ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

DATE: 4/13/02

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Signature of Interviewee: 

Name: Dorothy Holcomb
Address: P.O. Box 621 Farmville VA 23901

Name of Interviewer: Atif Gaddis
James Yount

Special Restrictions: None

ORAL HISTORY DATA SHEET (to be turned in with tapes & transcript)

PERSON INTERVIEWED: MS. Dorothy Holcomb

ADDRESS:

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 4/13/02

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Unemployment Office Va Employment Commission Farmville

INTERVIEWER/S: Atif Gaddis, James Yount

TOPICS COVERED: The school closing in PEC through today and Ms. Holcomb's position on the school Board

NUMBER OF TAPES: 2 (1 + about 5 min)

Remember to label and date tapes.
Transcribers/Interviewers
Atif Gaddis, James Yount
Interviewee
Ms. Dorothy Holcomb
Interviewed on
April 15, 2002

[Tape 1, Side A]

AG: Testing, one two, testing.

JY: Hello, hello. All right, this is about how loud I would talk right?

AG: All right.

JY: And about this far away.

JY: This is, uh, April the 12 it's about 4 o'clock, James Yount and Atif Gaddis interviewing Ms. Dorothy Holcomb. [Long pause] Can you tell us how old you were when the school's closed?

DH: You know I was thinking about that today it wa(s)- I look back just to make sure because I know in 1959 June 2nd, was when the board of supervisors made the decisions that they weren't gonna fund public schools anymore and believe it or not that was my birthday.

JY: [Laughs]

DH: And that was my ninth birthday. So I was 9 years old.

AG: [Hmm]

DH: And I didn’t, I knew it was in June but I didn’t realize till I looked back and actually [inaudible] and it was, uh, June 2 which was my birthday.

JY: Had, had you, uh, started attending class yet?

DH: At that age?

JY: Yes.

DH: Oh yeah. I had attended school I sat, at a little, um, elementary school near where I lived in Prospect. And I had completed 4th grade.

JY: Ok. Do you remember when you found out that schools were going to be closed? -Who told you?
DH: My Dad, my dad had been somewhere, and I can’t really say that it was on my birthday cause I don’t remember it happening then. But I remember, I mean I know that’s when the decision was made, but I’m not sure, I’m pretty sure he didn’t tell us on our birthday. He wouldn’t, he didn’t do that. But um, it was that, summer June or July that we found out and he had been somewhere to a meeting downtown and um, came back and said that school would not be open for the, for the fall. And my first reaction was that, as I told you in class-‘hey you know I don’t have to go to school’ [happy and laughing]. And I, being 8 years old, you don’t realize the uh the significance or the replications of not going to school. But da- my dad was the one that, you know, called us in, told us about it.

JY: What were your parents’ reactions?

DH: I think they were sort of in disbelief, I don’t think that they really thought that schools would not reopen. You know how things happen and, oh yeah it will work out because I could tell even at that young age that my Dad didn’t know what, what we were going to do. You know he just said you know, we are working on it children and we and knowing that funds were not there for us to go anywhere so we were there and, and we my mom didn’t have a whole lot of input. Uh, I tell you the truth I think my dad valued education more. But uh, [pause] but, the fact that he wanted us to go to school, I think that, what he valued us going to school more then that, but uh, he didn’t know he was going to do at that time. And as time went on, we really did not miss time, after school started, sitting at home very long, you know in September, because we started going to a church. As our school, but uh it was totally different from where we were and here we thought we did not have enough um, supplies and those kind of things at the school we were going to but you try going to the basement of a church and in a [inaudible] and it’s a lot harder then what we were so.

AG: Which church was that?

DH: It was a Methodist church in Prospect.

JY: Can you describe the differences between the school you were going to and the church school you were attending? - How you got there?

DH: The school that I was going to was basically as I remember three rooms and one of them was a kitchen and closet and those kind of things and then there were uh, grades like the very beginning to the second grade cause I remember my brother was in one room and I was in the other, my older brother so we were still in that little elementary school and it went through the 6th grade I believe and then that came down to Mary Branch. But um, Mrs. Davenport was the teacher and it, she was just very organized teacher, I remember that every thing was in its place, the books were there we got a book. You would make sure you replaced it and you know you got a real routine at school, and that’s one thing I realize was the difference when we got to the church, of course there was sort of chaotic at first because things were not in place. And you kind of, it was you went in and you got books and you, you started to learn or have lessons. But it wasn’t as structured as it was in the, in the schools, it couldn’t be. You know we were in a basic church we were all in the same room. Uh, and they had it sectioned off by grades but we were in the same room
and we all had that one teacher. And I think back I don’t know how she did it, I just don’t how she did it but we learned. You know, we learned. [Pause] Um, I don’t know what else I can tell you about the environment there you know, we had uh [pause] you know the environment, of course Ms. Davenport was in control at our little elementary school too and we had recess and those kind of things and the same thing happened at the church. She was you know, we had, once we got going, she got things a little more structured and we had our time to play and our time to learn. Um, the, I think the walk getting there was the hardest thing for us to the church I mean. Because when I was about probably a mile or so from the elementary school but we are talking 3, 4 miles to the uh, church and we had to either walk or our Dad would take us. That was our only transportation. We didn’t have any other transportation to get to school. And so when your, again talking about 8 and 10 years old well that’s an awful long ways to walk in the mornings and then walk back in the afternoon and we did it every single day I don’t remember [inaudible] somehow, I mean weather was bad sometimes of course they didn’t really, we didn’t, we would make up time when weather was so bad you know snow and that kind of thing cause we wouldn’t be out there in that but in rain as I told you, when it was raining, I got my Dad’s raincoat. And he worked with out one and I got the, the raincoat to go to school. Yeah. I guess at that time, your poor but you didn’t know you were poor you know you just did what you had to do.

