oh, sure. It's got to come from the parents.

LK: Sure. And I feel that it's too much looseness on the parent now. And you know what I'm talking about.

Unidentified Speaker: Yes. It's [unclear].

LK: And they see too much on television. Anytime I saw that—you don't have to put this on me, please.

RM: Let me just say thank you so much for this interview

LK: All righty. **[Laughter]**

[End of interview]