

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

OSCAR ADOLPH KAUFER, III

INTERVIEW 424

This is Marea Kafer Foster representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 400. I am interviewing Oscar Adolph Kafer, III, interview number 424. This interview is being conducted on 11 November, 1992. We are in Oscar's home at 604 Pollock Street in New Bern.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, Oscar, I want your personal history, your name again please, your birthdate, mama and daddy's name.

Mr. Kafer: I was born September 1, 1936 in City Hospital in Winston-Salem. My parents are Dr. Oscar A. Kafer, II and Helen Seifert Kafer.

MAREA FOSTER: And you have a sister.

MR. KAFER: I have a twin sister who's ten minutes younger than I am.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, so you're the oldest. (laughter)

MR. KAFER: I'm the oldest.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, that makes it nice, doesn't it? And then you have a younger brother.

MR. KAFER: I have a younger brother who's eight years younger than I am, Charles William Kafer who is an attorney here in New Bern.

MAREA FOSTER: How long did ya'll live in Winston-Salem?

MR. KAFER: Marea, I'm not sure, because you know I was sort of young.

MAREA FOSTER: That's right!

MR. KAFER: Daddy opened his practice here in '37. I think I lived there less than a year.

MAREA FOSTER: Uncle Oscar was doing his residency?

MR. KAUFER: Residency at City hospital. They lived in an apartment so small that they opened a chest of drawers and Helen slept in one and I slept in the other.

MAREA FOSTER: You're pulling my leg. I don't believe that.

MR. KAUFER: No. That's the truth. That's the truth.

MAREA FOSTER: That's the first time I've heard that Oscar.

MR. KAUFER: I don't know if you remember Alice and Henry Johnson who were friends of mama and daddy's in Winston-Salem.

MAREA FOSTER: I'm not sure.

MR. KAUFER: They told me that.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I'm sure they're telling you the truth.

MR. KAUFER: Yeah, it's possible.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, when you came to New Bern, of course, you were too young to remember, you lived first on Spencer Ave.?

MR. KAUFER: No, we lived here.

MAREA FOSTER: Here in this house?

MR. KAUFER: This was a wooden house.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, I remember that.

MR. KAUFER: And then mama and daddy had it remodeled. I can't remember the exact year. It had to have been '39 or '40. We lived in a house that my Granddaddy Seifert owned on Spencer Avenue. I went to Mrs. Bender's, isn't that the one legged lady, kindergarten.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, Mrs. Bender. She had the kindergarten, Mrs. Ernest Bender. Her husband was Dr. Ernest Bender, pediatrician.

MR. KAFER: Right. We had to cross the street by ourself.

MAREA FOSTER: That was a big deal then. (laughter)

MR. KAFER: That house was right across the street from, who lives in that big brick house on Spencer Avenue?

MAREA FOSTER: The Orringer's live there.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. The Rivenbark's lived somewhere near there. What was the guy with the city so long?

MAREA FOSTER: Bill Bartling.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Right. He lived on the corner of Spencer, and I can't remember that street. His house was the one I believe they have said is a Sears Roebuck house.

MR. KAFER: I didn't know that. There's a big house right across the street from that house where we stayed in. It's still there.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, when you moved down back here to Pollock Street, who were your playmates?

MR. KAFER: Oh me. Well, of course, my cousins, Breck and Charles Duffy; Bill Ferebee, Charlie Ashford.

MAREA FOSTER: Charlie lived right across the street.

MR. KAFER: Charlie lived right across the street. They were my main playmates. Norman Kellum. You were about to forget Norman and I don't want to do that.

MAREA FOSTER: Where did he live?

MR. KAFER: Norman lived around on George Street. The Palace is there now. They lived in a two-house apartment. The Grady's,

Jacqueline and A.D. and Mickey Grady lived around the corner. Then there were the older boys who we always took on in football; Johnny Funk, David Nelson, Kenneth Parker, Charlie Mohn. One nice boy lived around here, I got to mention him. He's your age I think, Jimmy Willis.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes. Uh huh. I know who you're talking about. Where did you play football?

MR. KAUFER: In this field.

MAREA FOSTER: The vacant lot next to you where now the Civil War museum is.

MR. KAUFER: Yes. That was a football field, baseball field, and everything else. In fact, somebody threw the baseball to me and it went across the street in front of Charles' house and I went and got it and threw it back across the street and hit the power line and it came down and hit right on the hood of a car right in front of where a woman's child was sitting. I ducked back down behind the car over in front of the Duffy's house and about that time comes the highway patrolman and the woman flagged him over. I said, "Lord, I'm in trouble now!" But if you remember that highway patrolman who was in such a terrible accident that daddy worked on so long putting together, Jones.

"It was an accident", he says, "I know this boy and I'm sure he didn't mean to. Let's let him go on home."

MAREA FOSTER: Grateful for small favors, weren't you Oscar? (laughter) Then when you came back down here, you were ready to start school.

MR. KAUFER: Roughly somewhere, yeah. I can't remember the exact

year Marea. I started school in '42 I guess. I may have been here a year before we started school.

MAREA FOSTER: Tell me where you went to school.

Mr Kafer: I went to Central School for twelve years.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. And who were your teachers? The ones that you can remember.

MR. KAFER: Miss Styron taught me in the first grade.

MAREA FOSTER: What was her first name? It wasn't Virginia, was it?

MR. KAFER: Yeah, right. She lived right across the street from the school right next to Johnny Mitchell and Julia Mitchell. Second grade our teacher got sick. I forgot who it was suppose to be. We had about seven or eight teachers. Third grade was Mrs. Sledge except for Miss Ruth Berry came over and taught us writing. The fourth grade was...

MAREA FOSTER: You're doing very well.

MR. KAFER: You know I can't believe who taught me in the fourth grade. Was it Miss Bell? One arm lady?

MAREA FOSTER: Uh huh. Miss Louise Bell.

MR. KAFER: And Mrs. Waters taught me in the fifth grade. Probably the best teacher I ever had taught me in the sixth grade. I think the best teacher I ever had was Mrs. Helen Morton who taught me in the sixth grade.

MAREA FOSTER: She was wonderful.

MR. KAFER: I had my neighbor in the seventh grade, Miss Moore.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, Mary Grey Moore.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, for the seventh grade you went to what we call the Bell building.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. You remember your teachers there?

MR. KAFER: Yeah. Miss Moore was my teacher. Then the eighth grade, Miss Minton was my base teacher and Mrs. Willis taught me science.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, Mrs. Willis, you're talking about Margaret.

MR. KAFER: Margaret Willis taught me science. Miss Dameron taught us North Carolina history. Mrs. Chadwick...

MAREA FOSTER: Mrs. Ivy Chadwick.

MR. KAFER: Taught us math.

MAREA FOSTER: Was Helen in the same room?

MR. KAFER: Every room! In fact, I was twenty-one years old before I found out my name wasn't Helen's brother. (laughter)

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) I think that happens to a lot of people, Oscar, not just to you.

MR. KAFER: It was always what Helen and Marea had done.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Oh, you poor thing. Now in high school, this is when you first started changing classes. Did you change classrooms?

MR. KAFER: In the eighth grade.

MAREA FOSTER: Not in the seventh but in the eight grade?

MR. KAFER: I've got a feeling that we did some of that in seventh grade, but I can't remember who the other seventh grade teacher was.

MAREA FOSTER: Then high school was nine through twelve, because we had twelve grades at that time and nine months of school. Isn't that right?

MR. KAFER: Yeah. H. B. Smith was the superintendent and he got your attention. He'd be on campus and he'd walk by you and you'd say, "Praise the Lord, I dodged that one!" (laughter)

MAREA FOSTER: Yes. Well, when you were in high school, who was your principal?

MR. KAFER: Mr. Farnell was principal the first year and then Mr....

MAREA FOSTER: Mr. Spears?

MR. KAFER: No, Mr. Brinkley.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. What classes did you take?

MR. KAFER: Well, I took English, Algebra, Latin, U.S. History, American History, Chemistry.

MAREA FOSTER: In other words, you took a college preparatory class.

MR. KAFER: I took college curriculum, yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: And when you graduated from New Bern High School, then you went to Wake Forest.

MR. KAFER: That's correct.

MAREA FOSTER: But before we graduate you, what activities did you participate in high school?

MR. KAFER: Well, my favorite activity was three o'clock in the afternoon cause school was out.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Oh, Oscar, be serious.

MR. KAFER: I didn't participate much in anything really. I was in the band, played ball.

MAREA FOSTER: Football?

MR. KAFER: Until I got hurt and then daddy made me quit and I played basketball. I started to play baseball but I quit and organized the New Bern High School golf team. That was the first golf team in New Bern and we've had one ever since.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, how nice!

MR. KAFER: Me and James Allen Lancaster and Harry Torrance. I can't remember if Billy Street played or not because he went off to Oak Ridge. Anyway, we formed the first golf team.

MAREA FOSTER: All right. Now, we've gotten you graduated, but before you go to Wake Forest, I want you to tell me about your father. In this house where we are now, on the other side was Uncle Oscar's office.

MR. KAFER: Right.

MAREA FOSTER: So, if you'll tell me all about that.

MR. KAFER: Well, he had his office in the house.

MAREA FOSTER: Describe his office.

MR. KAFER: Well, of course, that was back in the days when you had two waiting rooms. You went in and you walked into a hall, and what was referred to then as the colored waiting room was off to the

right, and what was refereed to as the white was off to the left. Aunt Katie ran the office. Daddy's office was beside the white and behind the black. Then behind that was the examining room. In back of that was his lab. Then behind that was a room where he had a bed where somebody had to wait for an ambulance, or on a couple occasions, a body. Then behind that was a bathroom and the air conditioning. It was one of the first places I remember being air conditioned. You remember the polio epidemic. I remember he would only see all those people after hours. He sat over there in the dark until he thought it was safe to come over here without.

MAREA FOSTER: And possibly infecting ya'll.

MR. KAFER: Infecting us.

MAREA FOSTER: You mentioned one bathroom. Did whites and blacks use the same bathroom?

MR. KAFER: Yeah, as far as I know. It was just a head and a sink.

MAREA FOSTER: Right. Did Uncle Oscar have a x-ray machine?

MR. KAFER: He had a fluoroscope. It wasn't x-ray, it was a fluoroscope I think rather than an x-ray. Now, what's the difference, I don't know. He had that. He had that special thing so Aunt Lucy could prop her foot in it when he took a picture of it. Remember that?

MAREA FOSTER: Oh yes, I do.

MR. KAFER: Built especially for her so he could bandage her foot or whatever he had to do. She told him whatever was wrong with all the Kafer's in the world. (laughter)

MAREA FOSTER: He did take care of everyone of us. Now, he made house calls.

MR. KAFER: Daddy usually operated in the morning. He was in his office in the afternoon and made house calls and his rounds in the hospital at night.

MAREA FOSTER: He had a full day. And this was seven days a week.

MR. KAFER: Seven days a week.

MAREA FOSTER: When you all wanted to go on vacation, who would cover for Uncle Oscar?

MR. KAFER: Well, I think Dr. Richardson did some of his OB stuff.

MAREA FOSTER: Dr. Ashford.

MR. KAFER: No, Dr. Duffy and Dr. Willis and Dr. Grady.

MAREA FOSTER: But they would help each other out when they wanted to go on vacation.

MR. KAFER: Yeah, right. I might be remembering the names wrong, but I know those are.

MAREA FOSTER: No, I think you probably got that right. And during this time, your mother was a housewife. She had not gone back into social work at this time.

MR. KAFER: No. Of course, she was active in the community now.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, I know that. Very much so.

MR. KAFER: She was New Bern's First Woman of the Year. She was real active in schools.

MAREA FOSTER: She was on the school board.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: How long did Aunt Helen serve on the school board?

MR. KAFER: A long time. I don't remember how long, but a long time. I saw Mrs. Gordon Parrott on the street one day and she said that when the school bond issue had first been defeated to build what is now Grover C. Fields, and mama went to Raleigh to get a special dispensation from the legislature. Now, I don't know the particulars of that, but that's what she said. She was on the Governor's Education Committee too.

MAREA FOSTER: Tell me about Kafer Memorial Hospital.

MR. KAFER: It had just been my daddy's dream to have a hospital of his own, so he and my granddaddy bought the Jones house.

MAREA FOSTER: And your grandfather was Dr. Oswald Kafer.

MR. KAFER: Oswald Ottmar, better known as Buster Kafer. They bought it and then opened it up.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you remember how the hospital was laid out?

MR. KAFER: Before the annex was added you went in and the rooms were wards. I guess he had two big rooms that had been in the house originally. They're were wards and operating room and obstetrics were upstairs and also some wards upstairs.

MAREA FOSTER: When was the annex put on? Before the hospital opened?

MR. KAFER: No.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, okay. I thought it was before. I thought when it opened in '49 the addition had already been put on. So, that

was put on later.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: But your daddy put it on.

MR. KAFER: He put it on and it wasn't long before he died. Cause I know it wasn't completely paid for when he died.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. Then when Uncle Oscar died, your mother had to run the hospital.

MR. KAFER: Mama ran the hospital. She went back to work and ran the hospital with Mrs. Turner.

MAREA FOSTER: Mrs. Eliza Ellis Turner.

MR. KAFER: And Miss Ritchy was head of nurses.

MAREA FOSTER: Dorothy Ritchy.

MR. KAFER: They were a real big help to her.

MAREA FOSTER: Then how long did Aunt Helen try to keep the hospital open before it was sold to the Baptist?

MR. KAFER: Marea, I can't really tell you. I can't remember that time frame. It was several years probably. Daddy died in '51. So, I want to say it was close to '60. That's what comes to mind. I don't know why I can't remember, but I can't remember.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you know why she wanted to sell the hospital to Baptist?

MR. KAFER: Well, it's just a matter of it was just too much for her. Economics was involved. It was never opened as a profit hospital. Daddy never intended to make money off of it.

MAREA FOSTER: He just wanted to break even.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. If it generated any income, he applied back into it. He just wanted his own hospital. Now, I don't know why.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I can understand that. How did the Baptist come to be involved in this? Do you remember?

MR. KAFER: Marea, I'm not really sure whether they had a desire to keep it open and they talked to mama, I really don't know. I should have asked my mother. If she told me, I don't remember. That was all going on when I was basically off at school.

MAREA FOSTER: Oscar, do you remember if they rented the building from Aunt Helen or if they bought it?

MR. KAFER: No, they never bought the building. The building was always ours.

MAREA FOSTER: The building was always yours.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. We sold it to Gulf Oil Corporation.

MAREA FOSTER: When the Baptist Hospital closed, then what happened to all the equipment in there? Did the Baptist sell it or were you all able to sell it?

MR. KAFER: As I understand the reason for closing was that they wanted to build what's now Craven Regional and there was too many beds, so they needed the others to close. I think that's about right. We sold a lot of the stuff. Granddaddy Seifert had gotten the Shrine or the Masons or somebody who donated that first cancer diagnostic equipment or whatever it was.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes.

MR. KAFER: I think your daddy was involved in that too.

MAREA FOSTER: Did they leave that big machine in there?

MR. KAUFER: I couldn't tell you. No, no, the hospital was cleaned out. I don't know whether the equipment was sold. What was ours, we sold. Cause I was surprised at the demand for medical books and how much people were in the market for one.

MAREA FOSTER: Then you sold that property to?

MR. KAUFER: Gulf Oil Corporation. The worst thing that happened was one of these talk shows came out and they said somebody had called in and said they understood that Kafer Hospital had been sold. Somebody called mother and I went around there and they were digging up the shrubbery, they were taking the fish out of the fish pond. If you remember the big fish pond.

MAREA FOSTER: Vaguely. Now that you mention it, I do. But where exactly was it?

MR. KAUFER: It was on the back right.

MAREA FOSTER: Now I do.

MR. KAUFER: That's the thing I remember most about the hospital being closed.

MAREA FOSTER: And people were digging up the shrubbery and taking it? They wanted part of Dr. Kafer.

MR. KAUFER: No, I think they wanted to fix their yards.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Well, I was trying to be nice about it Oscar. Then the Gulf people wanted it.

MR. KAUFER: They wanted it because the Darnel station as I understood was a very profitable station but it just needed more land.

I negotiated the sale with a gentleman out of Charlotte. They still own it as far as I know.

MAREA FOSTER: Yeah, they still use it.

MR. KAUFER: Part of it is vacant. I want to say, Marea, I'm not positive, that one of these Foundations, Ford Foundations or somebody, was interested in the woodwork in that building. But I'm not sure what happened on that. It seems to me they were interested in it.

MAREA FOSTER: It's a shame that that house was torn down because it's perfectly beautiful.

MR. KAUFER: It is and it's a shame.

MAREA FOSTER: But a lot of that happens.

MR. KAUFER: Yeah. But mama was struggling financially. She had two children in school and it was just too much for her to hold on to that vacant building.

MAREA FOSTER: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your parents and the hospital?

MR. KAUFER: I just think my daddy would probably still be alive if he could have added a two letter word to his vocabulary, and that was "No." I know the night he died that he had been operating til late and came home and hadn't been in bed long and had a wreck and they called him back to the hospital and he went back to the hospital. He got home about six o'clock in the morning and told mama, said, "I've got to operate at seven. Just let me lay down for a few minutes." He never got up. I was waiting for James Allen Lancaster and his

uncle, Goose. His uncle was going to take us to the Dixie Classic. Mama said, "Don't go." I didn't know what was going on. He was just a man who gave his life to the community. There's no other way to say it.

MAREA FOSTER: He certainly did. Whenever he would come in the room when I was sick, I immediately felt better. I knew that he would make me well.

MR. KAFER: I don't think anybody ever said a ugly word about him.

MAREA FOSTER: No. No. They couldn't at all. Well, Oscar, when you graduated from high school, you went to Wake Forest. Your daddy went there.

MR. KAFER: After we had our sojourn to Florida. Charlie Ashford and Bill Ferebee and Tody Thorne and there was a fifth one, we bought a old Pontiac convertible for \$200 and took all the seats out and took off for Florida.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) How long did you stay down there?

MR. KAFER: We were down there two or three weeks. I know that when we got to Myrtle Beach, Uncle Bill Ferebee had made arrangements with Fred Miles who used to run the Queen Anne Hotel and he'd put us up. Then we went into Georgia and stayed with the Fuller's, Bill Ferebee's mother, Aunt Celia's people. He was sort of a recluse and lived way back in the woods. Then down there, we just camped out.

MAREA FOSTER: And had a wonderful time.

MR. KAFER: And had a good time. I don't think we spent \$50 other

than gas while we were gone. It was in the Thirty Year Ago column here not long ago.

MAREA FOSTER: It's been more than thirty years ago.

MR. KAFER: Yeah, I guess it has.

MAREA FOSTER: So, after your trip to Florida, then you entered Wake Forest.

MR. KAFER: That's right.

MAREA FOSTER: And were there four years.

MR. KAFER: I was there four years. You know they moved the school while I was there. I went two years to the Wake Forest in town and two years to the Wake Forest in Winston-Salem.

MAREA FOSTER: What is your degree in?

MR. KAFER: Business Administration.

MAREA FOSTER: So when you left Wake Forest, you came back to New Bern and you started working in First Citizens Bank, is that right?

MR. KAFER: Umhuh.

MAREA FOSTER: How long were you with the bank and what position did you have?

MR. KAFER: I started work with the bank in the summer as a fill-in teller for the ladies on vacation. Two or three of us, Charlie Ashford, David Ward and myself I think did that. And then I just came back to work for them when I went home and I was a manager of the Fort Totten branch when I left to go into school teaching.

MAREA FOSTER: Before you went into the school building, you were married. Into the school business I should say, or before you decided

to become a teacher, you and Anna were married. You were. Anna's sitting over there nodding her head.

MR. KAFER: Okay. So I was.

MAREA FOSTER: So now I want to ask you, please give me the name of your wife, her full name?

MR. KAFER: Anna Lee Cartner Kafer.

MAREA FOSTER: And her parents?

MR. KAFER: Mr. and Mrs. Joe Cartner. Excuse me, Bill Cartner.

MAREA FOSTER: Right. His wife is Jo. And when were you and Anna married? July 20, 1963.

MR. KAFER: Right before I was born.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) And you have two children.

MR. KAFER: Two children.

MAREA FOSTER: A daughter.

MR. KAFER: A daughter, Helen Josephine Kafer named after her grandparents, and Oscar the IV.

MAREA FOSTER: They're both out of college.

MR. KAFER: Helen got her undergraduate degree from Wake Forest and her graduate degree from Virginia Commonwealth and she is a psychiatric social worker in Roanoke Rapids. Oscar graduated from Campbell and he's driving a Coca-Cola truck hoping to get in law school.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, we hope he does. Now, what made you decide to be a teacher?

MR. KAFER: I don't know Marea. It's just something I had in the back of my mind I wanted to do. That's all I can tell you. It's

just one of those things that pops out of your mind and say I want to do this. Somehow it got communicated to Mr. MacDonald. I don't know whether I told him or he and my mother were good friends.

MAREA FOSTER: Daddy may have told him.

MR. KAUFER: Or it could of been your daddy. But anyway, an opening came up. You remember a lady named Miss Koch?

MAREA FOSTER: Yes, Miriam Koch.

MR. KAUFER: She retired and they needed a teacher with a Business degree to teach Distributive Education as it was called then. Mr. MacDonald called me on the phone and asked me if I was interested.

I met down there with him and Mr. Brown from State Department in Raleigh and they hired me.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, you did not have a teaching certificate.

MR. KAUFER: No, I had to go back to East Carolina. I had to take, I think it was called nine hours in the area of the student and nine hours in area of the school. I had to go take that. No, I didn't have a teaching certificate.

MAREA FOSTER: How long did that take?

MR. KAUFER: I went one quarter at East Carolina and one session of summer school at Chapel Hill. We had to have two special courses for Distributive Education. They were only taught at Chapel Hill and I went there that summer to take those.

MAREA FOSTER: And so you preferred to do that rather than go in medicine or stay in business.

MR. KAUFER: Well, daddy had said "If you don't love medicine,

don't do it." And I didn't love it. He said, "Don't do it for money, do it cause you love it," and I didn't.

MAREA FOSTER: Right.

MR. KAFER: I wasn't really happy in the business world. I wasn't that unhappy. I don't know, it was something I wanted to do.

MAREA FOSTER: And you've enjoyed teaching.

MR. KAFER: I have loved it every minute ever since then.

MAREA FOSTER: Your first teaching position was in the Moses Griffin High School, is that right?

MR. KAFER: No.

MAREA FOSTER: No, that's right. Because you graduated from the new high school.

MR. KAFER: No, I didn't graduated from the new high school. My class was the last class to graduate from Central school. I graduated in '54. What is now called Grover Fields Middle School opened in the fall of '54. Norman Kellum and the Clemment boys and all that crowd was the first class. Anna's was the first class to go four years at that school.

MAREA FOSTER: I think the first class to graduate, you're right, was my sister's class.

MR. KAFER: Right. I forgot about that. Yeah, Jo's class.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes. I had forgotten that cause that school wasn't even thought of when I was in school. So, you were working at what we'll call the new high school. At that time, it was the new high school.

MR. KAFER: That at that time was called the new high school. It's now the old high school.

MAREA FOSTER: Right. What is Distributive Education?

MR. KAFER: Distributive Education is now called Marketing Education. But it's where students go to school part of the day and work part of the day. It's a co-op work program. They earn credit for going to school and they earn credit for working on the job.

MAREA FOSTER: Students that take these classes are not necessarily going on to college?

MR. KAFER: Well, I have them who aren't and I have them across the whole spectrum. I have them from who will never go to college to those who will go.

MAREA FOSTER: About how many students elect to take DE?

MR. KAFER: I have fifty right now. I only teach three classes cause you have to have the time. You have to have twenty-five minutes per student per week outside the classroom to go on the job sites. They're rated by their employers.

MAREA FOSTER: And you find them a job?

MR. KAFER: I help them find jobs.

MAREA FOSTER: So, you have fifty in there now. But you have other teachers working with you. Are you head of this?

MR. KAFER: I'm the only one. I'm the only one teaching Marketing Education. But Marketing Education is part of the Vocational Department and I am Chairman of the Vocational Department. We have marketing, we have drafting, we have home economics, we have health

occupations, principles of technology, graphic arts, electricity, electronics, carpentry, masonry, automobile mechanics.

MAREA FOSTER: So I can understand it, you will prepare them for a job in the market place.

MR. KAFER: Correct. All the evidence now says that most of the jobs are not going to require a college degree. They are going to require some kind of training above the high school level about roughly on average of two years. And the jobs are going to be technical.

MAREA FOSTER: Where does this information come from Oscar?

MR. KAFER: It's been compiled by the people who do that type of thing, who read the job market, talking to businessmen, educators.

I find that with my experience it to be true. The jobs are going to be skilled type jobs but not necessarily college education type jobs. That, I think, shows the importance of the community college.

Because that's where a lot of action is gonna be for these people when they finish the high school level. I think you're gonna see a new emphasis on what's called "apprenticeship programs" coming back into the business world.

MAREA FOSTER: Which they had many, many years ago.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Have the North Carolina schools always had a vocational program?

MR. KAFER: Well, I can't remember them not having them. We've had Marketing Education. We were the first program in the state. It was introduced in 1939. I think there's been some form of vocational

training in schools.

MAREA FOSTER: All along.

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: When you say that now you have fifty in a classroom, that doesn't mean that you have fifty in a room at one time.

MR. KAFER: No. My biggest single class at one time is twenty.

MAREA FOSTER: So you can give them individual attention.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. The state program of study says that a standard class in most vocational classes is twelve to twenty.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. Now, Oscar, when you first started teaching, there was segregation.

MR. KAFER: Right.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. Then when did integration come about?

MR. KAFER: Well, it started with what was called freedom of choice.

MAREA FOSTER: And when was that? Do you remember?

MR. KAFER: Marea, that was in the late sixties, '68, '69. But, of course, it all started with Brown v. The Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas.

MAREA FOSTER: What was that case about?

MR. KAFER: That was where they challenged the separate but equal school concept. The Supreme Court ruled the separate and equal was not constitutional. And then I guess it took time for it to progress through society. It started here with what was called freedom of choice. Then it went to total integration. I think that was '71.

MAREA FOSTER: When they had freedom of choice, did many students avail themselves of this opportunity?

MR. KAFER: Not at first they didn't.

MAREA FOSTER: I doubt seriously that any whites would choose to go to black schools.

MR. KAFER: I'm not aware of any who may have.

MAREA FOSTER: So it was really a choice for blacks to come to the white school.

MR. KAFER: That's probably the way it worked out. I don't know if that was the intent, but that was probably the way it worked out.

I had two boys who were in our program. Two real nice boys. I remember as the first black students I'm talking about.

MAREA FOSTER: Under freedom of choice?

MR. KAFER: Right.

MAREA FOSTER: Tell me about integration? How did it affect you personally, your students, your teaching, your curriculum?

MR. KAFER: Well, the hardest part of it was the first year it was put together and there were problems. I think they were brought on largely by people outside of the school. I guess they had their own agenda. The schools have sort of always been the place for social experimentation. Committees met. If you noticed, some schools had complete disappearance; like, they changed the names of their mascots and their school colors and everything. But we stayed with ours, bear and red and black. There was some policy established like a minimum grade, which I thought was counter productive. We had groups that

met. I just can't remember all the little details that were worked out.

MAREA FOSTER: How did you feel about it?

MR. KAFER: Well, I tell you, it was new to me just like anything else. I have black friends before then who were just as fine a people in the world. They just said that's what we're gonna do and let's do it.

MAREA FOSTER: So you went along with it.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. It was very difficult though to put it together. You had groups who had had their own identity and it was gone. And that first year was tough.

MAREA FOSTER: The blacks students from J. T. Barber High School went to New Bern High School. We'll just take high school. So, the high school students all went to New Bern High School.

MR. KAFER: I believe that first year, I believe that J. T. Barber became a ninth grade school and then we went ten through twelve.

MAREA FOSTER: At the high school. How did the white students feel about having blacks coming and being a part of their campus, their school?

MR. KAFER: Well, I guess you could find whatever you wanted. I mean, the feeling probably ran the gauntlet. And I'm sure it was the same for the black kids. Like I say, I think if the kids had been left alone, and this is just my personal feelings, that things would have gone much better. But like I say, people had their own agendas and unfortunately it spilled over into the campus. It culminated that

day, as far as I was concerned, in the auditorium. I happened to be in there.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, what year are we talking about?

MR. KAUFER: I think '71.

MAREA FOSTER: What led up to this disturbance at the high school?

MR. KAUFER: Well, I don't know that it wasn't just the step of integration that led up to it. Everything else was a step. You had a lot of things that were just different. Terminology was different. Different things to different people. But there had been something, I can't remember details, I think it was involved over Martin Luther King day or something like that. Anyway, that happened. I can remember being on the campus and remember being out there talking with the superintendent and the principal. But I just can't remember all the details.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. But you were in the auditorium.

MR. KAUFER: This was the following day I believe. The principal sent for me and I went in the auditorium. There were basically the white kids in there. The black kids came in and a confrontation developed between two of them. Then it just mushroomed. It spilled out of the auditorium out into that area behind the auditorium and between there and the science building. I had to go to Mr. Honeycutt, who was the principal. The police were in his office and I went and got them. {They did a good job. I felt real proud of myself. It made me feel like I belonged there.} A black female student who was looking for safety and she chose to come stay with me.

MAREA FOSTER: That was a nice compliment.

MR. KAFER: I thought it was. Of course, everybody was sent home.

MAREA FOSTER: You mentioned before we started taping a particular black policeman.

MR. KAFER: McConner. I just think he did a super job that day. Not that others didn't, but you gotta give credit where credit was due and he really, I thought, did a good job. {I can see all these heads now and he was about that much out there.} He really got it under control. Now, there was some side incidence. You gotta understand that not everybody was out there. I guess the majority of the kids were still in their classroom. In fact, I feel sure they probably were. But I didn't see that because I was in the other part. This policeman is still currently with the New Bern police department. He's a Captain with the police department. I think he was a Sergeant then.

MAREA FOSTER: And his name is Conner?

MR. KAFER: McConner.

MAREA FOSTER: McConner. Okay.

MR. KAFER: He just, I just thought, did a super job of getting it under control.

MAREA FOSTER: You mentioned that Mr. Wade was...

MR. KAFER: He was the maintenance man.

MAREA FOSTER: I couldn't think of the word maintenance. He was coming along with...

MR. KAFER: With a wheel barrow full of drink bottles.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes. What happened with that?

MR. KAFER: Well, of course, it was just like bringing ammunition to the battle. Fortunately, not many people got their hands on them.

I know that when it spilled out, a student who personally was in school with you, Sonny Russell, was very active in helping getting it broke up. They had been out driving in the cars and just happened to come back and there it was and he really jumped in there and was very helpful.

MAREA FOSTER: Oscar, were there any casualties?

MR. KAFER: That's a pretty strong word. There was some licks thrown but wasn't anybody taken off in an ambulance or anything like that.

MAREA FOSTER: Damage to the school? I've been told that windows were broken.

MR. KAFER: There were some windows kicked out.

MAREA FOSTER: No major damage.

MR. KAFER: Not that I'm aware of.

MAREA FOSTER: Then how long was school closed?

MR. KAFER: I don't remember. Two or three days. They had a meeting to air the complaints and look for solutions. I can't remember. We were closed two or three days I think.

MAREA FOSTER: As a result of this disturbance the high school principal resigned, is that correct?

MR. KAFER: He resigned, yes. Now whether it was right after that or whether it was later, but it was a result of that, yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Then Mr. Grover C. Fields came.

MR. KAFER: Mr. Fields came up. He did. And he was the right man at the right time. Absolutely.

MAREA FOSTER: He knew how to control the students.

MR. KAFER: Mr. Fields would do anything in the world for you. He was a very benevolent human being. But he also expected you to behave yourself. I know the first thing he did, he had two assemblies with the girls in one and the boys in the other and told them, laid down what was gonna be and what was not gonna be. I remember there were some girls somewhere down in the audience snickering and he stopped right cold and pointed right down there and he called them by name and he said, "Ya'll the persons I'm talking about discipline!" And I mean that got their attention.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) It would get anybody's attention.

MR. KAFER: But he was the right man for the right time. But it was a tough time. I remember second period was my period to patrol the halls and look for problems. I still say it was confined. The troublemakers were a small number. Had we not had those and outside influences, I think it would have gone a whole lot better. You would still have had everybody fighting for their identity so to speak.

MAREA FOSTER: Has that particular problem been solved today, fighting for their identity?

MR. KAFER: Well, I don't know. All over the world now there's a big movement to identify with the ethnic group or racial group. You're certainly seeing that here in the United States. I don't think that to say that the time of '71 is still here, no. You have a lot

of incidence where the races mix. I guess your friends in your neighborhood tend to stay your friends at school.

MAREA FOSTER: What about violence in the schools Oscar? Have you seen an increase in violence in the schools since you've been a teacher?

MR. KAFER: I think that if you're comparing New Bern High School to other schools and talking about violence, we're extremely lucky. We've had fights but not to the extent where you had them square off with pistols. I think that the child today is less obedient to authority.

MAREA FOSTER: That comes from the home, doesn't it?

MR. KAFER: I think it's the breakdown of the home. I really do. I've always felt that learning was the triangle that was made of the family, the school, and the students. And if one of the three breaks down, it doesn't work. There was a movie put out for school use called "Cipher In The Snow." It's especially about a kid who rode to school on a school bus. He was sort of a loner. He went to his peers, they ignored him. He went to his teachers and they ignored him. He was from a broken home. The essence of the thing is he was riding home on the school bus and told the school bus driver to stop he wanted to get off. He fell out into the snow dead and they had a meeting at the school. I think the thing that impressed me about that movie was the students blamed the teachers and the parents; the parents blamed the teachers and the students; and the teachers blamed the students and the parents. Nobody accepted any blame for the poor

boy. And I think we've got a lot of that. But I still say the weak link in the chain right now is the home.

MAREA FOSTER: Do students tend to bring more weapons to school now than they did when you first went into the high school?

MR. KAFER: Well, I don't know. You see some weapons and I'm sure there are some there. I'm talking mainly about a knife or razor blade. You could say when I was in school every boy carried a pocket knife. And what was the intent?

MAREA FOSTER: The intent then when you were in school was to whittle something.

MR. KAFER: There is a desire among some of the young people to settle their differences in a more violent method than probably I was used to when I was their age. But I think at New Bern High School we've been very lucky. We have had fights but not too any great extent.

As one student told me that came in here from another school system, "Lord, I've died and gone to Heaven." He was talking about the difference in the atmosphere at school.

MAREA FOSTER: How do you discipline high school students?

MR. KAFER: I try to do it through reasoning and psychology I guess. I sort of let them dictate what I do.

MAREA FOSTER: What do you mean by that?

MR. KAFER: Well, if I tell two kids who are doing something to break it up and they break it up, as far as I'm concerned that's the end of it. But if they don't want to break it up then we have to go to phase two. And if that brings on something else, we go to

phase three. Give them a reason I think. You say mama I want to do this and she says no. You ask why and they said, "Because I said so."

I think today you need to give them a reason. And most of them will understand the reason behind it.

MAREA FOSTER: Yes. We obeyed. They said "No" and that was it.

MR. KAFER: That's right. I hate to use the word psychology.

MAREA FOSTER: But that's exactly what it is.

MR. KAFER: But that's the big thing. How you approach it. I mean if it's a violent situation, then that requires firmer tactics. But most things I have found can be handled peacefully.

MAREA FOSTER: What have been the biggest changes that you have seen in high school from the time you started until now? I know our time period for this stops at 1975, but we're gonna bring it up to date.

MR. KAFER: You're talking about me as a teacher or me as a student?

MAREA FOSTER: You as a teacher. From your teaching experience.

MR. KAFER: I think the biggest change is the student is less obedient than what he or she used to be. I probably spend more time on discipline than I used to spend. The children, contrary to what you say, know more. They've been exposed. We have a drafting class in New Bern High School. I went down and talked to the teacher and I said, "We need to put in computerized drafting cause that's where it's going." So we bought four computers. Then there are all kinds of programs; Auto Cad and Versa Cad are two. I asked, "Which one are we using." The teacher said, "I don't know." I said, "Why don't

we call a meeting of the architects and the people who do this in New Bern," They came. The architect said, "We have computers." And I'm talking about an architect my age. He said, "I'm scared of it (computer) but the young people I hire love it." But then he also said that because of the computer, they (students and young architects) may not imagine the building in their head as good as they (older architects) did. But they know more.

MAREA FOSTER: Is this due to television?

MR. KAUFER: I think the television is counter-productive. If it does anything, it distracts from learning.

MAREA FOSTER: So, your materials to work with have increased.

MR. KAUFER: Oh my goodness. Yeah. There's no question about that.

MAREA FOSTER: What was your classroom like when you first started teaching? What did you have to work with?

MR. KAUFER: I had twenty desks and that's all. A teacher's desk and books.

MAREA FOSTER: And now what do you have for teaching aids?

MR. KAUFER: I have computers, nice oak work tables that we need. I have display materials. I operate a school store. I'm talking about just in my classroom. There's an equipment list that is put out by the state department that you need to teach your particular course. And in mine I pretty well have all I want. Now in some of the vocational classes, we don't. But we have come a long, long way. We have four computerized stations in drafting That's one computer

for every five students. We just put forty-nine computers in the business department plus we have up to date typewriters. But we don't ever have enough of them. In automobile mechanics, we have the latest wheel alignment equipment, the engine analyzer. We just spent a large sum of money to update electronics and electricity. In graphics, which is printing and photography and things like that, we have a modern dark room. Everything is laid out on computer. It's not done by hand anymore. We have four presses. We have a lot of equipment, but we do not have enough. One of the problems of course we deal with in vocational education is obsolescent. Can't keep up with it. Just can't keep up with it. In drafting we got four computers and need twenty. But we've come along way.

MAREA FOSTER: We sure have. Now, when you first started in DE I'll call it, were you the only teacher?

MR. KAFER: No. There was Matthew Prescott and myself. He lived in Pamlico County and he was killed in a plane crash there.

MAREA FOSTER: Not too long ago.

MR. KAFER: Right.

MAREA FOSTER: So there were two of you.

MR. KAFER: Right.

MAREA FOSTER: And now how many teachers in your department?

MR. KAFER: One.

MAREA FOSTER: How many besides you, under you? You're chairman of the department.

MR. KAFER: Oh, I thought you said in Marketing. In vocational

education when I started, there was more than that. There was two marketing teachers, TCT teacher, and two shop teachers. The current president of the community college started as a shop teacher at New Bern High School.

MAREA FOSTER: Steven Redd.

MR. KAFER: Steven Redd. Yeah. Now we have one health occupation teacher, three home ec teachers, one marketing teacher, one drafting, one graphics art teacher, one electronics electricity, one carpentry and masonry, one automobiles mechanics teacher, one essential skills teacher, one learning lab teacher, and five business teachers.

MAREA FOSTER: So your department has grown tremendously.

MR. KAFER: No question about it.

MAREA FOSTER: But then the school has grown.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. And in vocational education we were real fortunate. You might say we had sort of a year of vocational education.

Now they have upped the academic requirements that students have to have to graduate and they're having more and more difficult time fitting in electives. That has made it more difficult for students to take an elective, which vocational education is. But that also applies to music and art. I think in their wisdom to upgrade the students knowledge in the basic skills area, they have sort of made it more difficult to take the other things. A lot of our courses are two hour blocks. Take our upper level skill courses, it's difficult to fit them in.

MAREA FOSTER: Are you glad you went into teaching?

MR. KAFER: I am.

MAREA FOSTER: Why?

MR. KAFER: Well, I don't know. I just like it. If you talk to the students you may get a different answer. (laughter) But I like it.

MAREA FOSTER: I've had teachers say to me when we've asked this question, they say, well, they'll be explaining something and then all of a sudden a child's eyes will light up and you know that child understands what you're teaching and it's a wonderful feeling.

MR. KAFER: That's standard fare. I shouldn't say it that way. Yes, certainly. There's no question about that. You have that special success situation. I know working in night school, a student who dropped out of school, was drunk under a school bus at one time, went on to night school, worked all day long, came to school six o'clock finishing the night school, went to the community college, made up the deficiencies and graduated in math at North Carolina State. You got plenty of those. I mean, that's what it's all about. But there's more to it than that. I think you always worry that you left somebody out. When you got twenty students or thirty students, you always worry, "Jiminie crickets, I concentrated on Mary today and I forgot Johnny." I think you have to worry about that.

MAREA FOSTER: Now, Oscar, tell me about the night school. They did not have night school when you were in school and when I was in school. When did the night school start?

MR. KAFER: It came about in 1975 or '76. I opened night school

at the request of Tommy Phelps and Will Pittman. It was coming into state and they decided to put it in here and it's been here ever since and it really has helped a group of kids. I had to give up being the principal of night school because night and day ran together. It was just too much. But I have taught in the night school since then. Like last year, we graduated twenty-six students who graduated from New Bern High School who probably would not have graduated.

MAREA FOSTER: Are these students that attend night school ones that drop out?

MR. KAFER: For some reason or another. Now there is also an option in it where a student in the day school can't get a course they want and they can take it at night school.

MAREA FOSTER: Do the students have to pay for night school?

MR. KAFER: No.

MAREA FOSTER: It's free.

MR. KAFER: It's free.

MAREA FOSTER: Are students given their books now? When you and I were in school, we had to pay a book fee.

MR. KAFER: The book fee has been gone for fifteen to twenty years I guess Marea. All books are issued. Now if they lose one, they have to pay damages.

MAREA FOSTER: When did it come about that teachers could be paid on a twelve month basis rather than nine months.

MR. KAFER: Now, you remember, that's having their checks spread out over twelve months. I mean, that's taking their ten months pay

and just dividing it. That's to help them manage their money.

MAREA FOSTER: This is an option.

MR. KAFER: Yeah, it's optional. I'm a twelve month employee, so I haven't been involved in that. But I guess it's been ten years probably.

MAREA FOSTER: What about tenure?

MR. KAFER: Well, a teacher starts out three years of probation, and then if their evaluation is satisfactory then they are recommended for tenure. If not, they can continue probation I guess or be dismissed.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you have a lot of student teachers in your department? Do you have them to come for student teaching under you?

MR. KAFER: I've had a lot of them, yeah. You try not to have more than one a year. It's just really best if you don't. I mean, it takes you out of the situation too much I guess you could say. But we've had a lot of them.

MAREA FOSTER: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the New Bern High School?

MR. KAFER: Well, I brag about it. You know, everybody is kicking education. And all of these people kicking education, graduated from the public school, most of them. So, it had to be successful. And it is. And it is. If you want to say every child learns everything he's suppose to learn, no. Nor did the people who are complaining about it. But, yes, the public schools when you consider that we are educating everybody. The Danish educators were here, I don't know if you remember that, and I kept one of them. He was a principal over

there. Birger Friis, a super guy. But one of the things that amazed him was a teacher teaches 150 students a day with up to thirty-five in a class and only fifty-five minutes per day to prepare for it and teaches a wide range of intellect and wide range of social differences and wide range of racial differences. All in one class, he teaches. He was just amazed by that. They would never do that in Denmark. The teacher teaches two classes a day and has the rest of time to plan. So, yes, I think we've got plenty to be proud of.

MAREA FOSTER: Oscar, do you think the students of today when they graduated from New Bern High School have received a better education than you received when you graduated?

MR. KAFER: If you're talking about me personally, there's no question about that. (laughter) I want all my students to be a better student than I was. Yeah. I mean, there's more there. When you learned US History when you went to school, it was US History and it's US History today. But there are options for them now. When I was in school, Latin was the only foreign language. Then Mrs. Hunnings came in and added...Spanish.

MAREA FOSTER: We had Spanish and we had French.

MR. KAFER: We had French when I was there. Because what's her name had left.

MAREA FOSTER: Miss Lancaster.

MR. KAFER: No. Miss Lancaster only taught World History when I was there. Hyacinth Lancaster.

MAREA FOSTER: I think she taught French. I'm not really sure.

MR. KAFER: Now they can take Latin, French, Spanish, and German. They can take Algebra. They have Algebra, advanced Algebra, all different ability level Algebra, they can take Geometry, they can take Calculus, they can take advanced math, they can take US History, they can take World History, they can take Government Economics. See what I mean? I think they have a hundred and some courses offered. So, what's there is more variety than we had. But I think we had some good teachers then and we've got some good teachers now.

MAREA FOSTER: Any special teacher when you were in school that really touched your life, made you want to learn?

MR. KAFER: Boy, that one's tough.

MAREA FOSTER: Other than Mrs. Morton.

MR. KAFER: I think Mrs. Morton was absolutely the best teacher I ever had. She worked me to death. I stayed up in that hall for five and six hours a night working on homework. She probably had the most influence on me. A lot of them knew how to get my attention. Mrs. Smallwood.

MAREA FOSTER: Lila Smallwood.

MR. KAFER: Mrs. Smallwood called my mother on the phone and said she'd been teaching however many hundred years. She said, "Helen, I've been teaching x number of years and Oscar is the laziest student I ever taught." They worked out a deal that every class for the rest of the year with an oral report from me. I gave an oral report every day. Then I had a teacher call me to the front of the room and say, "Oscar", talking about Helen, say, "How come Helen's so smart and you're

so stupid?" I said, "Well, mam, if I weren't so stupid, I'd answer that question." She threw me out of the room. (laughter)

MAREA FOSTER: How terrible. (laughter)

MR. KAFER: Mrs. Morton was by far I thought the best teacher I had. Mrs. Smallwood certainly taught me a lot. Miss Styron was certainly a very stern lady and kept us in line. I had Mrs. Duffy in the fourth grade.

MAREA FOSTER: Oh, you had Mrs. Bradley Duffy.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. I knew it wasn't Miss Bell. I had Mrs. Duffy.

MAREA FOSTER: And she lived about four blocks down from you on this street?

MR. KAFER: Yeah. Right.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, now, let me ask you about New Bern? What do you think of New Bern today?

MR. KAFER: Well, I'm sort of like this. There ain't enough gun powder to blow me out of Craven County. I just think it's the greatest placed in the world to live. There's a lot of people who say we want to close the bridge and not let anybody else in here and there's something to be said for that. You know the population is growing in the whole world and everybody's got to stand somewhere and some are going to have to stand in New Bern. So we've just got to take them. It's radical and it's changing and it's gonna be different. I haven't seen the whole world, but what I've seen of it, this is the garden spot of the world.

MAREA FOSTER: A lot of us agree with you on that.

MR. KAFER: I think so. Anna thinks so much so that I won't even go out of town.

MAREA FOSTER: What are the many changes, I should say, in New Bern from growing up until now?

MR. KAFER: Well, New Bern is now big enough that don't everybody know everybody.

MAREA FOSTER: I know it and that's sad.

MR. KAFER: It is in a lot of ways. I remember leaving the Masonic Theater, I think your daddy was running the theater then, and Bill Ferebee and Charlie Ashford and all of us, the same old group, when we heard the word marijuana in the movie. Never heard of it in my life! We were walking back and we had the car parked in the Big Star parking lot. We walked by that section of houses. What was the names of retired school teachers and all those people living in there?

MAREA FOSTER: You talking about on Hancock Street?

MR. KAFER: Yeah.

MAREA FOSTER: Mrs. Turner lived there.

MR. KAFER: That's doesn't sound right. Mrs. Turner doesn't sound right.

MAREA FOSTER: Mrs. Charlie Turner taught school.

MR. KAFER: I don't believe it was Mrs. Turner. Wasn't there a Mrs. Carr living there?

MAREA FOSTER: Eleanor Carr? Eleanor Jones Carr lived on Metcalf Street.

MR. KAFER: Anyway, we were talking about, "What in the world,

is marijuana" when we left the theater. That's the difference in today.

I never will forget when I walked in the house, my mama said, "What's this about marijuana?" (laughter) And I don't think you have that anymore.

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) Someone had called her up and said, "Helen, Oscar is talking about marijuana."

MR. KAUFER: I think New Bern's lost that. I think that's important. But I think New Bern also then had the reputation of being a cliquish town. Maybe we've lost that, and that's good. I could as easily say as an old New Bernian I would just as soon put a fence around it and not let anybody else in, but that's not realistic.

MAREA FOSTER: You think the newcomers have contributed a lot?

MR. KAUFER: You asking me or them?

MAREA FOSTER: I'm asking you. If I ask them, they're gonna say yes. But I'm asking you.

MR. KAUFER: As I heard one say one time, "We're coming. We're gonna change the personality of your government. We're gonna change the personality of your churches. And we're gonna change the personality of your social clubs and so forth." And I think to an extent they have done that.

MAREA FOSTER: I agree with that. What changes have you seen in Christ Episcopal Church from the time we were growing up to today?

MR. KAUFER: Well, of course, the minister who raised us, Mr. Williams, was a family type person. The church was very much a family type. Of course, it was smaller then. Our great aunt, Buffa Kafer

Duffy ran the church. Maybe I shouldn't say that.

MAREA FOSTER: It's true.

MR. KAFER: It was just a different atmosphere. The church has grown. I certainly think Mr. Sharp did a good job. He and I had some differences on some things, but overall I think he did a good job.

I am a little too conservative for the thinking or the direction the church is going now and I would like to see it go back to more traditional, I guess is the term to use, than it is.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you remember any time growing up when we would have a disaster in town, hurricanes or emergencies or anything, how the churches responded? Did they to your knowledge respond?

MR. KAFER: Well, I can't remember anything.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, with hurricanes.

MR. KAFER: The hurricanes were major in '54 and '55 and I was in college and I just came home for mama and went back to school. In the polio epidemics, if you remember when we were small, you couldn't go anywhere. You couldn't go to the movie. You couldn't go swimming.

They're the ones that I really remember. I think that people just looked after people. My father was a doctor. He realized that there was just charity work you did. He didn't worry about whether Medicare was gonna pay for it or Medicaid was gonna pay for it. He realized that these were your patients, your people, and you looked after them. I think a lot of that's gone.

MAREA FOSTER: What about the relationship between blacks and whites when you were growing up?

MR. KAFER: Well, you just weren't with them. You didn't associate with them. Everybody lived in their own little kingdom. My association with black people was mainly through James Lee's family. I would go from here to the end of the world for James and his family. And people who you had some contact with was mainly through the world of work.

I know your daddy and Nicky Simpson and Mike Jowdy and all that crowd refereed the West Street High School football team.

MAREA FOSTER: I didn't know that.

MR. KAFER: We went to them because my daddy was a doctor and he looked after the boys that got hurt. Dr. Mann and Dr. Fisher were good friends of the family. But you just didn't have the contacts.

MAREA FOSTER: But people got along well. Black and whites. I mean, I know they were in their community, the whites in their community.

MR. KAFER: I don't know if you can say that Marea.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, there was no feeling of unease or unrest with them.

MR. KAFER: No, not to me.

MAREA FOSTER: Okay. This is what I'm asking for you. You just mentioned Uncle Oscar would go to the ball games. Was he by any chance the doctor for the high school football team?

MR. KAFER: He was for New Bern High School football team. I know particularly when your daddy was coaching. As far as I know he treated all the Coastal Plain League Baseball players.

MAREA FOSTER: So he was the doctor for the three years that daddy

and Nicky and Mike coached.

MR. KAFER: Yeah. He treated about anybody that the coaches brought. Now I'm not gonna say that he was the only one, but he sure treated a lot of them.

MAREA FOSTER: Do you know if he was ever paid for that?

MR. KAFER: No. I don't think so.

MAREA FOSTER: There was no money to pay. I know there was no money to pay the coaches and there were no coaches available and this is why daddy and Nicky and Mike did that for three years.

MR. KAFER: Well, I know that mama use to say to daddy at dinner table, "Oscar, somebody's got to pay you. We got to eat. Can't tell everybody don't worry about it." I know that. And she'd go out and knock on doors and ask them to pay. I remember one patient came in and says, "Dr. Kafer, I need your help. My little girl broke her arm but I haven't got any money, but I got some collards." Daddy said, "Good, cause I ain't got nothing to eat."

MAREA FOSTER: (laughter) I think that was common then.

MR. KAFER: I think that's the big change. People did things and didn't expect nothing in return for it. Now they either want to be paid for it or they want you to put your name in granite or they want some kind of reward. Maybe when communities get bigger that happens. You got to remember then too, your best friends were usually your next door neighbor or people that had some contact because of family or something like that. Now, with the automobile, you might not even know who your next door neighbors are.

MAREA FOSTER: What do you see for the future of New Bern?

MR. KAFER: Greatness! I think New Bern will continue to grow. I don't know how much the lack of the land will effect us. I understand that forest companies own most of the land around the town. Whether that will stifle growth, certainly you can go across the rivers. But I think New Bern will grow. I think it will be a place that people want to live. I hope it's planned and orderly. You've got to provide people the opportunity to make a living, but you've certainly got to protect the community. For a small town USA it's always gonna be bigger. Because every town is getting bigger. I think we'll always be a small town USA.

MAREA FOSTER: That would suit me fine. What about the future of the New Bern schools, or New Bern High School I should say?

MR. KAFER: I'm in an era that's leaving. There are a lot of younger teachers coming in. We've had a particular large influx of them. It's the first time I've ever had a principal who was considerably younger than I am. Tommy was younger than I am. My first time we about had a preacher who was younger than we are but I know that the people older than we are says, "My gosh! What's gonna happen when these people take over?!" But I see a lot of good young teachers out there. I was talking to this boy that I taught this morning. He's a nice guy. He just told me his daughter was gonna be a teacher. I'd have never thought that anybody kin to him was gonna be a teacher. And I'm sure she's gonna be a good teacher. But for me, the changing of the guard is coming in the world of teaching. These people may

will probably identify better with the younger people than I would.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, you were part of a very, very crucial time.

MR. KAFER: Well, anybody who teachers was involved in a crucial time because they taught young people and young minds. I'm still convinced the single most important learning tool in the classroom is the personality of the teacher. Period.

MAREA FOSTER: One more thing, do you have to be recertified?

MR. KAFER: Every five years.

MAREA FOSTER: And you have a Masters degree.

MR. KAFER: No.

MAREA FOSTER: You do not. You did not have to have one to teach.

MR. KAFER: You only have to have a Bachelor's degree to teach. We used to have non-degree teachers and you had journeyman teachers in shop classes, but that's all gone. I might add that one of the best teachers I had was what we would be called a non-degree teacher, but you don't have that anymore. You must have a Bachelor's degree.

MAREA FOSTER: Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview? There are probably lots of things I should have asked you.

MR. KAFER: Well, I don't know. You might call me back and ask me that question tomorrow morning when I've had time to think about it.

MAREA FOSTER: If you think of it, you call me and let me know and I'll come back.

MR. KAFER: I will.

MAREA FOSTER: Well, I want to thank you Oscar very much on behalf of the Memories of New Bern Committee for letting me interview you. It's been a lot of fun and a great pleasure for me and thanks for contributing to our program.

MR. KAFER: Well, I don't know how much I've contributed, but I enjoyed it.

MAREA FOSTER: It's been fun. Fred and I've enjoyed it too. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW