

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

MRS. STEPHANYE HENDERSON

INTERVIEW 907

This is Dorothy Richardson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 900. I am interviewing Mrs. Stephanye Henderson, interview number 907. This interview is being conducted on September 29, 1992. We are at Craven Regional Medical Center.

Dorothy Richardson: Mrs. Henderson could you tell us when you were born, your full name, and where you were born.

Mrs. Henderson: I was born March 17, 1953. My full name is Stephanye Ann Kenyear Henderson. I was born right here in New Bern, North Carolina.

DR: Where were you born?

Mrs. Henderson: At Good Shepherd Hospital.

DR: What were your parents name?

Mrs. Henderson: My parents are Janie and Harold Kenyear.

DR: Are they from New Bern?

Mrs. Henderson: No. My mother is from Pollocksville and my father is from Mesic, North Carolina.

DR: Right in the neighborhood. What street did you grow up on?

Mrs. Henderson: I grew up on First Avenue.

DR: That's where?

Mrs. Henderson: That's near where Armstrong's Groceries is now. It's at the corner of First and Broad.

DR: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mrs. Henderson: I have one brother who is nine years younger than me. His name is Eric.

DR: Where did you go to school?

Mrs. Henderson: I started out going to a pre-school at Cedar

Street Recreation Center, and then from there, went to West Street Elementary. From there, I went to Eleanor Marshall, and then Central, and then New Bern High.

DR: What do you remember about your neighborhood?

Mrs. Henderson: It was fun. I remember playing in the water puddles out front. You know in New Bern, water always stands all the time when it rains. There were lots of kids in the neighborhoods. We used to play house underneath the houses because they weren't underpinned at the time.

DR: Were there any parks nearby?

Mrs. Henderson: No, none nearby. The closest park was in Craven Terrace.

DR: Did you go there some?

Mrs. Henderson: Not often. Being a girl and the only child most of the time, my mother kept me most of the time near home.

DR: Did your mother work?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: What did she do?

Mrs. Henderson: She had her own beauty parlor right on the end of our house.

DR: What about your father?

Mrs. Henderson: My father worked at Cherry Point.

DR: So you had a pretty secure childhood.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: Do you remember anything about your kindergarten days?

Mrs. Henderson: Oh yes. (laughter) It was funny because one

of the teachers was rather loud. She would yell at the kids and I never did like people yelling, and so after I had been there only a few days, I decided that I didn't like it. I was three years old, and I walked from Cedar Street Recreational Center, which is now the Omega Center, all the way through Craven Terrace to First Avenue.

DR: I know your mother nearly died!

Mrs. Henderson: When they missed me, a search went out, and here I came walking down the street. I was always very independent.

DR: Was there a punishment?

Mrs. Henderson: No because my mother wasn't really one for a lot of corporal punishment. She asked me why I left, and I told her. She knew I didn't like loud noises and loud voices because I've always shied away from that. So, she told me I shouldn't do that again, and then the next day she went with me and explained it to the teacher and they moved me to another class so that I wouldn't have to listen to all that. I think punishment enough was the trauma of walking all that far.

DR: Let's go back. When you graduated from New Bern High School, did you go on to school?

Mrs. Henderson: Oh yes. I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and studied nursing.

DR: Did you graduate in nursing?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: I've been reading in the News and Observer everyday about what's going on up there about the Black Cultural Center.

Mrs. Henderson: I've heard that they've been marching to try

to get a Black Cultural Center and get it expanded. I don't know the details. I can remember when I was there that we got the one that they have now.

DR: The room?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: What years were you there?

Mrs. Henderson 1971-1975 and again 1977 and 1978.

DR: (interruption) Joe Stallings. He 's a lawyer now in Raleigh.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. Well, he was head of student government when I was at UNC.

DR: Were you homesick while at Chapel Hill?

Mrs. Henderson: Not at all. I was so glad to leave New Bern. I was glad to get away.

DR: Let 's go back now. You advanced to West Street School, first grade. Do you remember your teacher?

Mrs. Henderson: Miss Young.

DR: How many students were in a room?