JY: Did uh, your parents make any other sacrifices during this time? You said your dad drove you and gave you his raincoat and worked without one.

DH: You mean during the time we were out of school?

JY: Right.

DH: Um, I don’t think that, that the real sacrifice or as much came about until we tried to move to go to another county. Because you know there we were still in the same house we were still in the same neighborhood. And you know things didn’t change a whole lot, in fact I don’t remember thinking oh this is so different I cant do it or I can’t stand it or anything, it wa- it was just a change. And you went along and, and you changed and uh, I, but I remember when we had to move and then my mom had to go to work or else we couldn’t afford to have a house in Prospect and a house some place else too and they didn’t want to sell our house in Prospect so they tried to keep up two residents. And that was hard and I remember that because we were sort of with our mother or grandmother all the time. You know [several words inaudible] and her sister was right there, but once we got to the point we had to move then she had to go to work and uh, worked in uh, a restaurant. Just to get some extra money, but that’s where the most sacrifice came in but I know when we were in school and uh, we used to come home, of course we didn’t have any books type that you could bring from the school, like I don’t, I guess in hindsight they thought these are precious and can’t get rid of them and I might not bring them back or whatever, but we, we only had a few books at home but my Dad was insistent we read them over and over again you know. We had a Bible story-book and he’d get paper and newspaper and we’d read them and have to tell him what we read so, you know, it, [inaudible].
AG: When do you believe you truly gained an appreciation for all the things your parents’ did for you?

DH: Oh gosh, I am sorry to say this but it was a long time, you know I really didn’t realize I, I don’t think that I real- realized they [hand slap for emphasis] were doing anything out of the ordinary because they just made it so smooth you know what I mean, that they didn’t show they were go-., then, eve-eve even when mom went to work it was like, you know she didn’t say "children I’m going to work so you can go to school." We just knew she had to go to work cause then I mean it wasn’t anything like that. Um, and I remember, actually you know there were little bits and pieces going on and I guess I was, lived sort of a sheltered life here and that cause, when I got to college, ok, and I realized from some of the students there what was going on in their lives and you know their families and I am thinking you know this is really, really something because my parents did do a lot for me but some of these other kids didn’t have them do, you know um, and I didn’t realize the a whole lot about racism, or people being prejudiced, or it didn’t really come up in my house hold so I didn’t really realize what was going on. And then when I got to school and my roommate was from Alabama you know, boy, I mean [hand slap for emphasis] she told me some things and I was going like ahh that’s you know, But um, how [inaudible] 14 and her family and they were sometimes afraid to walk the streets or go out or, for fear for what would happen to them. But we never had any of that here. Even though schools closed, and I think that there was a lot of uh, probably, resistance to uh, integrated schools you never saw, I never saw or heard from my parents of blatant racism or anything like that. You know I wonder till today how all that got, you know, kind of by me, I guess because I was so young or if it, you know happened, my, even after I got older and I would, would talk to my dad about it, he never talked about that part of it. Um, and I would say to him you know, you know because you heard about the raincoat I didn’t realize that until much later and I would say "I know what you did and I know why you were doing certain things" and he, he wouldn’t even really comment on it to say "yes I was making sacrifices for you" and he said "well you benefited from it didn’t you, or you, you know, you made me proud or you stayed in school or you did," you know, and he would let me know that all, everything I did and all my work was because I wanted you to be able to where you are and um, really didn’t make a big deal of it. And I don’t know if I wanted him to or not, but I’m just, I think that, I probably needed to let him know more often, you know, how appreciative I was and what, when I realized that, what had actually transpired during those years of my life.

AG: Were there any Blacks in the community that expressed their animosity towards whites during this time to you?

DH: Uh, yeah, there were, um, [inaudible] to say I was so young at the time it, once I got older, uh, you know, this, the people the church that we went to was in the community, the school that I went to was in my little neighborhood and those children or people that I associate with who did not continue their education or get a chance to go, I think they were probably the most bitter ones that you would come in contact with. And um, and I think sometimes they would say to me “you don’t know, you got to go to school” you know, and kind of put me on that, that side too and I was always, found my self trying to make allowances to say "I’m the same as you" type thing, but as I got older I would say my teenage years, because even though we moved to Appomattox, we still worshiped at
the same church. We came back to go to church every Sunday.

AG: Could you tell us a little bit more about the history of the uh, house in Appomattox?

