

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

MRS. VANN JACKSON

INTERVIEW 908

This is Dorothy Richardson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 900. I am interviewing Mrs. Vann Jackson, interview number 908. This interview is being conducted on September 30, 1992. We are at 1910 Chestnut Street, New Bern, North Carolina.

Mrs. Richardson: Mrs. Jackson, how about telling me your full name, your maiden name, your husband's name, where you were born, and what year.

Mrs. Jackson: My name is Vann Staten Jackson. I was born in Jamesville, North Carolina.

DR: Where is that?

Mrs. Jackson: Martin County. I was born March 14, 1902. My father was William Daniel Staten. My mother was Mozella Staten. I had two brothers and three sisters.

DR: What were their names?

Mrs. Jackson: My oldest brother was Steven Staten. My baby brother was Booker T. Staten. My oldest sister was Odelle Staten. My next sister was Beatrice Staten. And my baby sister was Vann Lee Staten, that's me.

DR: What did your father do?

Mrs. Jackson: He owned a business. He was a storekeeper.

DR: Your mother was a housewife and teacher?

Mrs. Jackson: My mother was a teacher years and years ago. She taught first grade in Jamesville, North Carolina up until her death.

DR: How old was she when she passed?

Mrs. Jackson: My mother was forty-two when she passed.

DR: For you to have lived to such a ripe age, from what did your mother pass?

Mrs. Jackson: Childbirth. When I was born, it was a midwife. That's why they didn't have a record of me. I had to work five years beyond my sixty-fifth year in order for them to find out how old I was. Mr. MacDonald didn't believe it. I couldn't make him believe that I was old enough to retire. They had to go through Social Security and everywhere to find out how old I was.

DR: Where did you go to school? Did you start school there?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, I did, in elementary school and I finished the seventh grade there. Then I went to high school in Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

DR: Your family had moved there?

Mrs. Jackson: No. I went there and lived with my Aunt Ella Colbert, and I stayed there until I graduated from high school there.

DR: In Elizabeth City?

Mrs. Jackson: In Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Roanoke Institute it was called. It was a wooden building with seven rooms. Way back! 1928.

DR: After you graduated from high school, then what did you do?

Mrs. Jackson: I started teaching with an elementary A certificate.

DR: How did you get that?

Mrs. Jackson: The supervisor arranged for me to get an elementary A certificate, and I taught in her school in Gatesville, North Carolina.

DR: Did you have to have special grades or did you have to take a test?

Mrs. Jackson: I had to take a test, and I made 97.4.

DR: Was that administered by the state?

Mrs. Jackson: That's right.

DR: How long did you teach under that certificate?

Mrs. Jackson: About four years. Then, I started taking courses at night.

DR: Where did you take those?

Mrs. Jackson: In Elizabeth City.

DR: At the college there?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. It was State Normal then, but later on, it was changed. Then, I moved to Fayetteville.

DR: What year did you go to Fayetteville?

Mrs. Jackson: I moved to Fayetteville in 1935.

DR: And you taught there?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, I taught there.

DR: They accepted your certificate?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, they did, my elementary A certificate. Then, I decided to go to college. I did not have not one quarter, so I went out to the school and Dr. J. W. Seaver says, "I do believe you do want to go to school. I'm going to let you work in the library and work your way through." So, I did.

DR: That was Fayetteville State?

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. I graduated from Fayetteville State

University in 1940.

DR: Then what did you do?

Mrs. Jackson: I started teaching then. I taught at several different places. I taught in Fayetteville. I taught in Jacksonville.

In the summer, I was in South Carolina; Waynesboro, Georgia, and then, I came back to Fayetteville.

DR: What grades did you teach?

Mrs. Jackson: The first through the third. That's as high as I taught.

DR: The little ones.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. That's who I like.

DR: I know they enjoyed you too.

Mrs. Jackson: I've enjoyed them too. I love children. I love children.

DR: What did your husband do during that time?

Mrs. Jackson: He was a long distance truck driver.

DR: That was hard.

Mrs. Jackson: It was, very hard.

DR: Did you have children?

Mrs. Jackson: No children. Just a little adopted girl.

DR: While you were in Fayetteville, you adopted her?

Mrs. Jackson: I adopted her in Fayetteville.

DR: Tell us about that.

Mrs. Jackson: Well, it was very hard on me because at that time I was teaching and it was hard to get someone to keep her.

DR: How did you come to have her?

Mrs. Jackson: A lady came by and asked me if I would keep her until she went to Fort Bragg to get a job. I said, "yes, I'll keep her for you." I was sitting on the porch just resting during the summer in June. I waited and waited and waited, and she never did come back.

That was 1955 and now this is 1992. I haven't seen her or heard from her since.

DR: Did you report it?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, I did. They told me to continue to keep her until they found out something, where she was and everything. They found her, I suppose, but they never did tell me anything about it.

DR: Did she give you a name for the baby?

Mrs. Jackson: No, she didn't give me a name for the baby at all. She just said "baby." So, I gave her the name myself, Delores Rochelle Jackson.

DR: How old is she now?

Mrs. Jackson: She's thirty-seven. She went through high school here in New Bern, and I sent her to college. She graduated, and she's been teaching thirteen years now. She's working with the social services department in Edenton, North Carolina.

DR: That's great. The kindness and goodness of your heart, to take a baby like that and give it a home.

Mrs. Jackson: Well, I didn't have any children, and I love children.

DR: When you left Fayetteville, what year did you come to New

Bern?

Mrs. Jackson: I came to New Bern in 1961. I was teaching in New York, and then I worked at the unemployment service in New York.

Stanley Wesley was my husband's uncle. When his sister died, they asked my husband to come here to stay to help raise his sister; and if so, they would give us the home on Brown's Alley. So, I broke up there and moved here with that intention.

DR: Where is Brown's Alley?

Mrs. Jackson: It's the street behind the funeral home over there on West Street. After we were here about three month, his sister; the home was suppose to be Jimmy's, but she suggested that I pay rent.

My husband was still in New York. And I said, "No. I'm not going to pay any rent because the home is suppose to be my husbands." It hurt me so bad that I talked to Mr. Booker. Mr. Booker said, "I'll tell you what you do. I know a friend, Jack Aberly. You talk with him and Henry Edwards, and I think they can arrange something for you."

So, I talked with Henry Edwards and Mr. Booker, and they arranged for me to buy this home.

DR: Here?

Mrs. Jackson: That's right.

DR: Were you teaching then?

Mrs. Jackson: I was teaching. I had gotten a job in 1961 here.

DR: With the city of New Bern schools?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. When I came here, it was during the school year. I was hesitant about applying because I had a New York

certificate. My North Carolina certificate had expired. So, I went to see Mr. Booker and he said, "I'll tell you what you do. Go to summer school and you can have your certificate renewed and I think we can work out something." Well, Mr. Danyus was principal then. I met Mr. Danyus' wife, and right away she fell in love with me for some reason.

She said, "I'm gonna get you a job! I'm gonna get you a job!" I said, "Mrs. Danyus, I don't think so." She said, "Yes. He's gonna put you somewheres!" I went over to see Mr. Danyus, and he said, "I know exactly what you're coming here for. You want a job. My wife done told me. Yes, come in Monday morning, I'll sign you up." Just like that!

DR: You did go to summer classes though.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. I went to Durham to North Carolina Central for six weeks, and then I renewed my certificate. I started teaching at West Street. When it burned, I went to Central under Mr. Hardison.

DR: What age group?

Mrs. Jackson: Always my babies; first grade, second, or third. I had the first grade over there. I worked with Miss Mary Dent. She had first grade too. Then after West Street burned, I went to Central.

DR: When you were at West Street, the schools were not integrated?

Mrs. Jackson: No mam. No indeed.

DR: How many students would you average in your class?

Mrs. Jackson: Thirty-one and thirty-two.

DR: No aides back then.

Mrs. Jackson: No indeed!!

DR: Did you have adequate books and materials?

Mrs. Jackson: No, we didn't. We had to share.

DR: Each teacher shared.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right.

DR: Did you get new books?

Mrs. Jackson: No. We used used books.

DR: Where did these books come from?

Mrs. Jackson: They had a trailer down on, I can't remember the street, where they had a lot of books, and we'd go down there certain times of the month and they'd issue those books to us.

DR: Was that through the city Board of Education?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes.

DR: But they were all used?

Mrs. Jackson: All used books taken from other schools that were not using them.

DR: Did you have enough books for each child?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, we did.

DR: What did your curriculum cover then?

Mrs. Jackson: Nothing but reading, writing, math, health, and science, also art.

DR: And you had all of the subjects to teach.

Mrs. Jackson: Oh yes! I had all of them; art, music.

DR: How many years were you at West Street?

Mrs. Jackson: I was at West Street for five years.

DR: Do you remember any outstanding students you had?

Mrs. Jackson: You mean at West Street?

DR: Yes.

Mrs. Jackson: No, I don't remember any I had at West Street. The only ones I remember were the ones from Oaks Road.

DR: When you were at West Street, did the children bring their lunches?

Mrs. Jackson: Most of them brought their lunches. They had a lunch room, but most of them brought their lunches. They ate in the cafeteria.

DR: The children were from all walks of life.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. They were. Most of them were from the poorer class on welfare. They were very poor children. Because that's where most of my money went, buying lunches for the children.

DR: And clothes.

Mrs. Jackson: How did you know?!

DR: Did you make home visits, Mrs. Jackson?

Mrs. Jackson: Oh yes. I had to.

DR: Why did you have to?

Mrs. Jackson: Well, I wanted to talk to the parents about their children because a lot of things they could help them with. The children had problems at home that they brought to school, so I would go and talk to their parents. Several times, the children would bring razors and guns and knives to school.

DR: Even then?

Mrs. Jackson: Oh yes. I would take them, and the parents would come out because they didn't like it. They would reprimand me for it. So, I would just go to their homes and talk to them.

DR: Do you feel you helped some of the parents to understand?

Mrs. Jackson: I did. I helped them a whole lot.

DR: Did you find many single parent families?

Mrs. Jackson: Quite a few.

DR: So many of the young black mothers stayed with their own mothers.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right.

DR: Even then.

Mrs. Jackson: They did.

DR: Did you have many problems with discipline?

Mrs. Jackson: That was one of my problems. I don't believe in spanking and things like that. I always treated the children with kindness. If they would do something, I would just say, "Would you like for me to do that to you? I'm not going to like you anymore if you do that. You're not going to be my friend." And that was all there was to it.

DR: The Principal felt you should do what?

Mrs. Jackson: I should punish them by making them stay in and making them write. Now once in a while, I'd make a student write me a letter and tell me why they did such and such a thing and if they were going to do it any more. But so far as spanking, I didn't feel like I wanted to do that.

DR: Did you feel that the children at West Street got a good basis in their education?

Mrs. Jackson: I think so. I really do because those teachers along then, they were dedicated teachers. Of course, most of them are out now because they are old like me and they are out now.

DR: They felt like they had a mission to teach these little black children.

Mrs. Jackson: They really did! I don't know not a single teacher out there that wasn't a dedicated teacher. Not one!

DR: They taught them the basic things I imagine like cleanliness.

Mrs. Jackson: That's it. Oh yes indeed! They went overboard with that. Plenty of days I have seen some of the teachers taking the children in the bathroom and washing their faces and their hands and putting them on clean clothes that they brought from home or that they bought for them. Yes indeed, they believed in cleanliness! Washing their hands before they'd go to eat and things like that, they would always do that.

DR: Did you have a public health nurse come into West Street school?

Mrs. Jackson: Once in a while.

DR: You all had to do the screening for the vision and hearing.

Mrs. Jackson: We certainly did. We had to do all of that. And most of us were not trained, but we had to do that.

DR: Did you ever have any children that you felt were abused?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes indeed, plenty of them! Many a night I have

kept children overnight to spend the night with me because their parents were out drinking or partying. They'd go home and they wouldn't have anything to eat. I would feed them and take them back to school the next morning. I would notify their parents that they were with me.

Oh yes, quite a few of them were abused. Some would come in there all scarred up where their daddy was drunk and their mother was fighting and they'd jump into it and they'd beat them up. Things like that.

DR: This was at West Street.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, at West Street. That happened a whole lot. That's the only school, West Street.

DR: Did you report that then?

Mrs. Jackson: We reported to the truant officer at that time, but nothing was done about it.

DR: The truant officer made a home visit?

Mrs. Jackson: That's right, they did. At that time, we had to keep our mouths shut or lose your job because they didn't want it known that things like that were going on.

DR: I think that was prevalent in both the white and the black schools. You didn't want to offend the parents.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. That really happened.

DR: When West Street burned, then what?

Mrs. Jackson: I went to Central.

DR: Was that integrated then?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, Central was integrated.

DR: Integration was in 1970, I think.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes.

DR: How'd you feel about the integration?

Mrs. Jackson: Well, to tell you the truth, I left Jamesville when I was young and I left Elizabeth City when I was young. We moved to Brooklyn, New York, and that's where I was reared mostly. I didn't see the difference. I didn't know the difference because where I worked, we were all mixed. All different kinds and I didn't see the difference. So when they integrated, it was nothing new to me.

DR: Did you have a choice of what school you wanted to teach at?

Mrs. Jackson: No, I didn't have a choice.

DR: They just assigned you?

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. They just assigned me to Central, and I went over to Mr. Hardison's school.

DR: Mr. Hardison was principal.

Mrs. Jackson: Mr. Hardison was principal there then. They closed that pretty soon, and I went to Riverside under Mrs. McCoy.

DR: What grades were there then?

Mrs. Jackson: I think it went to third grade. That was the highest grade at Mrs. McCoy's school at Riverside. They closed Riverside, and I went to Oaks Road.

DR: That was your last school?

Mrs. Jackson: That was my last school.

DR: I imagine some of the teachers had mixed feelings.

Mrs. Jackson: They did.

DR: They were anxious.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, they had mixed feelings, but it didn't bother me at all. I didn't feel any differences. I really didn't. I have seen the fruits of that too because I have had so many white children that I taught in first grade that have gone on to be doctors, lawyers, policeman. I have some down here in the police force, children that I've taught. They never forget me. They call me "Mom." They call me up on my birthday, at Christmas. The policeman, they patrol by here, toot the horn, "You all right?", "Yes, I'm fine."

DR: Who was some of the outstanding students that you remember?

Mrs. Jackson: Cy Burt was one. James David Thompson was one. Wendy McCoy was one. Pamela West was one. Tammy West was one. There are a couple of nurses who are out at Craven Medical Center. There are quite a few of them that have gone on and done well! They really have! They've done well! I feel so proud of them. Some of them have gotten married and they send me their baby's pictures. I have a whole bunch of baby pictures, and I'm the godmother of I don't know how many children (white).

DR: That's a real joy for you.

Mrs. Jackson: It makes me feel so good! They never forget me.

DR: At the time of integration, it probably wasn't easy for the black students at first or the white students at first. Did you pick up on any of that?

Mrs. Jackson: Just a little bit.

DR: Because you had the little ones.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, I had the little ones. One thing that changed them I think, I said, "Listen, if I cut my finger, what comes out?"

Little boy said, "Bleed." I said, "Blood. That's right. If you cut your finger, what comes out?" "Blood." I said, "All right. We both have blood coming out of our fingers, don't we? What color is it?" "Red." I said, "What color is yours?" "Red." I said, "We're the same then. You just have a little more color than I do, but we're the same. We're all God's little children." I didn't have any more problems.

DR: And they played together?

Mrs. Jackson: They played together, yes indeed. They were friends. They played together. They ate together. They shared together. They really did. Of course, I don't know about the children up in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. But the ones that I worked with, I didn't have any problem whatsoever.

DR: You always taught first grade?

Mrs. Jackson: First grade or second. Some time Mr. Shine would send me over to the second grade.

DR: He was principal at Oaks Road.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. Mr. Mitchell was principal first. When I went out there, I was under Mr. Mitchell. After Mr. Mitchell left from over there, then Mr. Shine came in. I worked with the first, but some time Mr. Shine would say, "Mrs. Jackson, I'd like for you to take second grade today." I'd go in the second grade room. His little boy graduated this year, and honestly, it touched me so. They

had so many invitations to sit with them when they graduated. Mr. Shine's little boy, Jamie, wasn't old enough to go to school; and his wife, Helen, was teaching, so Mr. Shine would bring him out to the school. I don't know what it was about me, he just fell in love with me and everyday, he'd leave Mr. Shine and come in my room. I'd put a rug down on the floor and give him toys and that's where he'd sit and play. He'd go with me everywhere, even to the bathroom. Everyday I'd buy his lunch. I bought him a little wagon and bought him some toys. Now, he has finished high school, and he sent me an invitation. He said, "I want you to sit with the family."

DR: That was a real compliment!

Mrs. Jackson: That hurt me so much because there were so many others he could have invited. He said, "I want you to sit with the family, and after the graduation, we're going to have a bash." I didn't know what a bash was. He said, "We're going to a bash." So, I said, "I'm going out to your house with you, but after that, I'm not going out to no bash." So, I went to the house, but I didn't go to the bash.

DR: Going back to West Street. Did you have adequate desk and materials to work with?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, we did. We didn't have too much material because I spent a lot of money buying material. I wanted the children to have it, so I bought a lot of material myself. But they gave us a little bit.

DR: How long was your school day?

Mrs. Jackson: From 8:30 until 3:00.

DR: A little longer for teachers?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. We had to stay until 4:00.

DR: Then you had to come home and make plans.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right, for the next day. You had to pass in your plans every day!

DR: Another thing, a teacher has to keep her certification up.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right.

DR: Is it every two years?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes mam. Every two years.

DR: And you have to pay for that.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. We certainly do.

DR: Where did you take your recertification?

Mrs. Jackson: I took mine at Fayetteville. I went back to my alma mater.

DR: Oh yes. It's a beautiful school, and it has grown.

Mrs. Jackson: I was there when it was just three or four buildings up there.

DR: Yes, in the thirties and forties.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, just a few building up there. I was there when Dr. Seabrook was there.

DR: He was a respected man in the Fayetteville community.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes! Yes! And little Miss Seabrook.

DR: Did all of your children at West Street walk to school?

Mrs. Jackson: No. Just about a third of them walked to school. The rest of them came on a bus. And then I would take some of them.

Those that lived in this area out here, I would take some of them. I took about five or six every day because they were small, and especially when it was cold, I hated to see them stand there waiting for the bus. I was going, didn't have anybody, so I'd pick them up and carry them on to school and bring them back in the afternoon.

DR: Bless your heart. After integration, what do you think were the advantages and disadvantages in looking back?

Mrs. Jackson: In looking back, I really don't know. It has done some good. It has done some harm. I think it has done more good than it has harm because it has given the black people more privileges than they would have had before.

DR: Opportunities?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, opportunities. It has given me, I know. Before we were integrated, we went to the black schools and they did not have the conveniences and things that the white schools had.

DR: What were some of the things?

Mrs. Jackson: They had different curriculums there that we were not offered in the black schools. You had a better chance to grow there.

DR: Even to books.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, and to books because we just had ordinary books. That's all we had.

DR: And hand me downs.

Mrs. Jackson: Hand me downs is right! Exactly right. I think it was the best. A lot of people didn't like it, but I thought it

was the best.

DR: You mean a lot of your black people too.

Mrs. Jackson: Yeah, that's it. They didn't like it. They like all black schools and all white schools. I don't look at it that way. I don't. If God had wanted it that way, he'd of made a white Heaven and a black Heaven. But he made us all and he put us all in the world, so we are suppose to be as one. Even though we may be a different color, we as one. We have the same type of heart. We have the same type of everything. And that's the way I feel about it!

DR: What do you see as some disadvantages?

Mrs. Jackson: It's in the person themselves. That's the disadvantage I see, the person themselves. If you want something, you're going to work toward it and get it. But if you're going to sit around and listen at someone else complain, then you're going to be rebellious. So, I don't see any disadvantages in it. I really don't. Personally speaking, I don't see any disadvantages.

DR: Were you accepted by the white teachers and the administration?

Mrs. Jackson: They certainly did. They treated me as if I were their daughter, their mother, their brother, their sister. I've never been excluded from anything at all. Nothing whatsoever. They've taken me in just like I was one of them, and they've always treated me that way.

DR: Did you look around you and see that some of your black teachers were not as secure?

Mrs. Jackson: I did that, but they brought it on themselves.

DR: In what way?

Mrs. Jackson: Because they just had that feeling that they came from Africa and they were all black and they should act black. I don't feel that way. I don't act black. I just act as a normal person. I'm just a person, that's all.

DR: They really didn't want to be integrated or take on white ways.

Mrs. Jackson: They didn't.

DR: Or what they saw as white ways.

Mrs. Jackson: That's it. That's the whole thing. And I don't look at in that way.

DR. No, you wouldn't.

Mrs. Jackson: I really don't. I don't look at it that way. The first day I went over to Central when it was integrated, the teachers were telling me, "You know you're going to have some white children!" I said, "So what?" "Girl, you don't know!" I said, "Yes I do. I've always lived with whites, Spanish, every kind. It doesn't make a difference to me. They're all human beings. I'll treat them just like I do the others." I didn't have any problem whatsoever. When I went in the classroom, the white children, I can't blame them. Some of their parents had told them about black people and things like that and it was instilled in their mind, and they were kind of resentful.

DR: Could you see it?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes, I could see that. But when school closed,

we were the best of friends. They found out that mommy and daddy was wrong because I wasn't the bad person.

DR: You were really a human being.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right, and they found out that. Now all of them, those that were so bitter against black, they are my friends. The mothers and the fathers too.

DR: Did you have any white parents come with complaints?

Mrs. Jackson: I had one to come. We only had one vacant desk with one child sitting in it, and that child was a black child. She didn't want her child to sit with that. She wanted to buy a desk and bring it to school so her little girl could sit in it. I told her, "No, don't do that because you'll ruin this child's mind the rest of her life. Don't do that. Let her come here because she's got to grow up in a world where there are black people and she might as well start right now." She said, "no," and she went to the principal and told him that she was going to take her out of school if she had to sit with that little black girl. So, we had a conference; the black girl's mother, the little black girl, the little white girl, and the white girl's mother and father.

DR: Did the father have much input into the conversation?

Mrs. Jackson: He didn't. He didn't have anything at all to say. Not one thing did he have to say. The last thing I said was, "I'll tell you what you do. Give me one week and let the little black girl and little white girl sit together and see if they make friends. If they can't make friends, I'll move her." In one weeks time the lady

came back to the PTA meeting and she got up and made her speech that I'll always remember. She said, "I feel like two cent, but I got to get up and say something. I came here to take my little girl out of school because I didn't want her mixed, but Mrs. Jackson has taught me a lesson I'll never forget. You know what my little girl told me?

She said, "Mommy you were wrong and Mrs. Jackson is right." I've got to live in this world with black, white, and everybody else and why make me stay by myself now? I don't want to be by myself." She and the little girl even went to college together. They're good friends.

DR: Did she give you any reason other that the child was black?

Mrs. Jackson: That's all. Just because the little girl was black. No reason. Because I told her, "She's clean. She takes a bath. She doesn't smell bad. Now, what is it?" "I just don't want her with blacks. That's all." I said, "If that's your reason, give me a week and if you want to take her out, all well and good." So I said, "Mr. Booker, what about it?" He said, "Well, it's up to you." She gave me that week, and that little girl went home and told her mama what she wanted to do and she came to the PTA meeting and she made a speech. This was at Central.

DR: And that was in first grade?

Mrs. Jackson: The first grade. The cutest little girl! Just as cute as she could be.

DR: And when mama wasn't around, she played with everybody.

Mrs. Jackson: She did! Out on the school yard they were all

together jumping rope and hugging each other and walking with their arms around each other, eating lunch together, taking off this plate and putting on that plate and things like that. I'd walk around and I'd sit down to eat lunch with them sometimes. I noticed one little white girl. She didn't want to eat her food. So, I drew a ugly picture and everyday I put it right in front of her and I said, "Now this is the way you're going to look if you don't eat." She looked at it and she said, "Mrs. Jackson, how do you know?" I said, "Because I do. You need all these vegetables and protein to eat to make you look like me. Don't you want to look like me?" "Yes mam." I said, "All right. Eat!", and she'd eat. I didn't have any problem with her eating. So, that's the only thing I had problems with, the children eating and wanting to stay by me. I wanted them to just get out and play. But so far as anything else, I didn't have any problem.

DR: I had a first grade teacher once say that when they went to that second grade, she knew what she had given them. They knew their alphabet, they knew so many things, and she had done it because nobody else had. It's a wonderful grade to have.

Mrs. Jackson: It really is because that is their foundation right there! Of course now it's different. They have day care centers and kindergarten. Kindergarten is all right. It gives the children a chance to mix.

DR: Socialization.

Mrs. Jackson: That's all it is. It's all right just the same.

DR: Can you think back on anything you want to talk about in

your school career?

Mrs. Jackson: I don't know of anything special. I finished college in three years. I didn't go the four years. I finished in three years, and I was the valedictorian of my class. I joined several organizations and organized several clubs. Every Sunday we would go to Sunday school and teach Sunday school classes. I'd take a group of students from the college, and we'd go. We had a choir. We had a glee club, Also, I was the president of the class as long as I was there. I was the treasurer of the club. I was inducted into the Alpha Kappa Honor Society, Beta Kab, chapter of Alpha Kappa (), and I was an AKA.

DR: Sounds like a good life.

Mrs. Jackson: But I wasn't a partying kind.

DR: You couldn't of with all that studying and finishing in three years.

Mrs. Jackson: I never drank. I never smoked. And I never go out to parties all night long. I didn't have time.

DR: What church do you attend?

Mrs. Jackson: St. Peter's. My membership is there at St. Peter's because my husband's aunt was a member there. So when I came here, I went there. But I go to most of the churches here. I don't go to St. Peter's all the time.

DR: Where is St. Peter's?

Mrs. Jackson: It's off Queen Street.

DR: It's not AME?

Mrs. Jackson: It's near the Presbyterian church. I go to the Presbyterian church sometimes, and then I go to Trinity.

DR: Over here in New Bern?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes.

DR: The black church has always been sort of a rallying place for the black people and brought them together.

Mrs. Jackson: Exactly! That's right. I don't care too much for St. Peter's because, I don't know, it's just a group of people that looks for you to be dressed, education, and one of the macho type, and I don't like that.

DR: Oh, I know the church. It's near St. Cyprian's.

Mrs. Jackson: I'll tell you what hurt me very deeply. I was away from church two Sundays because my husband was sick. The third Sunday that I went there I didn't have on anything new, just the same thing I'd been wearing, and the minister says, "I'm glad we have Mrs. Jackson back. Don't wait until you get another new outfit now until you come back again.", right out in church, and that hurt me very, very deeply. So, I did not go back any more. I sent my money and my tithes there, but so far as me going, I didn't go.

DR: When did you lose your husband?

Mrs. Jackson: He died in 1987. You know, it's the strangest thing. I can't understand it to save my life. He was an amputee. He lost his leg, but he was a happy go lucky person. We hunted together. We fished together. He belonged to the Jollymaker's Club here. He was a Mason. All those functions that they had, we'd go to together.

This particular day on Sunday, he went to the club meeting. He was just as happy as you and I are right now. He came home and he ate. He said, "Baby, you know what?" I said, "What?" He said, "Let's go fishing in the morning." I said, "It's all right with me." He said, "We'll going to have to go to bed early." I said, "Okay." Well, this room in here was my den. We went in the den and looked at television. He looked at his watch and said let's get the 11:00 news, and I said "Okay." He went in and washed up and jumped in the bed. I went in and washed up and jumped in the bed. We laid there and the news came on and it said, "Tomorrow will be cloudy with some showers." He turned over real quick and he said, "Uh oh! I'll be here to worry you tomorrow." I said, "No, you're not either." (laughter)

It was cool, so I said, "Jimmy, I'm going to turn the heat up." He said, "No, don't do that. Just get in my arms." So, I got in his arms and when I knew anything I was, I was fast asleep. I woke up the next morning and my daughter was in her room. She was teaching here then at Roger Bell School. I woke up and it was about eight o'clock. I said, "Jimmy, did you wake Delores up? We're gonna be late!" He didn't say anything, but he had pulled his arm out from under my head and he was laying on his back smiling. I thought he was asleep. I went in the bathroom and I said, "Well, I'll go back to sleep a few more minutes." I slept and got up at nine o'clock. He was still in the same position. So, I pushed his leg and it felt kind of cold. So, I went over and touched his face and it was cold. He was dead. I don't know when he pulled his arm out from under my head.

DR: But wasn't that a blessing that he went so peacefully?

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. He wasn't sick or nothing whatsoever.

DR: How old was he when he passed?

Mrs. Jackson: Sixty-seven. I was much older than Jimmy.

DR: Did he know how old you were when he married you?

Mrs. Jackson: He really did. He said he didn't want no teenager. He said he wanted a second mama. That's what he'd tell me, a second mama. He didn't treat me that way though. He treated me as if I was a young woman. He really did.

DR: Maybe that's the secret of why you're still so young at heart.

Mrs. Jackson: I guess you're right! We had a lovely life. We really did. I just couldn't believe it, and I haven't ever gotten over it. But I do have Dr. Preston and Mr. Pete Bland. He's the Chief of Police down there. There's several other people here, Mr. John Watkins. Just several people that I know. Whenever I get kind of sickly, I call one of them and they say, "Well, come cry on my shoulder" or they'll come out and talk with me.

DR: Sheriff Bland with the county?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. He's a very good friend of mine too.

DR: When did you retire?

Mrs. Jackson: 1973.

DR: Tell us about what happened that they wouldn't believe that you were old enough to retire.

Mrs. Jackson: They didn't retire me until 1973. Then they found out that I was old enough to retire, past retirement. So, they told

me then, I could retire. So, they retired me then. They said, "Now if you want to retire, you can retire." (laughter)

DR: Is that true about Mr. Pittman going out to see you and you were playing dodge ball with your children?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes! (laughter) How did you know?

DR: I don't know. But we heard that they had found that you were eligible for retirement and he made an appointment to come out and talk with you. You were how old then?

Mrs. Jackson: I was in my seventies I know. They still couldn't believe that I was old enough to retire.

DR: You were in your seventies when you retired?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes indeed.

DR: Have you enjoyed your retirement?

Mrs. Jackson: I have. I subbed 'til 1986.

DR: You substituted?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes indeed.

DR: How old were you then?

Mrs. Jackson: I was still old. (laughter)

DR: You were in your eighties.

Mrs. Jackson: And they still call me.

DR: And these are for first and second graders?

Mrs. Jackson: Yes. Susan Rivenbark out at the new school out there still calls me to come in and work a couple of days. I said, "Nope. I'm through." She said, "You can handle the children." I said. "I know it but I'm not coming out there."

DR: Now your energies are with the Retired Teachers Association.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. I'm working with them now. I'm working with Meal on Wheels. I'm going to the hospital and reading to the sick shut-ins, and I'm taking flowers and cards out to them and things like that.

DR: That's wonderful.

Mrs. Jackson: I have to stay active because if I sit down and say, "Lord, here I am", then he's going to come and take me. But as long as I'm active, I think I'm fine.

DR: Something to look forward to each day.

Mrs. Jackson: That's right. I have to be doing something. I just cannot sit. I'm still driving. I drive from here to Raleigh, and from here to Greensboro, Durham. Right by myself. I have a friend now. Maybe I'm wrong, but it's the strangest thing. This friend of mine, when I first came to New Bern, I met her and she fell in love with me and I fell in love with her, and we were just like sisters.

She passed in 1987 too. She had a friend. It wasn't her husband, it was a friend of hers, but she loved him dearly. His name was Johnny Redding. The last thing she said was, "Van, if I leave first, please take care of Johnny." I said, "I will." And so far I have been taking care of him ever since. Up until about four months ago, someone found out that he had an illegitimate daughter in Philadelphia. She came here, took him from his home and put him in a rest home in Britthaven.

That has hurt me dearly because I have been taking care of that man since 1987. I'd go over pay his rent, pay his bills, take him to the

bank. He's the same age as me. He's 92.

DR: Did he agree to go?

Mrs. Jackson: No. She took him by force. She got someone to help her. His mind wasn't alert as mine. She got some papers and had him to sign those papers. He didn't know what he was doing. He had money in the bank. He had around 35, 40 thousand dollars in the bank. He was getting social security and he was getting another check.

She took everything. He had a beautiful home. He was in the project but it was beautiful. It was set up nicely in there. She came down here from Philadelphia and cleaned the place out. What she didn't give away, she sold it. She took his money out of the bank, put him in Britthaven and went back to Philadelphia. Now, he's over there with not a soul but me. That's all. I go back and forth to see him. She took his clothes.

DR: Does he know you?

Mrs. Jackson: He know me, yes! He's just as alert as I am now.

DR: When do you have to go for driver's renewal?

Mrs. Jackson: 1994!!

DR: So do I.

Mrs. Jackson: This is really true. This is funny. I went out to get my driver's license. Well, you see, I'm ninety years old, and I just knew they were not going to give me no driver's license. I was sitting in a parking space that said, "No Parking", and this highway patrolman came up and he says, "Madam, do you know you're on a No Parking space?" I said, "Yes I do, but I'm waiting for the line to get shorter

so I can go in to get license." "What kind of license?" I said, "I'm gonna get driver's license." He said, "Let me see your license." I showed it to him. He said, "I don't know. I should give you a ticket."

I said, "But if you want me to move, I'll move." He said, "No. Stay there for a while." He walked on and he came back and he says, "Come go with me." I just knew he was going to take me to jail. So, we went through the highway patrol station, he opened the door and looked in there and he said, "Go over and sit in that chair." My heart was up here. I went over there and sat in the chair. He came and sat in front of me and he says, "Look through there and see what you see.

What do you see in there!" He was talking so rough. I was shaking, and I told him. He said, "Get up and go over and sit in that chair!"

I got up and went on and sat in the chair. "Click!", he took my picture.

He went over and said something to some man, and he said, "Come on."

I went on back there and got in the car. I was waiting for him to give me a ticket. He said, "Mom, you don't know me?" I looked, and I said, "No." He said, "I'm little David Thompson. You taught me in first grade." I said, "Jesus, have mercy! David Thompson a highway patrolman." He said, "Come on and get out of here."

DR: So, you got your driver's license?

Mrs. Jackson: I got my driver's license, and I didn't take no test because I didn't see anything in there. I didn't see a thing through there. I got my license and I got my ugly picture back. I was so frightened I didn't know what to do.

DR: Well, how many years now did you teach in New Bern?

Mrs. Jackson: From '61 until '73.

DR: You had many careers in teaching in different areas.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes indeed. I certainly did. I had quite an experience, and I enjoyed every minute of it too. I really have.

DR: Teachers now tell of being so frustrated.

Mrs. Jackson: But I wasn't. I was always glad when the morning come so I could go to school. I never dreaded it. In the afternoon, I wasn't too happy to go home.

DR: Could you pick out even the in the first grade the children who might be bright?

Mrs. Jackson: I certainly did. I picked those children out that I thought was going to make it.

DR: And you can sort of spot them.

Mrs. Jackson: Yes indeed, and they really did. Everyone of them, and I'm so proud of them. They are lawyers. They are policemen. I think I had a social service worker. The mayor in Edenton, North Carolina, I taught him. I call him Roy. A lot of them are teachers, librarians, they are in all walks of life.

DR: And you had a part of it.

Mrs. Jackson: I had a part of it. They are after me to have a reunion. I said, "Baby, New Bern isn't big enough for me to have a reunion with all my little babies."

DR: Your grown up babies.

Mrs. Jackson: They're all my babies.

DR: Well, Mrs. Jackson, we want to thank you for sharing with

us. It has really been a pleasure.

Mrs. Jackson: Well, I'm certainly glad that I could just open up and talk with somebody. It's not often that you can just open up and talk. They just don't want to hear it, that's all.

DR: We do.

END OF INTERVIEW