Mrs. Henderson: I don't know. You know when you're six years old, you don't pay any attention to those kind of things. I would say about twenty.

DR: How long did you stay at West Street?

Mrs. Henderson: Five years.

DR: Then you went where?

Mrs. Henderson: Eleanor Marshall.

DR: Had schools integrated then?

Mrs. Henderson: No. That was the first time they had what they

called freedom of choice. Those students who chose to go to other schools could do so for the first time.

DR: Were you one of the few Black students at Eleanor Marshall?

Mrs. Henderson: I believe I was the only Black student at Eleanor Marshall. (laughter) I know I was the only one in the sixth grade.

DR: A friend of mine told me about leaving the parochial school and going to New Bern High School in our era and how traumatic it was for her. How was it for you?

Mrs. Henderson: When I was in elementary, we were caught up in the movement; Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and it was on television. Martin Luther King was one of my mother's heroes, and so he was my hero. President Kennedy and President Johnson were into civil rights, and so I felt that it was an honor for me to go and integrate the schools. The PTA and the NAACP came to my parents and asked them if they thought I would be willing, and she said she'd talk to me about it but she wasn't going to force me to go. My mother put it to me and told me to think about it, and I decided I wanted to go. So, it was an adventure.

DR: You were eleven years old then?

Mrs. Henderson: Sixth grade, 11 or 12.

DR: So, you really were aware.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, we were aware of what was going on. I knew about Medgar Evers and the marches in Montgomery and George Wallace.

DR: The first day you went, your mother went with you?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: You couldn't help but be apprehensive or anxious.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, apprehensive but excited because it was a new adventure. One thing that was strange, my mother was told to bring me at a certain time and when I got there, the whole class was full. Everybody had taken their seats. We knew it was a planned kind of thing because I knew New Bern wanted things to go very well. They didn't want a scene like had been going on all over the south. So, you could tell the children were primed, and when I walked in the door no head turned. Now you know if you have a bunch of sixth graders and a new kid comes to class, everybody's gonna look. You could tell those children had been "schooled" so to speak. I walked in and my mother introduced me.

DR: Who was your teacher?

Mrs. Henderson: Mrs. Hunt.

DR: A white teacher?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. She told me which seat to take. Well, there was only one seat left, so I took that seat. It was in the middle of the class. That wasn't strange either because my last name was Kenyear which is in the middle of the alphabet and we were always put in alphabetical order. We went in there and the class proceeded. The other thing that I noticed, I was never called on in class. No matter how much I raised my hand, she wouldn't call on me. That didn't last very long because when I went home and told my mother that I was never called on in class, she made it a point to come and have a conference with my teacher. She said that I was just as prepared as the other students are and you need to call on her just like you do the others, and if you don't, I will speak to the principal.

DR: Who was the principal at that time? You never had to go to the office.

Mrs. Henderson: Well, I had to go once. I want to say Mr. Swain. I can't remember exactly who the principal was at that time. I had to go to the office once because a little boy pushed me in line and I pushed him back. So, we had to go to the office.

DR: How was that handled then? Was it handled fairly?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. We had to stay after school, both of us. (laughter) That was okay because I pushed him back and he fell down.

DR: At Eleanor Marshall one of my painful memories; and I'll never forget it and I'm seventy years old, but I see him today and I think back to that day and it was cold and they used to have coal furnaces at Eleanor Marshall. In the third grade we would go out those steps on the side. It was cold, and he pushed me down in those ashes and both my knees were skinned. To this day every time I see Harold, I think about that at Eleanor Marshall. But I wouldn't of dared pushed him because he was so big. (laughter) How were the studies for you? Do you feel that what you had gotten at West Street had prepared you?

Mrs. Henderson: Oh sure.

DR: You were up with what the other students were getting?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. I was an A student before I came to Eleanor Marshall, and I left Eleanor Marshall an A student. I went to Central and made straight A's.

DR: How were the other students with you?

Mrs. Henderson: I would say by the end of the first grading period, I was jumping rope with the rest of them and playing kick ball with

the rest of them. Children are going to be children. If you let them alone, they'll be fine. I think children have their problems because of we adults. So, after they found out that I didn't bark and bite, everything went fine.