DH: Ok, interesting, um, initially when we started, uh, to go to Appomattox we didn't have a place to live and the word was as far as I knew from my dad that you have to be a resident of the county. And he worked with some people and I don't even know their names. I wish I did now but he worked on the railroad and he worked there for 44 years, but um, they, somebody on his job told him about a house that was vacant in Pamplin Virginia. And uh, that he could go and rent it and put us on the bus in the morning because his job was in Pamplin, he worked on what they called a section, and it was in Pamplin. Um, and so he proceeded to, to rent that place and I know that the guy that told him about it was White. But anyway, he went and rented it and the house was not fit to live in at all. And I remember going in and the floor being real creaky you know, and going upstairs, and but it was, it was, it didn't have indoor facilities or anything, and, but what we did was that by, by the time school opened and I think that was year three because we had been out of school 2 years and year three, um, we went up, my mom went up and put curtains at the window and the lights weren't even, [laughing] we had no electricity in the place. Put curtains in the window, my Dad would bring us in the morning and would go around to the back of the house, go straight through the house come out the front door and get on the bus. And we did that for a long time. And I, I can't when I say a long time I can't remember the exact time. And finally he kept working on the house at night and friends helped him and everything and got it to the point where we could move there but, in the transition of moving, my brother and I and my niece and nephew started there and then as time went on, stayed in school, more people started to come. And it ended up we had seventeen children getting on that bus at our house going through that door and of course we practically filled the bus up and somebody asked me you know did the school system know what ya'll were doing I'm sure they did. But I think they were trying to give us an opportunity, give us a chance and uh we really didn't get into trouble that was the rule, do not make trouble you do not make waves. You be as invisible as possible you know, so we did that and got the got the house in a little bit better shape and we moved in there and I don't even know, I guess I could ask my mom I don't know what the rent was that they paid I know it couldn't have been too very much coz the house was bad but any way um. So we did that and then the following year we were there a year maybe a year and a half and then the following year we moved to another house a little bit better house and um in Evergreen which is about ten miles from Pamplin closer to Appomattox. Um and it was not a great house either but it was better then where we were so we lived there for until schools reopened and at that point my father said “you will not go back”. And then after that I realized that he could have given up that house and only had one house payment and came, we could have come back to Prince Edward like the rest of those children missing all those years and going back to school coz he said no it's been to important you've gone too far in this system. And my brother was involved in sports and we were really had found our place there and plus he thought, and then again he thought that with going back and children having those children who didn't go to school and we coming in and their trying to catch them up we would kind of be lost. So he made a decision. We didn't go back. We stayed there until we graduated high school. And then they moved back home. Yeah that, that house in Pamplin, I'll tell you how bad it was; it was bad. It
was torn down. The road came through close to it and it was such an eyesore. They tore the house down and there was a neighbor that I told you about in class that was next door to me Kathy um was the daughter's name she's about my age in fact. I think Kathy and I were the exact same age and we played. She's white and we played every morning before we went to school and every afternoon and her mother would invite my mom over for coffee and they would talk and, and so you thought it was hard to say if people were prejudice or anything like that because you just came into contact with so many different people that this, this you know could [one inaudible word] Well um and of course Kathy and I couldn't figure out why we got on separate school busses or why we weren't in school and we really never talked about it. We just played when we got, when we got home in the afternoon and we'd go to a store close by and my mom would let us walk to the store. Kathy's parents never had any trouble with it. We never had any trouble with it and so we just thought this is the way its supposed to be.

AG: Do you still have any contact with Kathy?

DH: Yes I do. And, and I didn't I, did not have any contact with Kathy for um maybe twenty-five years, honestly. Coz I went on to college she stayed back. Her mom got passed away but we moved so when we moved I didn't have any contact with Kathy. But I was in Lynchburg in River Ridge Mall a few years ago, and I was in the store and this young lady who looked just like Mrs. Baldwin, who was my neighbor, came to me and she said "Dorothy" and I said 'Kathy' I looked at her eyes and I said,' Kathy' and it was just like the time had never passed. And she emails me and I email her. Now she's living in Lynchburg, but um it was the strangest thing and I expect it was meant for us to meet that day. And course when she emails me we talk about when we were eight nine years old. But um we both have grand children now and we both happy but it was really, really just a joy. We talked about planning an outing for ourselves and were gonna do that still one day but yeah, yeah it was good. But, but we hadn't seen one another for about twenty, twenty five years and of course I think both her parents are now deceased. Um but some how or another, she graduated school and I graduated, and I remember when we graduated well because I was at Tay Macado's store where we used to always go to and saw her, and we were both graduated from school and at that time she wasn't going to school but she told me she had gone to community college or something.

JY: You mentioned a brother earlier. How old was he and how did this experience affect him?

DH: I guess I need to go back. I am the youngest of seven children okay um. I have a brother who was deceased very young, but the brother who was when I was born my oldest sister was eighteen years old. The brother that's closest to me in age is two and a half years older than I am. So he and I were like and then there are six years difference between him and the others, so we were like the two little accidental children, coz uh um, but we were best buddies coz we were real close in age. And he was the one, that um, said "if he didn't go to school," after that third year somewhere "he didn't want to go back," and that really was scary for I think, for my dad, because my oldest sister she was eighteen when I was born, she was married, and I had another sister and she had finished but the, my third brother he was the one that when schools closed, I guess the third the middle child, he was the one that when school closed he got caught up in that. And he was at the age
where he said you know he wouldn’t even go to this church school, so we just kind of lost him as far as that got and I’m not sure what grade he was in he was in high school and he never went back to complete high school um and that that always saddens me that he never, and I’m not saying he didn’t get a chance. He didn’t go back you know, coz some time you come to making some choices, but he got married at a very young age. He got married when he was eighteen years old, and um you know he had his own family so he never got a chance to go back. But my other brother, when we went back, the one that’s two and a half year’s older, we went to school in Appomattox and there he got heavily involved with sports and um went on to college in North Carolina, and then two years later I followed him um but not to the same school but to North Carolina. But he does not come back here and I think that’s the problem Mrs. Bagby was alluding to. He does not come back a whole lot to visit the area he was here in April. He was here in March, March 16th he went down to the Moton Museum and I think it brought back some memories for him and in fact his wife told me during black history month, or at their church, he got up and told them about Prince Edward and they were all amazed coz a lot of people don’t know. They really don’t; I don’t know if you guys knew before this, but a lot of people don’t know and they were amazed about it. And she said, "I think that was good for him I think that was sort of a healing thing for him to share that with somebody and to do that." And even though he got to finish college and he’s you know got his masters and all that, it was a hard time for him and um one reason it was hard because I think the older you are when you go into an environment, like being a teenager and going to a new school, and people there, knowing that you were out of school coz you didn’t have a school to go to, it was a harder adjustment for him. And I really am thankful that he got into sports and those kinds of things, that made him um you know he got to make friends a lot easier and those kinds of things but, but I know that it was harder for him than it was for me [several inaudible words]

AG: During your discussion with our class a few weeks back you mentioned that the middle brother, who um was in tenth grade I believe, who dropped out, blames both those whites and those blacks who were responsible for closing the public schools in Prince Edward County. Um who do you believe is responsible for closing the schools?

DH: I don’t know. I think, I think it was really both races involved in it. I think that it got to such a point that people were so resistant to integrate and it seemed to me, and now I was eight years old now you have to remember that, it seems to me that the blacks or those who were in authority, said just refused. The schools were awful here. You know we’re not gonna do this anymore we either have to integrate and give us the same type of, and they felt from what I can tell from the people I talked to, they felt that even if we remained separate we would not get the caliber of equipment and caliber of equipment that the white children did so they thought, "I’m gonna call your bluff were not going to agree to have separate schools anymore," and so integration has to take place. And then, I think there were those white folks who were so intent on that not happening that its like brick walls, to my dismay, how even our governor, our president, would let something like that happen, and I felt sadder when I got out and looked back because that, you know I was a fortunate one, that happened to so many children it affected the lives of people and will continue to affect the lives of people for a long time and for our legislators or our people in power in the government to let that happen, I think you would be it was really
bad on their part so I, I don’t think that you could blame one person or one group of people because even though one group of people said no and the other group of people said no then there still should have been somebody above them to say this is non-sense. These children gotta be educated no matter what, and you know coz I remember when I was younger and my dad had this book and it was entitled Death at an Early Age and it was about a child who could not read, you know, and in a sense that is death. I mean you can’t read you can’t comprehend you can’t do what you need to do to get on in life. Then I think they did a terrible injustice. It was a terrible injustice, and I, you know I won’t pass blame on any one person or any one group coz I just think it was just a combination of things that caused that to happen. I wish I could. Then I could go out and say "you did this you did this and you should be punished" but that’s not the way it is it was. I know, I know that we were so low on the totem pole that we didn’t have anything to do with the decision. I know that. It was sure.

JY: Were you aware of anyone in the black community that was frustrated with the NAACP during this process for their stance on purely integration instead of going back to a segregated school system?

DH: Yes. And again this is later, but some people that were out in the rural areas felt like the NAACP did not um do enough for children in the county, that there were a lot of in town children who reaped the benefits and that the children out in the rural areas did not get that. And I don’t know if that, you know that I think about it, that that was totally accurate or not coz I don’t know that my dad went to them and sought their help and according to the people that I have talked to they actually said that they had recruiters in the area from the NAACP that went around to recruit children and help children, but nobody ever knocked on our door. I don’t know why, I mean I, I don’t, I don’t know why I think that that’s how my father said, "I will have to take matters into my own hands." And we had been out for two years and nobody had offered to assist us in anyway, um and so he did what the next best thing to do was, to move and take in a tremendous amount of debt with two homes, but we did.

JY: The text we are reading, it mentions the Rev. Griffin...

DH: Mmm-hmmm

JY: As a great community leader and supporter. Do you remember any other members of the black community, either affiliated with the church or not, that were leaders that haven’t been mentioned?

DH: No I really don’t. You, you would hear a lot about Rev. Griffin because I think he was [inaudible] in that whole decision making progress. Uhh, and you know as I got older and I came to work here, Rev Griffin was still in town and I met him on a different level. He was a very very caring person. In fact, I know people just from where I, I was working, and you could go, you could go were you were, you could go to him and ask him for a reference for a job and he would have a standard reference ready for you and you know, and would on sight meeting you and give you a reference you know, for what he deemed from you at that particular time. But um, no I’m not sure of uh any of I think I was just
too young to, to be involved in that aspect of it. But we heard a lot about Rev. Griffin.

AG: Why have you chosen to return here and live and work in Prince Edward County? I mean you're a college-educated woman, you could go almost anywhere but you came back here?

[Tape 1, Side 2]

DH: It was sort of a, I, I think it was sort of a fluke too. I'll, I'll be honest with you I had...

[Tape problem]

DH: [inaudible] do I need- ok? I really had not intentions of coming back to the area. I really didn't. What happened was that when I graduated uh, college, and I had gotten a job offer, I had a degree in business and concen-, concentration in accounting, and I had gotten a job offer at a financial company in northern Virginia. And I remember my, I came and my dad went with me to northern Virginia to find an apartment and everything and go to work, well I did. I found a place and um, we got back here and uh my dad was still working on the railroad. And he started to uhh, he, he, got injured on the job one day. This was during that time and um one thing lead to another but he ended up not being able to go back to work. And he had to have surgery on his back. Well the surgery went badly. They told us that a blood vessel got loose during the surgery and he almost bled to death. Umm, and after that, they said he may not walk again, well being the determined fellow that my father was, we had to rehabilitate him at home and that's why I made the decision not to go to northern Virginia and I came in and started to look for a job in this office. We were not located here then, but in the Virginia Employment Commission office to stay close to them to help them and I figured, you know, that he had done so much for me you know. I m, I mean it wasn't, it wasn't a question, I just said "I'm gonna do this". Umm and course then we had to uh, we had to, we had to make, make things to rehabilitate him, we had a chair we put in the bed, we put his legs over and I would exercise him everyday and all this kind of stuff. Well to make a long story short, he walked in three months. And they said he wouldn't be able to do it. But he was just a determined little cuss [Laughing]. Anyway, he walked in three months and uhh, not you now he was still bent over a little bit but he was moving around and doing his gardening, his yard and all that kind of stuff, and by that time I had come in and um, gotten a job at the Virginia Employment Commission and I was actually the first black person to work in a provisional position at the VEC in Farmville. Ok. Uhh, we had a janitor [laughs]. So, um, and one of the questions that I was asked when I was interviewed, and you can't ask it now, but they asked me "what does your dad do?" And I said he worked for the Northern and Southern Railroad for 44 years and it was almost like, "work ethics", you got the job. I mean that's, that, I could see the difference in these two peoples' eyes that were interviewing me, and I, they were interviewing me for a job in Lynchburg as well at one [inaudible] and again you know, just I think my dad's record got me this job [laughing] and I've been here 30 years and don't know what else to say. But um, once we got him rehabilitated and I said "well now's the time for me to go", but I was still thinking I'm getting this job and I'm leaving cause I came in as an interviewer you know, not a lot of
money at um, that they kept writing me from northern Virginia saying you know, “we still...” but then uhh, my dad had cancer, and uhh he had cancer of the lymph nodes so I said uhh, 'I’m just going to what I, I am not going to northern Virginia and have that whole thing going on”. So I just told them no that I am not coming and I stayed here and then um, I met my husband, um, who was from this area also. And he was going to Virginia State at that time and he finished up cause he had been in the military first, and then went back to college and he finished up and, it was no question, he wanted to teach at his alma mater Prince Edward. And I am going 'oh god, of all the people I could have picked' [laughing] uhh, so he, from day one, he wanted to teach and coach at Prince Edward, so he did and you know that’s, that’s why I am here. [Pause] I had a dream of a being a CPA and going someplace in northern Virginia and making big, big money [laughing] it didn’t happen though. I am not sorry for one minute though because I was there everyday ay for my father you know, like I felt he was there for me. And they told us he would not make it more then 6 months after his diagnosis so there was so severely the lymph nodes and everything. He lived over a year and this just, I remember he had the same cancer as Hubert Humphrey. I don’t know if you would know, at the same time and he would laugh and say “You know what? He’s got a whole lot more money then I do and we have the same cancer and he can’t do anything about it and I can’t do anything about it.” You know that kind of attitude, he just a very strong attitude and uh, so I stayed here.

AG: You mentioned that you’re uhh, mother had taken a job to uh, you know subsidize the family income uh while your family rented the house in Appomattox. Uhh, when did she, did she ever stop working after awhile or did she continue working until she retired?

DH: She continued working until she retired. She sure did, because going to work later in life you know, you don’t really get retirement you know, you have to work awhile so she continued until she retired.

AG: When did you begin working on the school board?

DH: Uhh, let me see. This is my third year, that I am in right now, on the school board, so, not good at math here, about, it’s been three years ago.

AG: What were you reasons for wanting to join the school board?

DH: Honestly um, I felt like I could help. I really, I had a lot of things on my plate; believe me. This is really my job. This is a really demanding job and I had a lot of things on my plate and somebody approached me about it and I said you know, ‘ok’ but my daughter had gra-, two children had graduated out of the system by then. And I, and I thought about it and they said, this is a person in the community they said, 'would you submit us a resume', and I said, I said, 'well I know I won’t be chosen so I’ll just go ahead and submit this resume', and I did. And then I, they called me for an interview and I went and talked to them and I got appointed, but uh, I, I really wanted to help that’s the only reason I m interested. Boy they have some long meetings and those kind of things going on and, and I think that education is so very important and I just go a lot of times and talk to classes at the high school to tell them you know, how important it is. I just talked to a GED class
and that’s a class where the children are kind of, they have outgrown high school. And they are in the GED program and, it’s still not too late let’s go! You know. But I do that because I just feel education is so very important and I know that that spark came from my, my parents.

AG: How much longer would you like to continue working on the school board?

DH: Well, that’s been decided for me. Next year is my last year, unless, see what happened is that I got redistricted, and so I’m not in the Prospect district anymore, and they have to choose, we are not, I represent the Prospect district until my term runs out which is, just starting in July; this is my last term, the last year of my term so then they will have to choose somebody else in the, in the district that I’m in, the person that left, we just, we uh, we just appointed somebody. So they, they have one more year longer then I do, so unless somebody comes back and says "Hey", uh, after that, "we need, we need you back", then, then that’s it for me.

AG: What are some of the major problems facing the public school system, currently?

DH: SOL’s [laughing]. I tell you, uhh I think that’s, that’s a major piece uh, that they’re working on so much and I think now with the new governor and administration, we are gonna have a lot more focus on career technical type things going on but, I think that just getting them sort of prepared with everything else that is going on in our world, you know schools just don’t, when I went to school, we basically, when I was in that elementary school Mrs. Davenport’s job, she of course, she was a strong disciplinarian, but her basic job was to teach us the reading writing and math and then we go the morals and the, most of the discipline and all that stuff at home. But now in school’s it’s different, you, you know. You, your incorporating sex education and all kinds of stuff in school systems where my father probably would have said "that’s no place for it, you know, for it to be taught." You need to be taught that at home, and those kind of things so, I think it’s a big, it’s a huge challenge for the education,educators of today and I all, one other thing that’s a big challenge for the school systems is having, getting the personnel. There is a real uh, need for special ed teachers. There is a real need for math and science teachers. Not enough people are going into the educational field. Cause there, cause we need, and I don’t know if that’s because of pay or whatever but that’s a new problem. I can see it right now with the hard to fill positions that are statewide. Uhh, recruitment is going on heavy so I so I can see that as an issue that we are going to have to deal with.

AG: What are some of the problems facing ya’ll as a result of the school closings?

DH: Just this area?

AG: [nodding]

DH: Uhh, I don’t know I. I tell people and I’ve told them that you have to realize that some of the grandchildren [pause] children and grandchildren of the people who were in the fourth grade with me that never went back to school, are the children we are dealing with in schools now. You know, and sometimes if you felt like you have been deprived of
something or you like, you didn’t have the opportunity to go, then the importance of education may not be there that you would want. You may have less people in PTA. You may have less response for uhh, a teacher parents con-conferences, and those kind of things because I am just convinced that if you look at our literacy rate in the area and the fact that those people are still a part of our society, and that’s what I am saying about long term damage, um, that’s one of the effects we are having right now. Where, we have this training program here and we are trying to train people to uh, do uh, train people to do the job that employers need in the area but its tough when your uh, don’t have more then a fourth grade education, to come in and read anything to do anything, it’s really tough, that’s basic ed that we are looking at. Uhh, and I think we are gonna [inaudible] that hole up.

AG: How many people that were closed out of schools from your generation take advantage of the programs that are offered by the school system?

DH: How many of them take advantage of it, you mean, like for adult programs?

AG: Yes, percentage.

DH: [sigh] I, I really don’t know a percentage for you but I don’t think it’s very many. I, I really don’t, when I go out and look at the adult classes, now there are more now in the GED prep that I have seen that I know were in my area for a long time. But, uh, beyond that the community college comes out and offers classes and you know, there are things going on at Longwood but, I don’t think there are very many, that take advantage of it. A lot of people don’t want you to know that, you all know, that I’m uneducated or I can’t read you know, my brother wouldn’t tell you. I mean, I have a brother who really can’t read. [Inaudible] you wouldn’t know it by talking to him. You wouldn’t know it by watching what he does because he has learned to compensate so well, you wouldn’t you would never know it unless he came up and said “I can’t read that.” He, he, he has found ways in his life that, he is now, sixty-two, sixty-2 years old. And he has found ways all his life to do it. Made more money in his life and career then I did. [Inaudible]

AG: What are some of the advances that the school system has made since you have been on there, and over the past twenty to thirty years?

DH: Oh, leaps and bounds believe me. When, when my father made the decision that we wouldn’t come back to schools when they reopened, I think it was the best decision for us. But, over the years, I think there has been a strong influence from Longwood and the Hampden-Sydney Colleges, and that population of, of, instructors and those people coming in uh, I think we have made huge strides. In fact, Prince Edward, if you look at some of the statistics and how we measure up with other school systems in the area, in Southside you see that we come up very well. And I think it’s only due to the hard work of those people who come in, who are really dedicated to making the school system improve and, um, you know we uh, we have had a new superintendent for what, five years now or so, and she has done a good job in uh, promoting the schools. We had one company say that the reason we decided to come here was because of your school system; that says a lot. So, when you promote the schools, and you have programs, and you have
things going on where you uh, associate in cooperative efforts with businesses and the schools, colleges, then its gonna grow, it’s gonna go. We have a lot of classes that our students participate in through Hampden-Sydney and Longwood through the uh, the advanced programs. So, it’s, it’s improved a whole lot. I mean [pause] when they’re not, and, and um, I think I am really glad that we made the decision that we didn’t come back but, uh, but I can see from that point that my husband was wrapped up in that. He uh, as school’s reopened, every time he had tried to go to school in another county it failed. You know, it was too far for him to walk, or it was, you know, so when school’s reopened, he was one of those children that was 21 years old when he graduated high school and went right into the military, and then went to college so he was 27 years old getting out of college. But uh, so if you’re determined you can do it, but some people aren’t.

[Long pause]

JY: Uh, a few years back, Fuqua was uh, Mr. Fuqua bought Prince Edward Academy, and changed the name obviously, and even the colors trying to get rid some of the association with it.

DH: Mmm-hmmm.

JY: Do you think that has worked at all?

DH: [pause] I think there is some people who no matter what you call it, it’s Prince Edward Academy to them, I’ll be honest with you. Um, but, you know, I have been involved with the headmaster in different projects from Fuqua and I think she as, she is as committed to education for the children um, as any, as Dr. Blackman is who is our superintendent. And I think with her coming in, she sees it, or saw it as a private school. It is. And that’s what Fuqua, I think wanted. This is a private school. It has nothing to do with you only go here if your white or [inaudible] cause there are black students there now. So, I think this, that’s something within we have to kind of educate ourselves per say; that stigma is gone. That it is a private school, and you know, if you want to go there, you can go there. And I haven’t heard anything about anybody being treated differently because of their color that, that attended. So, I think it was good. I think it was good to, to change the name to change the colors because it gives a little different of uh, a little different feeling to the community. It really has.

AG: Would you ever uh, uh, send your grandchildren there or encourage anyone to attend Fuqua School?

DH: I don’t know. And the reason I tell you that is cause I have not investigated the difference. The only way that I would say, "Send a child to a private school," is that you investigated and saw that there was a little difference in quality of education. And I can’t say that for Fuqua versus the county schools here. So my answer to you would be that I would probably, I would have my children in county schools, um, because I know about them and I just, have been on the school board and I know how hard they are trying to educate the children and what they are doing. So um, that would be my only reason for, you know, and I think one advantage maybe that Fuqua has, and I, and I have people that I know that go, is that the class size is smaller, and, and that was the reason that I sent my
daughter to Longwood, at the round school, because I wanted her to have the advantage of a smaller class. She was so tied to me and grandma and all this kind of stuff that I thought when she went to school that this would be a good thing for her. So she went to the Round School for a couple of years, and then went to [inaudible] school, but we thought about that too, and uh, we decided to it, and knowing that honestly she was the only black child in the class, she really was. And she did not have a problem from that area, and or as I know now from talking to her, she is now 26 years old, none of the children had a problem with her. It’s the, and I think a lot of times if we leave children alone they are fine you know [laughing].

AG: What’s the ratio of white to black in the Prince Edward Public Schools?

DH: A lot more then it used to be. I, I won’t want to quote you statistics but, I think its about 40:60 now, I think is what they tell me, 40%.

AG: And how many of uh, high school graduates go on to college?

DH: We were somewhere in the 80th percentile I believe, of graduates um, and somebody told me that Fuqua was 96 percent or 97 percent, whatever. But you have to realize we have a lot larger population then they do but you know we uh are in the 80th percent.

AG: Uh, is this history of the school closings taught to the students in the public schools?

DH: We were talking about that just the other day. Umm, I think that it is incorporated in the, in the history classes, you know. Umm, and I was telling someone just the other day I think that one of the fieldtrips of the school should be to the Moton Museum to see what happened, uh, to show them what happened and to go over that. But I know that it is taught, to answer your question. It is taught but its, you know its, its, weaved in with other history which I think it, it probably should be. Just like you’re taking this class and you know, it’s a history but its a lot of things that your involved in [inaudible]. You know other things, other then just Prince Edward I’m sure.

AG: Are you in favor of forced integration? I know a lot of people, a lot where I’m from, believe that school systems are much stronger in the Black community, uh, when it was segregated I mean there was an “our schools” you know we were building it up. Uh, do you see that as a uh, seg-segregated schools as a as a positive thing in a sense or uh, uh community or is it you know, a negative sense you know, “We should still have forced integration”?

DH: I think, I mean like you said, that when people have something of their own, it’s a sense of ownership and those kind of things. But I think that can be in the, with integration. I, I have a hard time seeing that, and I think it’s just because of, of the way I was brought up. But I have a real hard time seeing that and say, you know, if I were only, because the world was not that way. You can’t only be with black people, or you can’t only be with white people all your life. Go ahead and get a job, your gonna be with everybody, and you, if you go to a community area, you go out to eat, you go anywhere, you got, you, you, its gonna be, your not gonna be on an island. So I’m, and I am, and I can’t say that I
am in favor of having the schools that way, and then when we got out, it’s all together different you know. I think that we have to be educated the same way we have to live in the world. We have to work together you know. And I had the benefit of that because when I went to Appomattox and I could–couldn’t figure this out either; everybody in my school in Appomattox was black, you know [laughing]. They closed the schools in Prince Edward because you know, but when I went to Appomattox everybody was Black and I had the benefit of that, but, and then even, at my college there were like three of four black, I mean three of four white people, you know, minority were Whites, were at my school. And then course when I get out here and I start working and all, I get a j-, I worked at the same job for four years, summer in New Jersey. And there was you know, it was multicultural, Spanish from everything else. You know, you have to, you have to live in the world and the world is just not that way, I think we have to, we have to get some sense of ownership or some sense of pride in, in the education system itself and not because of who is there or what the ratio of population is. [Long pause]

AG: What’s the image of the county as being portrayed to the rest of Virginia and within the county itself? Is it still very racist or, or have a lot of advances been made?

DH: I think a lot of advances have been made, and, and I was wondering earlier if you were going to ask me something like that and I think that the image, I think the image, uhh, statewide, is a good image of Prince Edward because as I say a lot of people don’t know about it and you tell them and its like, “this is foreign to me and, you know, you people are over there in this little world and you have all this going on and we didn’t know it.” But I think the schools system measures up very well you know our principles have been to, to, we have models, we have people come in and looking at what we do. We go and, and uh, make presentations at the governors' conference so some of the techniques that we use in the school system. So I think in spite of everything that has happened to us, we have had growth that, just unbelievable growth, and I think our image is very, very good. Um, I think that, that everywhere your going to have some people who are, racist or uh, prejudiced. But I just think that’s just the way the world is you know. And uh, my daddy use to tell us, "you don’t waste time dealing with that kind of thing," you know, because when we were walking to that school when we were uh, in the mornings and the children on the bus that were white went by us and we were wondering why they were on the bus and we were walking and we would you know, get upset because they were rolling down the window and be saying things to us and my dad would say, you know, "you don’t deal with that, you don’t even get into that. Keep your mind focused on what you're supposed to be doing and you walk on down the road, and you go on to where your supposed to be going." And he would always pull us back and you know, and even if you get mad he would [say] "you don’t have anything to be upset about." [Inaudible] it’s hard to get anger out of him, you get, you don’t have anything to be angry about, you know. He was that way with us so...

AG: In the past few years there has been a symposium up at Hampden-Sydney, uh at the sight of the school closings, uh, the opening of the Moton Museum, um, ahh, what more can the county do to address the uh, the uh problems uh, dividing the races in the county?
DH: What else should they do?

AG: [noding]

DH: Um, I think that continuing with what we are, or what we’re doing. Um, I think this class that you guys are taking is very good. Um, I think that a piece of the, the history classes in school should be designated to the history of the county so people would know. I think that we should address, the illiteracy a little bit harder because we know some of the reasons for it. You know like any area where you have some members of the, the, they probably have a literacy program. Well I think we need to address it harder then what we are because we know where our illiteracy is stemming from, you know. I think more needs to be done in that area.

AG: What do you believe is [inaudible] this uh, Prince Edward County’s role in the history of uh, the Civil Right’s struggle?

DH: [sigh, pause] Now when you say role I am not sure what you mean except that I think that a lot of positive things have happened since that day in 1959, you know. That’s where, and I think, I think that the, the county has put a lot behind them and they have a lot to move forward with this um, that there are a lot of county activities, there a lot of programs and things going on that there is, there trying to, to assist in educating people to that point. So I, I think that we need to continue to do that. I, I just don’t think we could, should drop it, I think um, Black history is very important to us and I think that, um, the school systems saying where we were and where we’ve gone or what we’ve accomplished is very important, that we have to look back sometimes and see where you have come from and when you look at that school back when it reopened and that people were seniors had children in the first grade. Now where we are and having all the AP classes and all those kind of things, we have come a long way. And I think that we need to not let people forget that, what we have done. And I think that Moton Museum is one strong piece to keep that alive and it’s a part of our historical, um, area now so people will know, its been fit into that, so um, we are doing a lot, we are still, were working a lot, hard.

AG: How often do you recount or reflect upon your experience as a result of the school closings in Prince Edward County?

DH: I don’t, everyday, I have grown from it, every day. Because, I don’t take a whole lot for granted, you know. Um, and I think sometimes I see people and I see young people and they are taking so much for granted and I’m going, ‘you just need to be, stop and think,’ you know. I mean, you could not have this education. You could not have this pc in your classroom. You could not have some of these books that you have. This library, which is so wonderful and that’s another thing with the county library you know, there were two libraries, and I meant to touch on that when I was talking to you guys, but there were two libraries in Prince Edward. And you might not know that. One in the church that White people went to and one in the uh, well one, in the hotel that white people went to and one in the church that Black people went to and it’s the struggle of those people that were committed to pulling those two libraries together, to now have a Prince Edward County
community library. And I was on that board for 10 years, but again, we pick things that, the things that are important but we have to keep struggling and we have to keep those things conscious, but, I, I grow from it everyday. I mean, I don’t think I could be where I am, had I not been through some of the things I went through.

AG: Is there anything else that we have not, uh, asked you that you would like to touch upon?

DH: Gosh you asked me a lot. [Laughing] Uh, and uh, there were a lot of things I hadn’t thought about in a long time. Um, no, uh, you know I think it’s good that you guys are doing this interview. I uh, you know it’s something that you, that I’ve sparked that you need to ask me, I mean go ahead. But I’ve been as honest with you as I can. I wish that I could remember more of you know, when I was 8 years old, of everything that was going around me cause I think now that if I could, just could remembered, you know had a sense of everything, still of being yay! I’m not going to school, you know, that was the sense of everything that was going, but I guess, my guess is that I was too young to try and think about those things but, uh, I think if you do nothing else but say that this has been a real struggle with the schools closing to get where we are now.....

[Tape 1, side B ends. Begin tape 2, side A]

AG: I have one final question for you, how willing were your parents, uh, to discuss their experiences, uh, and their struggles trying to uh, get you all together to uh, put you all in school and how, how willing were they to discuss that with ya’ll, you know, after, after the fact and during the fact, I mean did the impress upon you that they made these sacrifices or uh, you know, cause I know my parents often tell me “oh, I’m struggling [inaudible] and had to go up hill both ways to get to school” and what not.

DH: Uh-huh

AG: Uh, what was that, for you, how was it for you?

DH: Well, I, I don’t think that they really talked about the struggles they had to get us an education. My dad use to say that, he went to school through the 8th grade and um, people use to tease him because his grandmother sent him to school for that many years. You know, back then you worked on the farm or whatever, and they were saying that he went and he would never do anything except read books right, but then course, he worked on the rail road for 44 years, but um, I, I think that, um, the things that were shared with us, I, I think they were being very careful, about what they were sharing with us because I think they didn’t want us to know some of the things that were going on, and I found out what kind of debt my dad went in later, and what he had to do to get us there, but I think that was some of the things they wanted to keep away from us. I really do, and I don’t think they have any problem right now if you go to my mom and she’s um, 93 years old, and can I mean, strong mind, she, I remember that, and she will tell, tell me things now that they, that happened, and that they did, that I find fascinating, but, uh, it wasn’t that, you know, cause I tell my kids too, you know, you know, I, like your parents [laughing]. But, but, I didn’t. I didn’t see much of that I mean, they were willing to talk about it and say things, but, never made me feel one day that they had gone out of the ordinary other then, the want, to do, to get me in school. They never did. Um, my dad would always say,
“make me proud”, and you know he would tell me and instill that, and I think that, that was one thing that, through my whole life is that I did not want to disappoint them, or anything and I don’t know how they did it but I’m trying to figure out how do I get that into my kids but, [laughing] but that was the thing had I had in here [several words in audible] you know, that was really ingrained in my head. And it wasn’t in, the, the, that he was positive about saying, you know, "I don’t want, I want you to do well, I don’t want you to disappoint me, but not that, you know, anything you do is terribly bad that you can’t tell me." Cause I was always felt real open about that, you know, I mean, so [inaudible].

AG:  Well thank you very much for you time here, and I have enjoyed having asking you these questions and hearing you responses to them and I think this will definitely help a lot and, with people uh, researching the history of the school closings and uh, the impact that it has made upon the uh, county as a whole. So thank you once again, very much for uh, giving us your time.

DH:  Well your welcome. I was real impressed with your class, you guys [inaudible] seem like you have a relaxed class there. It seems like its pretty good interaction, and of course working with uh, Mrs. Bagby here, uh, she’s just real uh, I think she’s real good. [Inaudible] so I, I think it’s good I didn’t realize that they were teaching that piece of it so its good for me to know.

End of interview.