DR: Were you invited into their homes?

Mrs. Henderson: No, and I didn't really expect to. My mother explained that to me. And I still had my friends that I grew up with.

DR: That's what I was gonna ask, did it hurt you with your friends?

Mrs. Henderson: No. I tell you something else. About half way through the school year, a new family moved to town. Her father was a minister. Her name was Joan Parks and she came to the sixth grade. She and I were the only two black students in the sixth grade. We became fast friends, and we're friends today. She's a lawyer in Dallas. So, she wasn't harmed by it either. (laughter)

DR: What church did ya'll attend?

Mrs. Henderson: St. Peter's AME Zion Church.

DR: Were you called upon to tell them about your experience?

Mrs. Henderson: No.

DR: You did have their support?

Mrs. Henderson: Sure. I had the support of the Black community because that was something that at that time we were fighting for; for equality. So, yes, I had that support. A big deal wasn't made out of it. It was just that I was going to go to this other school. A big deal would have probably been made if I had been harmed in anyway, but as long as everything went fine, I was just going to school.

DR: Do you remember any white students that were really kind

to you?

Mrs. Henderson: Well, yes, a few. One of the girls in class, her name was Roseanne Tully. Her mother now works at Eckerd's. She was very quiet and we became friends. Some of the other students, I can't remember whether they were at Eleanor Marshall or if I met them at Central, but several of them and I became good friends. We went all the way through high school. Several of them work here at the hospital; like, Stas Humienny and Susan Wilson. Just to mention two of them. I can remember them from seventh grade on because in seventh grade everybody from all over town came to Central. So, Central was the junior high school. I remember more of them from seventh grade on than I do from sixth grade.

DR: But it went pretty smoothly for you that year?

Mrs. Henderson: It went fairly smoothly. I didn't expect it to be perfect because it was a learning experience for everybody.

DR: And you ended up as friends with your teacher, Mrs. Hunt?

Mrs. Henderson: She was under a lot of pressure too, and probably some that she didn't particularly like, so you have to know that. When I moved back to New Bern in 1983, I saw her on the elevator one day here at the hospital and she grabbed me and hugged me. We were so glad to see each other.

DR: She felt good within herself.

Mrs. Henderson: Sure. It's wonderful. It was great.

DR: Then you went to Central School.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: Were there any other Black students at Central?

Mrs. Henderson: Oh yes. There were a lot more then. I can't remember the number, but there were more. More students were beginning to integrate. Then, it was more like, if you lived on that side of town, you would go to Central, and it wasn't a big deal.

DR: So the schools had integrated?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: When did that take place at the high school?

Mrs. Henderson: Now, total integration was 1970. That's when they just divided up the city into elementary school districts.

DR: And the teachers. That didn't happen until 1970. You still had white teachers?

Mrs. Henderson: You had white and black teachers by then.

DR: I mean in the seventh and eighth grade.

Mrs. Henderson: In seventh and eighth grade, pretty much all the teachers were still segregated. By 1970, they just put teachers wherever, whatever grade you taught, they put you in different schools. That was the year that J. T. Barber became junior high and New Bern High was the only senior high. The elementary schools were divided as wherever you lived, you went to a certain school. A neighborhood program.

DR: So, you weren't alone then at Central School?

Mrs. Henderson: No. I had plenty of friends. (laughter)

DR: Did they have any social programs at Central?

Mrs. Henderson: Not very many. I don't remember being in many school oriented social programs there. They started that in high school.

DR: How many years did you spend at Central?

Mrs. Henderson: Two.

DR: The seventh and eighth grade?

Mrs. Henderson: Right.

DR: Then where did you go?

Mrs. Henderson: New Bern High.

DR: Was it totally integrated then?

Mrs. Henderson: No. In ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade, J. T. Barber High School was open and New Bern High School was open. I went ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth at New Bern High.

DR: Had you gone when it was totally integrated?

Mrs. Henderson: No. It was my senior year that it was totally integrated.

DR: How'd you do? Did you get along real well with your academics?

Mrs. Henderson: I did very well. I had no problems there. In 1970 when things were totally integrated, I had no problems because I always attended all of J. T. Barber's functions. Even though I went to New Bern High. I went to their prom. I went to their football games. I did them both. I had lots and lots of friends at J. T. Barber, so when they came over to New Bern High, it was just like I had all my friends there with me.

DR: What about the junior/senior prom in your junior year?

Mrs. Henderson: In my junior year, I went to both proms. (laughter) My date went to J. T. Barber, so he took me to his prom and I brought him to my prom.

DR: And he was accepted?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, everything was fine. (laughter)

DR: You really didn't suffer any traumatic problems?

Mrs. Henderson: No, I didn't. I felt sorry for the students that came over in 1970, the seniors.

DR: What was the situation then?

Mrs. Henderson: You go to one high school for three years, you want to graduate from that high school. The state had to integrate sometime. It was just bad that they picked 1970 for that group because their diplomas say New Bern High School, and they really didn't want that. Any class wouldn't want that. There's no good time to do it.

DR: Were the black teachers now at New Bern High School?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, they had some there and some at J. T. Barber. They were mixed up because J. T. Barber then was ninth grade only in 1970. So, all the ninth grade teachers went over there. In 1970 they had co-everything. They had a black homecoming queen and they had a white one. They had two student council presidents; one black one and one white. One would be in charge one month and one would be in charge the next month, and that kind of thing.

DR: How did that come about? Did the students have any input?

Mrs. Henderson: Oh yes, students had all the input because those students that came over as seniors held offices in their school and they knew that when they came over to New Bern High, the white students didn't know them so there was no way that they could vote for them.

So, it was fairer to have two because they had just as much right to be leaders as anybody else. We thought that was very fair. People like me, I got elected as secretary by the students from New Bern High

because they knew me. I had been there all the time. But that was just a way to acknowledge that there were leaders from both schools that had to come together.

DR: But they had input in how this was handled?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. I think it was handled fairly well.

DR: And at the football homecoming they had two queens, and everybody was in accord with that?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. It was fun. (laughter) I was one of the homecoming contestants.

DR: You didn't make it?

Mrs. Henderson: No. I was never popular enough to make it. (laughter) But I was glad to get the votes that I got. It was nice.

DR: Did you maintain your grades all the way through high school?

Mrs. Henderson: I was in National Honor Society. I was inducted as a sophomore.

DR: That's great.

Mrs. Henderson: I just really enjoyed high school. I was just ready to get out of high school and go to Carolina.

DR: Who was valedictorian of your class?

Mrs. Henderson: Dee Bratcher.

DR: Do you remember the salutatorian?

Mrs. Henderson: Wanda Patton. I see her from time to time now.

DR: Did they go on to college?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. I don't know where they went though. I don't know about Dee, but I know that Wanda and her husband live in New Bern.

DR: In your programs at the high school, did they do anything about trying to set up any kind of conferences for understanding of integration?

Mrs. Henderson: I can't remember anything specific. Student council did more for that than anything else. They are the ones who fostered everybody working together, problem solving and those kind of things for the school as a whole. I really don't think there were very many problems until we tried to have a Martin Luther King day, and then the white students wanted to have a Robert E. Lee day. (laughter) That's when we had the only little riot if you want to call it a riot. We had a little altercation during that time which closed school for a couple of days.

DR: What actually happened, Mrs. Henderson?

Mrs. Henderson: The principal let the black students have an assembly on Martin Luther King's birthday, and some of the white students took offense to that and they said they wanted to have assembly on Robert E. Lee's birthday.

DR: Was there any disturbance during the assembly?

Mrs. Henderson: No, there was no disturbance during the Martin Luther King assembly, but the white students didn't get permission to have the Robert E. Lee assembly. They were just going to go and take over the auditorium and some people had some words and they started fighting and then you know how everybody just kind of joins in.

DR: Were you a part of that too?

Mrs. Henderson: No. I was ready to run. I ran. (laughter) No, I didn't take part in that. I remember I went to Mr. Swain's room

because his room was way up on the second floor. I called out to some friends of mine, we were all car pooling together, and they came up there and when we got a chance, we just went to the car and left. They closed school for about three days.

DR: How did they settle it? Was there bad feelings?

Mrs. Henderson: The police came. Yes, there were bad feelings.

DR: On both sides?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, but it blew over. The kids that started it were trouble makers anyway. They would have been trouble makers anywhere.

DR: Black or white.

Mrs. Henderson: Right. And so it was just written off as that. When we went back to school, we had an assembly and the principal said that this will not be tolerated, and that was it.

DR: Who was your principal?

Mrs. Henderson: Mr. Honeycutt.

DR: And he said that that was not acceptable.

Mrs. Henderson: Not acceptable behavior.

DR: Did they suspend any students?

Mrs. Henderson: The ones that started it got suspended for three days I think it was.

DR: White and black?

Mrs. Henderson: Oh yes.

DR: So, you feel it was handled fairly?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, I feel it was.

DR: So you graduated?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes! A wonderful day! (laughter)

DR: You had no problem being accepted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill?

Mrs. Henderson: No. I had the grades and that's all they were interested in. Plus, there were plenty of Black students there.

DR: That's right. You know in my day, it was primarily a matter of money.

Mrs. Henderson: I didn't have money, so I got full a scholarship.

DR: Great. An academic scholarship?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. A James M. Johnston Nursing Scholarship.

DR: Wonderful. Did you start right away in the nursing program when you got up to Chapel Hill?

Mrs. Henderson: No, you are not allowed to do that. You have to do two years of general college and then the spring of your sophomore year you apply to nursing school and if your grades are good, then they'll accept you into the nursing program.

DR: Did you feel that New Bern High School had prepared academically you when you got to Chapel Hill?

Mrs. Henderson: Sure. I was able to compete. I did very well. I placed out of several classes. There were freshmen classes I didn't have to take. I wish I had taken them now though because my GPA would have been higher and I would have made better grades.

DR: How about your SAT scores?

Mrs. Henderson: My SAT scores were good. I can't remember what they were, but I'd taken the SAT two years in a row and they took the highest scores.

DR: What was Chapel Hill like?

Mrs. Henderson: Fun!! It's just a lot of fun. I made the most of it. I enjoyed every minute of it. The party capitol of the state!
(laughter)

DR: I've been reading about that too in the News and Observer.
Getting back to your family, is your husband from New Bern?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes he is.

DR: Did he come through as you did through the school system as you did?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes he did. He graduated from J. T. Barber in 1968, three years before I did.

DR: So, you knew him.

Mrs. Henderson: Oh, I knew him very well. (laughter) We grew up in the same neighborhood. We went to the same church. We hated each other when we were growing up.

DR: Did he go away to school?

Mrs. Henderson: No. He graduated and went into the military. He joined the Air Force, and he is now retired.

DR: Were you away then travelling?

Mrs. Henderson: No. I've just married him the last three years. So it is new love found.

DR: That's great. How did he get along in the Air Force?

Mrs. Henderson: He did very well. He loved it. He was ready to get out, though, after twenty-one years. (laughter)

DR: Was he in any of the Saudi fighting?

Mrs. Henderson: No, but I was. My brother and I were.

DR: Oh, well, this is interesting! Tell me about that.

Mrs. Henderson: I got married right out of college. I married my first husband. He was a student at Chapel Hill, so I ended up staying in Chapel Hill seven years all together because he had to finish medical school.

DR: Were you working then?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. And then, he joined the Air Force to put himself through medical school. We travelled all around. In 1983, we broke up and I moved back home. One of the things I had always wanted to do was be in the military. My first husband wouldn't let me be in the military because he said he might go one place and I'd go another and he didn't want us to be separated. So the first thing I did once I got settled here, was join the Reserves. So, here I am in the Air Force Reserves and I'm trained as flight nurse and I'm flying and then I get meningitis and they ground me. To get on flying status in the Air Force you have to pass a rigorous physical. Once I got meningitis, they put me on waivers to see how well I was going to do and I never did get my flying status back. So, I said. "I'm going to go inactive because if I can't fly, I don't want to play." (laughter)

So, I went inactive in 1987 which means you're just a number in the computer. You don't belong to any unit. Meanwhile, my brother who is nine years younger than me, graduates from high school. He joins the Air Force. Now, he's active duty. When Desert Shield started in August of '90, they packed him up and sent him to Saudi Arabia.

My only brother! Now I'm upset! Then January comes and they say they're going to start fighting and I'm really upset. I'm remarried

now, my husband has just retired, and he says, "Well, they probably won't call me, but I bet you they'll call you because you're a nurse."

I said, "ah no." So, we were prepared. I knew I was going to get called, and I did. It was the end of January '91.

DR: You had the baby.

Mrs. Henderson: I got two. I had two kids. They said, "you've got four days to come to Texas." So, I went to Texas and they said "Since you haven't been actively in the reserves, we'll just send you to a stateside assignment." So, I got sent to Langley, Virginia for two and a half months because they had emptied out that hospital and sent them to Saudi Arabia. My brother was in Saudi Arabia until March and I stayed until May and came back home.

DR: I bet that was an experience.

Mrs. Henderson: I loved it! I wish I could have stayed. I really do. I liked it.

DR: Tell me about your job here now.

Mrs. Henderson: I am the Infection Control Practitioner here.

DR: What does that involve?

Mrs. Henderson: Most of what I deal with here at the hospital is infectious processes. Patients come in with various infections and one of the things you don't want to happen is to spread the disease from one patient to another or from a patient to an employee. My job is to write policies and to make sure that people follow the policies. I also report infections that have to be identified to the health department.

DR: You work closely with the health department I imagine.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, and closely with the doctors and the nurses in making sure that patients get put on the proper type of isolation.

I look at quality of care; a patient comes in with a certain infection, did they get put on the right antibiotics. That kind of thing.

DR: You have to have a thorough knowledge.

Mrs. Henderson: The hospital sends me to the training that's necessary. It's also a matter of reading and keeping up with things.

DR: It changes.

Mrs. Henderson: Every day. Every day there's a new drug out or a new protocol or something.

DR: Now of course, this is even more in the fore with AIDS. This has got to be a frightening thing for people in medicine in working with patients.

Mrs. Henderson: Really that's a misconception. In the health care field, you're not going to get AIDS from your patients. You're going to get hepatitis from your patients. People think that health care workers are at high risk of getting AIDS, but you're not.

DR: We just hear the exceptions.

Mrs. Henderson: You just hear the exceptions.

DR: Do you have anything to do with the blood supply too?

Mrs. Henderson: No, the lab takes care of that pretty much. I deal more with protecting our employees from getting hepatitis and other illnesses. One of my jobs is vaccinating people against hepatitis B. That's the big problem with health care workers. We have across the United States two hundred health care workers die a year from hepatitis B. We've only had maybe fifty employees across the United

States in the last ten years get HIV. It's no where near the problem people think among health care personnel.

DR: I think America has got to do more.

Mrs. Henderson: It's a lifestyle kind of thing. Having people change their lifestyle is much harder than changing the policies of a small population like hospital workers. When you're talking about the way people deal with each other on a private basis, you're talking about a monumental type of scale. That's why it's an epidemic because it's very hard for people to change their private lives.

DR: Yes it is. I don't think young people are as knowledgeable, or maybe they don't want to be even though they read about it. Is it denial?

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, it's more denial. I grew up in the seventies; free love, and the most you had to worry about was a little gonorrhoea. That kind of mentality is still there, and that's what you got to change. And that's hard to change!

DR: Do your own thing and be your own person.

Mrs. Henderson: Right. You know the pill was a big deal. As long as you were on the pill everything was fine. That kind of mentality has to change, and that's going to be a monumental task. I don't think we're going to see an end to this epidemic until the children that are my children's age get to adulthood which is sad to say. The teens now are past help. Some of them are already sexually active. The kids that are young, if you can put abstinence in their head, they may be able to stop the epidemic.

DR: My granddaughters...the oldest is nineteen and one is

seventeen. Their mother was divorced. Her lifestyle has certainly changed. I feel like I have set an example for these girls; that this has been good for me all my life, and at least they have a comparison of the value system. But the lifestyle and the thinking is very foreign to me.

Mrs. Henderson: I know in speaking with my mother, she says "that something as simple as living together just blows her mind."

DR: How old is she?

Mrs. Henderson: She's sixty-six.

DR: Your grandmother would probably...

Mrs. Henderson: Roll over in her grave! Bless her heart. I think I've done a lot to try to get my mother to see where it's coming from. Now that I'm grown and married I can tell her some of the things I did in college and she just almost dies. (laughter)

DR: It was easier for us, Mrs. Henderson, because I could do something and before I got home to Pollock Street my mother would know.

Mrs. Henderson: That was the way it was when I was young. It was the same way here. But once we got away! That's why I wanted to get to Chapel Hill!

DR: In looking back on your part in the integration of the schools in New Bern, what do you feel that was good about it and what was bad about it, if there was any bad?

Mrs. Henderson: Good; because the chance to show the white community that Black students could perform just as well as white students. The equality issue was a good thing. The bad thing about it, I think, was that black students lost a lot of attention that they

would have normally gotten from their black teachers. Our teachers lived in our neighborhood, they knew our families, and they cared about us. You take a teacher that lives in Country Club, they don't really have any kind of notion about a child that's in Craven Terrace and what their needs are and what their parents do. This is through no fault of their own. This was the bad part and it's still the bad part.

My oldest daughter now goes to Trent Park and I see it there. The teachers are a little more in tune to it, but it's hard to have a vested interest in some of the kids when you don't know their parents. You may not even see their parents even at PTA. That's not because they're in an integrated society, those parents might not have even come if West Street School was still open. You understand what I'm saying.

But you might have run into them on the street because you lived in the same community. That kind of thing is missing. After going through the whole process, I still think we would probably do better if we were separate, but equal. If you had the same books at J. T. Barber that you had at New Bern High, I would say let J. T. Barber stay there and let New Bern High stay there.

DR: That surprises me.

Mrs. Henderson: It's no different than being Jewish, or being Italian. Ethnic groups are special and they have their own special talents and their own special needs and their own special life, and that needs to be preserved. You look at the black schools in New Bern.

Every one of them are being turned into something else. None of them are schools anymore. J. T. Barber used to be a very distinguished high school. I knew Mr. Barber's family. I grew up with his

granddaughter. It's an elementary school now. West Street was one of the first black schools in the state! There was no other black school that took blacks from elementary to high school. It's a headstart center.

DR: That says something for New Bern.

Mrs. Henderson: That's right. But West Street School is not there anymore. There is a marker or something, but there needs to be a monument there. West Street School was something special for New Bern. My father graduated from there from high school. None of the Black schools remain.

DR: What was your maiden name?

Mrs. Henderson: Kenyear. Being a person that went through the integration process, I still see that Blacks lost in some ways. There are always going to be people that excel. No matter what their color. No matter what their background. Then there are going to be some that would excel if they had some special attention. Some of the programs that Craven County/New Bern schools are doing; like, Partners in Success, I take part in that. That's very important. DR:

Role models for these children are so important. I think perhaps more could be done in getting the white teachers and the black teachers together in role playing and where we're coming from and where our children are coming from. I remember in my work, I was a school social worker in Cumberland County, taking a white teacher up in an area to get some papers signed and when we got back to the school, she sat down and cried and she said, "I'm sorry Mrs. Richardson. I didn't know what I was asking." And so often, it is not knowing. I think

people like you could communicate some of these things to our white teachers.

Mrs. Henderson: I think they are beginning to understand because I've gone in conferences with my daughter's teachers and they'd say, "You're so concerned about your daughter; but there are children here who don't get meals except what they get at school and they go home to nobody who cares whether they get their homework done or not." That's not just black students. That's white students too. There's a big disparity in the haves and the have nots. In a society like the United States, there should not be that disparity. We send all this money overseas and we have people sleeping on the streets. That's just stupid.

DR: There's got to be a way to help. One thing that LBJ did, I was a part of it and I think it was one of the greatest programs we ever had, was Headstart.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. It's still good.

DR: I would get the parents and bring them to the schools. I got them involved, and they had their eyes opened; the mother's as well as the teachers. To me, that's one of the greatest programs that ever was cause I saw it in action and I saw what it could do. Can you think of anything else that you would like to say about that time in New Bern and the schools?

Mrs. Henderson: I can say I stand by the public schools. I'm a product of the public schools and I think I've done fairly well. Both of my children are going to go to public school. I feel that I pay my taxes and I should demand a quality education for my children

and I think they get it here. I have been extremely happy with Trent Park Elementary. The teachers care. The test grades were the best in the state recently. My daughter, the one that's in the third grade, is excelling. She's doing very well. She just got elected to student council as an alternate. She's just got to be her own person.

DR: But look where she's coming from? Educated parents, caring parents, people that let her know what is important.

Mrs. Henderson: She knows she has only one task, that is to go to school and to do her homework. Everything else will be provided for her.

DR: Going back to when you were growing up in New Bern. What kind of entertainment did ya'll have?

Mrs. Henderson: We relied on church. Our church had lots of activities. We were always going to the beach or having little festivals or plays. Most of mine was church. Then as I got in junior high and high school, it fanned out to school. We had sports. I was in the drama club, in the glee club, and was an accompanist for the glee club. So, it revolved around church and school. We didn't have, and still don't in New Bern, have any kind of organized teen kind of thing. There wasn't even a "Y" when we were growing up. We relied on our church and school, and it was fun. I felt like I had a well rounded childhood.

DR: And the church was the center.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes.

DR: I think it has been, from my white observation, the mainstay of the black community.

Mrs. Henderson: Oh yes. The church has always been the mainstay of the black community and it still is a major force in the black community. If you want to get anything done, you have to do it through the churches.

DR: You've had some strong black leaders in New Bern. I think Mr. Johnson of St. Cyprian's and just go right down the line. I imagine your mother and father are pretty active in their church.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes. My father goes to Star of Zion Baptist. He's a Baptist and my mother is a Methodist. (laughter) Now that all the kids are grown, my mother has started going to church with my father. But they're both very active in church. They always have been.

DR: Did your brother come back here?

Mrs. Henderson: He's still in the military. He'll do his twenty and get out and probably come back. He's in Turkey right now.

DR: How many grandchildren does your mother have?

Mrs. Henderson: My brother has two, so, she has four grandchildren and four step-grandchildren. My husband has children from a previous marriage and my brother's wife has children from a previous marriage. So, she's got eight grandchildren all together.

DR: There's something great about having your grandchildren.

Mrs. Henderson: That's what she tells me. She spoils mine.

DR: Mrs. Henderson, I can't tell how much this has meant to us. I think by having your memories of how it was is so important to show how New Bern really did come along. I'm sure everything wasn't right down the line.

Mrs. Henderson: No. Nothing ever is. But you take the good and the bad and put it together.

DR: It sounds like you have taken most of the good.

Mrs. Henderson: You have to. I can't dwell on the bad. My parents taught me that.

DR: Have you ever been hurt by others because of your race?

Mrs. Henderson: I would say there were times that I thought that I should have been chosen for something and wasn't, maybe in high school. Since I've been an adult, I don't think so. I feel that I have always been able to project myself in a way that I'm accepted on the merits of what I do or the knowledge I have. As a child, it's one thing if you have somebody arbitrarily picking, but when you get to be an adult and you can show somebody "xyz" and they can compare it to somebody else's "xyz", I really don't think I've been passed over.

DR: You were chosen to be the student to tell us about your memories. I believe that says a lot for you.

Mrs. Henderson: Yes, I guess so. I was surprised when they called me and said I'd been chosen. Who gave you my name? (laughter)

DR: They had a committee and you were suggested. It would be interesting to hear the other student and their side. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW