Interviewee: Esphur and Harold Foster

Interviewer: Hudson Vaughan

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DISK 1

Hudson Vaughan: So how long have y'all lived in this neighborhood?

Esphur Foster: 70 years.

HV: So your whole life?

EF: Yeah, we have…we had a cookout one night, and we… brought all of our, a lot of old pictures out and we was showing them to everybody at the cookout and we forgot and left them out and it rained on them. And one of them was when this place was just a field, and it was a picture of mother and me on a blanket, it was my first birthday, she had baked me a cake and it had a little candle sitting the middle of it and my sister, we lived at 506 Cotton Street, which is straight down there but on the same side as this one and she was born there so and I'm not sure whether my brother was born there or whether not. I was born on Sunset Drive.

HV: You were born on Sunset? So y'all just moved down a neighborhood.

EF: Yeah, uh huh.

HV: Now technically at that point that was two different neighborhoods, one was Sunset and this was Potter's Field, right? And the separation point was starts with an M, right here

wasn't it? Mitchell! Is that the dividing line? And there were rivalries between them? Is that… especially in baseball?

EF: Everything.

HV: Everything.

EF: Everything. Academics, sports, music, art, everything.

HV: So there's three of y'all, three siblings? Are you the oldest?

EF: I'm the oldest. My sister's next and he's the baby.

HV: So what was this neighborhood like growing up?

EF: Oh my goodness, there were children and dogs and cats everywhere. Always laughter and fun, sneaking out the yard when parents went to work. He and my sister got—we don't, we do not go through peoples things to this day because he and my sister got a whooping every day, going through my mother's drawers, she had the prettiest things in her drawers. But she knew when someone had been in them.

HF: She sure did.

EF: And they just do not get it, why do they keep, they know she knows when they, she, they been in her things. So that went on for about a week and then they finely stopped doing it… ( )

HV: She what?

EF: She'd say get a switch, I'ma get you for the old and the new. [Laughter] She'd didn't like whipping us, she was very soft spoken.

HV: Hmmm, what was her name?

EF: Hatty.

HV: Hatty, and what was she like?

EF: Oh my goodness. She was a jewel, she was a jewel. She was 5… she would have been 6 feet if she didn't have the scoliosis, and she had a real bad case of scoliosis. She was elegant, she was brilliant, she was sweet, she was very… My sister is a copy, is a carbon copy of her except she doesn't have the sweet personality that my mom had. My mother was very tactful, and my sister isn't. And she just, she was… everybody, everybody, black and white both, always talked about what a wonderful person she was.

HV: What brought—did she, did she grow up in Chapel Hill?

EF: She was born, she was born out in the country, the Booths had a lot of property, and her mother, by the time she was 10 her father, who everybody said she was the apple of his eye, her father, her stepfather, and her mother had died. So when she was 10 she was a orphan, and so nobody on either side of the family would take her, and so, her mother was a professional seamstress and so she had at some point said to a white lady, Mrs. Neal, "if anything ever happens to me please take my baby." And so when Mrs. Neal heard that grandma had died and no one had taken mother, she took mother, and she raised mother. And they had a white son they had adopted, so they had 2 children that were, you know, not biologically theirs. And, and it's—the most, the most perplexing thing to me is that Mr. Neal and mother and Roger, the young man that they adopted, both—all three died of cancer, and I don't know Rogers was colorectal, my mother's was colorectal, I don't know what Mr. Neal's was. When he was diagnosed with cancer they the theory was that laying out in the sun was good for you and that Hedy Lamarr, have you ever heard of Hedy Lamarr? She was a gorgeous movie star. She had a cottage in Florida, so the Neals rented that and took a train and went down cause they thought that would, you know, be good for Mr. Neal, but of course it wasn't and he died in Florida, so they brought his body back and, I tell you where, downtown where the university florist is, that was their building, they had

a big green, and that so that was their building. So they brought Mr. Neal back and buried him, and my mother, and I often wondered why my mother didn't like the beach, because we loved it, and, you know, as you get older you put things together. It was because, I think it was because of what happened to Mr. Neal, and he was very, very good to my mother, because we—all of us, I said to him one time, he's, he and my mother are historians, they had an insatiable appetite for reading. They could just not read enough. And mother loved history and so does he, and he's soft spoken like mother, and… So why was I going to tell you that? Oh, so I remember. One time I said to him, I said, "Have you noticed that every time the Foster's get together we always want grits and fried fish?" He said, well you know Grandaddy, my dad's daddy, was a full Creek Indian, and I said what! I'd never heard of a full Creek Indian, so I didn't argue with him, I knew better than to argue with him because he spoke only from fact, so but as soon as I came home, we had 2 great big—they weren't encyclopedias but they weren't dictionaries because they were too big to be dictionaries, and I looked up Creek Indian. And sure enough, my father's from southeastern part of North Carolina, and Creek Indians lived on the things, and they—I was like, I'll be doggone. And so my aunts, all the children that we knew had hair like, like it was straight and a little wavy, and I'm like, where did that come from? And but my daddy had hair just like his mother and I have hair just like my daddy. So then, that's when I said, "Oh, that's from granddaddy, the Indian, they lived in Moravian, North Carolina and he couldn't find work, so he left and he went to Florida and he found a job and he sent for grandmamma and grandmamma wouldn't come, she wouldn't leave her mother, my Hannah we called her, and so he, you know, he relocated there and remarried and had another family but, my, Kathleen who was my daddy's oldest sister, she said well I'm going to find my daddy. And she went down and she found him,

and then they, they had a relationship until let's see, I believe… Did—Do you remember if granddaddy died after Kathleen? See no, now you didn't even know Kathleen had died. So…

HV: Do you mind if a turn this down a little bit? Probably the far right there… Alright. No, no, it's not a problem I understand, it's not a problem.

EF: So, my mother was a single parent because my father was a beautiful black man and the women loved him, and that that was his weakness plus he was an alcoholic, so she raised us.

HV: Did y'all know him at all growing up?

EF: Mhmm, yeah, yeah, we knew him. I think I was 14 the last time I saw him.

HV: So what did your, what did your mother do? I'm guessing that in addition to bringing y'all up she probably had to find..

EF: 3 jobs.

HV: Yeah, I was going to say, so she had to work too.

EF: Uh-huh, she was a maid and she worked at Danzigger's, and she learned a lot about the Jews and what was done to them because Mrs. Danzigger, the first Mrs. Danzigger, told mother all about it, she was very fond of mother. And she told mother about how she had put them in trunks and shipped them over here. And when they opened up the…it was Danzigger's Old World, no, no, that was a Ratskeller, but upstairs there was Old World gift, gift and candy, candy with gifts. So mother worked down there in the evening, so the first Mrs. Danzigger told her all about their trials and tribulations. And mother loved that because she loved history. And then she worked for a private family, the Whitmeirs, and Mr. Whitmeir was in business with Foushee, it used to be Foushee insurance and reality, it's here on Rosemary Street. And it's… they tore the porch off, they had a porch, I'm trying to see where it is, but anyway before that they had a little small office right behind what's called Spanky's now, that's where they started

the bar, Mr. Whitmeir and Mr. Foushee, and mother worked for the Whitmeirs and then Mr. Whitmeir became an alcoholic and he and Mrs. Whitmeir separated and divorced and they had a son who had some mental retardation and one day Mr. Whitmeir was backing out of the drive and go to work and go to Hillsborough, because he had the first Roses downtown, and he had a Roses in Hillsborough, and he didn't see Dougie and he backed over Dougie and drug him a few feet and that just exacerbated what was already the problem and he, Dougie, just loved momma and mother loved him and he was so jealous of Dougie, so when they separated…I don't know who mother was working for then. And they were opening, they were about to open the film school and so Mrs. Whitmeir said to Dr. Sturdivan, she said my maid needs a job, she has three children. Oh, I know why I was gone tell you about Douglass being so crazy about my mother. Mrs. Whitmeir was telling my mother to do something one day and she raised her voice so my mother took off her apron and laid it on the table and walked home. So that was— they lived at 219 East Rosemary Street, the house is still there, and so mother walked home. Well, everybody is Chapel Hill would have loved to have momma, that's the kind of reputation she had. So Dougie cried all the time and he wouldn't eat, so Mrs. Whitmeir took him to Dr. Baker, there's a children's hospital at Duke, Mr. Baker, that's the doctor, to examine Dougie and he couldn't find anything unordinary with him, so he said to Mrs. Whitmeir, he said, "Have you had a maid leave or has someone in your family died or someone that Dougie was very close to?" and Mrs. Whitmeir said, "Yes, my maid left," and he said, "Well, if you want Dougie to live you will do whatever it takes to get her back," so Mrs. Whitmeir came down and she talked to mother she told mother that Dougie was so sick that he wouldn't eat and that Dr. Baker told her that she needed to do whatever she could to get her to come back, so mother told her, she said "Don't ever raise your voice to me again. If you ask me to do something and I'm not doing it the way

that you would like me to do it or the way you think I should do it, tell me, but don't ever raise your voice to me again." And Mrs. Whitmeir, of course, you know, she apologized. And mother went back and that saved Dougie's life because, then he was happy. But then the Whitmeirs broke up, and, you know, broke up the housekeeping and stuff, and Mrs. Whitmeir went back to working and she got this job with Dr. Sturdivan who was over at building school, and she told Dr. Sturdivan that her maid needed a job and she said I don't want her in a position where anybody's over her, I want her to be over. And so Dr. Sturdivan said, oh, that's so Mary! And she said, yes! So Bo went down and talked to her and so he hired her, so she was head of the maids stand, and so that was in 1954…52 or 54, in fact she was the first person to unlock the dental school doors when they got the certificate for occupancy. Momma was very organized so she got into a position of where she wanted to, she got her GED she wanted to go to business school so she asked her— she only had one aunt on the Booth side because the other aunt died. So she asked aunt Dina if we could stay with them Monday through Friday and I will pay you money to help with the bills you know, because I know they're going to be there, the bills will increase. We go home Friday night and come back on Monday because she would catch the bus to Durham every night, she went to what was called Durham Business School, so that would have been something like a community college now but it was for black people. So she finished that and then she went-- what happened? Oh, Dean Bout called her in and oh and she was going to evening college at UNC and Dean Boutans secretary was taking the same course so she said to Dean Boutan, do you know how to go to evening college? He said tell her to come see me and she did and Dean B said tell me what it is that you can do, other than clean. And so then she told him about business school and counting courses, because she loved math. They said her daddy that the guys down there used to pay him to help them. The Booths have a thing with numbers

and we've all inherited that too. And so he said, "Well Hatty, physical plan is about to take over housekeeping." And he said, "I do not want them rednecks over you. So I want you to go to Peabody and take the test and after taking the test I want you to come see me," so she took the written test and passed with flying colors and then she took the typing test and she didn't do good on that because she hadn't been typing and they told her she could come back so every day she went home and would practice for 30 minutes and did that every day for a month and after that she did really good on the typing test next time. // Well, I am very deliberate I am just the opposite so she got the job and that was when they added that was the first time they added to it, it was the Brier Hall and they asked her if she liked that job and this is the type of person she was and she said if you think I'm Qualified I'll try, very very to a fact, so then she got the job and needless to say everyone was blown away cause she was the first black worker and nobody knew she could do that and everyone thought all she could do was clean and when they had a opening in the admissions office they called and said Hannah we'd for you to be secretary to admissions. And would you be willing to do that. And so then she got it and um let's see, Anne or Luke was the admissions person and that was when the UNC dental school was number 1 in the nation and so that's where momma became secretary to admissions and shortly after that maybe 3 or 4 years after that she was diagnosed with Colorectal cancer. And so um she was just devastated, absolutely devastated, she said no I've not had anybody, I've not had anybody that could hold a candle to her, and so she died and she was still secretary, the day that she died. I think they she um, she was there the weekend before she died and they and they took a lot of money and stuff and she was and I didn't know but my daughter and I moved in the room with her and I looked shocked and she asked if we could have a minute. And I would lie in my bed with her and she would do this haunting sigh, it was the death rasps, and I didn't know, and I would just pat her

all night long. And see my sister knew it cause she was a registered nurse and she knew I was afraid of dead people and I was in denial about mother dying. So when we took her down from the hospital that next morning and tried to send word to the dental school and she said tell everybody if they want to see Hannah for the last time and say good bye that that to come over. So we got ready to leave and the whole emergency room dock was filled with people from the dental school and they all came cause, to say goodbye. And then with our funeral, it was the weirdest thing, the church was packed and I remember when we were going to the cemetery for some reason I turned around and looked outta the back window of the Hurst, and as far as my eye could see a lot of cars coming with us and when I had just begun working at the law school and when we got to the church that day of the funeral, and I hadn't cried yet, I did cry one time a law student came when she had heard mother had died, and when I opened the door I remember standing there and I broke down. And then when we go to the church and the church stoop was full of my professors and I cried I just couldn't believe it. And we had, we had the wake in Durham and the dean and all the law professors came to Durham to the wake, I was just overwhelmed, I could not believe it, that's the kind of lady she was.

I: Reminds me of one of my mentors in Memphis, she's an 88 year old woman, her son passed away, he had some kind of cancer, but he was an incredible activist but also one of those people that everybody just comes to and she said it was one of the saddest days of her life but it was also one of the most powerful because she said all the people were gathered at the hospital and they were all coming up to her and telling her stories of how he changed their life or just affected them so… and sounds as if it just resonates…

EF: Yeah, yeah I remember her good friend Earl, stays right up here, and flew in for mothers funeral and I said oh William, oh gritty grit, we called him gritty grit, I said mother

would just be so, so, so surprised, and he said, many times as I've put my feet under Mrs. Hanny's table, and you think I'm not coming home for her funeral and then another uh another girl uh I think her first cousin had just died umm said to me umm cause her mother had um severe mental illness so mother always valued education and so I said, "Denise, your mother has given me so much effort and advice she said I just loved her so much." There was just a whole lot of people, she was superintendent of Sunday school, first Baptist, she was director of the children's choir, she loved music, she played by ear, she was the sec, she was the president of the PTA, they would not let, she was the president of the PTA about six or seven years, we had finished high school and they would not let, they said please, please don't, please remain… ( ) She was something. She walked everywhere she went, she had those three jobs and—

HF: She had to take care of y'all.

EF: Yeah, she made our clothes, she had a garden, she cared, and every August was her vacation from, she worked us to death, I mean we had to clean, and it was a big house and we stayed in it, it had the real, high rooms, you know with the real high ceilings… we had to hate every August. So there was Charlie, Charlie, Charlie and my room, there was the kitchen and the bathroom, and there was the room that Harold and mother slept in, and there was a hallway there, we had to paint six rooms every August.

HV: So, who, who'd take care of her, or just… just amazing resilience…God.

EF: She always said, I know, and I didn't know what she meant, she'd say, I know there is a God because if it was left up to man I would have been dead a long time ago. And I remember one day we were coming out of church, out the, out and it was the Sunday that we sang, and mother and I were walking up the isle going out the church, and Uncle Lewis had had it, and mother stopped and said, "Hey Uncle Lewis, how you doing?" He said, "Fine, I want to

apologize to you." And she said, "Apologize to me? Apologize to me for what?" And he said, "I'm so sorry that I didn't try harder to take you as a child he said you were the apple of your daddy's eye and he would be so proud of you," and momma said, "You don't have to apologize," and he said, "I just want you to know how sorry I am and how proud I am of you and I know that your daddy would be." And when we got away from him at a distance he couldn't hear, she said to me he least of all could have afforded to take me because he already had 5 children and his wife had severe mental illness I think she was what they call bipolar now and mother said they had already lost two great big two-story homes on West Franklin right over here going down south and because, you know, she wouldn't—you know what I'm talking about? I guess that's where she won all these big homes and stuff and he tried to take care of her and he did not need another person at his dinner table. And I remember it made momma feel good that he at least acknowledged it and apologized to her.

HV: So how did you come to know and hear all the stories about her different jobs and how, how they came to her and would she tell you all the stories or did you ask her or would other people come and tell you?

EF: She was just me and talk sometimes you know, always much more humble, she'd never talk about, she had this beautiful mirror, rectangular mirror, and it was, I'm trying to think, a small, small scalps around the edge. Maybe it'll come to me, but when she turned fourteen I think she said mother had thick hair, and it was long, and so Mr. Neal gave her a comb and a brush and he told her she gets to be a young lady star and to take care of yourself. She would just tell you know stuff like that, lets see what, she never talked about, oh—when Mrs. Neal died, and mother went to the funeral, Mrs. Neal's sister said to mother, "I wondered if you would come," and mother said, "Why wouldn't I come?"

HV: Did Mrs. Neal pass away before y'all were there or after?

EF: No, I wasn't there, I didn't know her. But see mother was pregnant with me and there was a shot at marriage, so Mrs. Neal told daddy, if you can't treat her right, you bring her back where you got her from. And mother said I would have died and gone to hell before I let that. And mother said Mrs. Neal taught her how to handle money, but no, she didn't, that was innate. She was born with that, she did say that it was a little harder after Mr. Neal died. And I remember that—oh yeah, Roger, for after the funeral, Roger the young man that she came over and he and mother talked for about three hours, and then my sister was looking in the paper and she saw Roger Neal had found Virginia and he was in the service, she said to mother, "Mother was that boy's name that Mrs. Neal adopted Roger, and was he in the military?" and mother said yeah, and she said, "Was he in Virginia?" and mother said yeah, and she said he died. Wonder about that because they were not biological, neither three of them, and they died from colorectal cancer.

HV: She sounds like a remarkable woman—

EF: She was, she was. She was—

HV: Tell me a little more about them growing up and childhood for the three of y'all and school and church.

EF: She always made our birthday special because she never had a birthday gift, she never—and you know, when we would give her a gift she would take the loop and she would put it back, you know, because she loved the bows and it was so pretty, and our birthday. And—Jesus Christ, our maid turned the air on. Low heat, she has got to be kidding. That is what she has it on, bless her heart. Tell me if you get a little cool. I'm about to pass out in here. So what was I saying?

HV: You talked a little bit about your birthdays and how—

EF: Oh, oh the birthdays, because her parents was so young when they died so she said that a birthday is a gift, so we didn't have to do any chores on our birthday, she would cook our favorite dinner and our favorite desert, so my favorite desert was her peach cobbler, his was a fruit cake, and Charlie's was fresh, three layer coconut cake and I always graded the coconut for that. And Christmas, oh my god Christmas— Christmas was so wonderful. Because Mr. Witmeir would get samples of toys and clothes and all that kind of stuff so he always let mother pick whatever she wanted for us, and then she would order stuff for us and so she would put it under her bed, and one summer by chance we discovered it and so she had gotten me a typewriter, we played with our toys all summer long and put them back under the bed. Got them that Christmas and was still clueless, didn't put it together who Santa Claus was and we played…and so many years later we told mother and she laughed and laughed, she was really— and so she would have daddy, daddy was home a lot on Christmas Eve and she would try to get us to go to bed, but we were so excited, and daddy would say, "I got to go up the street and I'll be back." So he would go out and in a few minutes all this racket would be on the back porch and we thought it was Santa Claus, and you should see us fly up and get into bed, and my heart was beating and I can just remember that song that says, "he knows when you're sleeping and knows when your awake," and I thought he can hear my heart beating and I'm not going to get anything. And so I finally I would go to sleep and we would get up the next morning and the cookies and milk would be gone and mother was exhausted and she'd just had all these goodies for us and she even tried, she would have— she would buy a fifth of liquor for daddy hoping he would stay home and spend the Christmas with her but he never would. Just had to, so she was just a wonderful person, and in the summertime we would decide—we loved whist, it's the

complete opposite of bridge, it's black folks' bridge. Okay, so we would decide because we supposed to stay in the yard, not supposed to be going, so we would decide whose yard we were going to play whist in and for a week we would go in everybody's, and the boys would go in the trestle and jump in that sewage water and learn to swim because we had never, there was no way else, you know, for us to learn to swim, so they would—the girls would play that, so the they would go over there, here, and swim in the trestle. I remember one day I was riding somebody's bicycle, came down airport road and some kind of way his foot and pants leg got stopped in the spoke and drug him all the way down Airport Road. Came home, and he said, "Mother," he said, "I know what you mean, mother, about a hard head make a soft ass." [Laughter] And I thought, oh God, now he didn't say that to momma. And he apologized before he said it because he knew he wasn't supposed to say it, and she didn't do anything, oh man, I'm telling you that, he was scratched, oh my goodness. And we had, when I was in the seventh grade, Mrs. Bell was my teacher, she used to be Miss Scales, then married Mr. Bell who was the band teacher, so she was Mrs. Bell. So our class room when you going down the hall at Lincoln, if you go this way, our classroom, there's a door at the end of the building, and if you came in that building the first room on the left was the band practice room, then the next room was Mrs. Bell's classroom. And so I was in that was, that was our class in the seventh grade, and the last period of the day was band practice. Well, she knew that we would not go and do band. Oh my God, when they would play Rhapsody in Blue, Stormy Weather, it was just—and I love music.

HV: What did you play?

EF: Nothing. I played the radio, I was supposed to be playing the horn and I went to practice one day and I couldn't make the B flat, I always thought I was supposed to do perfect, I don't know why, thank God we had classes. If you knew it, and then we had in the spring we

would have them. See, Mrs. Bell had gorgeous floors, and in the spring we would have a concert and it would be the band and the chorus, and it was a formal affair. Let me tell you, it was— and then May Day we would have the May Day Festival. And Prince Taylor was prince charming, and what was the walker's name? She was in my class, not Cinderella—Snow White, she was Snow White. She had to be kissed by a prince.

HV: What would y'all do on May Day?

EF: Oh and you know, Prince Taylor, have you ever heard him sing? He could been a huge recording star, but his wife was his childhood sweetheart, he would not leave her. And they are still together. So we would always have that and the May Pole, and I got a chance to wrap the May Pole and I was just thrilled to death. The girls had to wear, I think the boys wore black pants and black shoes, and the girls had to wear white dresses with a satin ribbon and so your socks had to be the same color as your satin ribbon and black shoes. And so we practiced and wrapped the May Pole and it was just absolutely gorgeous. And then that would have games like the sack races. What all other stuff did you all do for May Day? See because I was not athletic at all. We had baseball too, oh yeah, okay, baseball games, and what else? What else did we do? What other kind of games? For May Day? I just remember playing baseball. Okay, alright, the boys used to run up and down, and she could outrun, always been a sibling rivalry. And so they would start at the bottom of Cotton Street then she would they go, I think would you all go past Mrs. Farrell's house or at Cotton Street and run all the way up? And so you would start down at Cotton Street, and it goes to straight down to and the first street is Brooks to the right, and it's a little patch below there, so they would do that and they used to kill birds. Harold and them used to kill birds and would eat them in the summertime and so Braxton and Harold got into an argument about whose bird was, and he pushed Harold down and broke his leg. Lord have

mercy, I thought they were going to kill Braxton, and he had an aunt named Aunt Lee. She would smoke, she worked for a doctor here named Dr. Palister. And Braxton's brother Tee-Tee, and the reason they called him was James Thomas, but they called him that because he was premature and he was so tiny, so Aunt Lee called him Tee-Tee, and she worked for Dr. Palister, some kind of way she built an incubator to keep him alive till he got big. And she would walk around with a cigarette in her mouth and it would burn and that was before filters, and it would burn to just about that much, and it'd have ash on it that long and it never fell off. And she would be walking and cussing her. And one day we got on her nerves so bad—one day, and we really loved to go around there and play cards, and every mother and grandmother in Potter's Field heard her that day. She had a hip set up real high, and one higher than the other. And she would put her hand on that hip, and that cigarette with them ashes dangling, she said one day at the top of her voice, "GO HOME! Go Home." Well, when we got home, mother was just laughing, and said I do not blame her, that was a big family and then all of us come in there. I do not blame her, mother said, I do not blame Miss Lee. And none of us forgot that so when people got on our nerves we would say, "Go home, go home." And we went to the chapel which was right in our back yard, so that was the first church we went to and mother played piano down there, and it was always Christmas Eve program, Easter program, and children's day program, and every time they would have a speech and she would say two words and start crying. So when Reverend Ward, because you know how the Methodists change ministers, I didn't know whether he was a Methodist minister, I knew he was a minister. So they didn't send Reverend Ward and he was really tall he must have been six eight, and his wife was tall and they had a tall daughter. And mother loved Reverend Ward, and when they didn't send him back mother was upset. And their mother went to First Baptist and they had a lot of children and they always passed by our

house going to Sunday school and church and mother asked her if we could start going with them up to First Baptist and she would get us when she came to church, and so Mrs. Norwood of course said yes, and I think that maybe happened about two or three times and mother was like, oh.

HV: So she started going to First Baptist? How old were y'all then?

EF: We were very young, and mother was very young because she was young when she had me, she was five days shy of being eighteen, because I was born August the seventeenth, and she was born August the twenty-second.

HV: And Reverend Ward Manley would have been the pastor then.

EF: God, and he would tell you, don't let us go with anybody to talk to Reverend Manley. He would tell you that he has never had a member like Harry Foster, and then you have to hear all about how competent she was and how great she was. I remember when Kim Brown was running for Mayor of Chapel Hill, and Kim asked me if I would take him and introduce him to Reverend Manley and endorse him and stuff. We never did talk about that. Talked about it the whole entire time, so we did, and then oh, in August we would go to the churches, the churches would go to a picnic, they would have all these buses, they would have five or six buses going to Raleigh, for the annual picnic, and everybody, cooked and so, and you know you didn't have to worry about your children having food, I mean they had more food than—fried chicken, potato salad, string beans, apple pie, peach pie, homemade ice cream, biscuits. I can't remember, I remember tossed salad. They were special processes for all these things, special recipes. Women could cook, it was just wonderful. It was— Everything was momma's specialty. Everything she cooked and my sister cooks exactly like her, and I cook like my daddy, my daddy was a chef. He used to do some beautiful ice carvings, he was left-handed. My mother's father was both-

handed. My grandson is ambidextrous. My family loves the banana pudding that I make, and I just love to cook. And sweet potato custard. You never had it? I am going to bake you a sweet potato custard, I'm not going to tell you how, I'm going to make it and give it to Shiloh to give you to pick up. Mother used to do—I really loved her gravy sweet potato pudding. Oh my gosh. You grate the sweet potatoes. And for Christmas we would have all that and Thanksgiving she'd just bake all the time and there was always a pound cake in our house, and there was this couple who were best friends to my mother's parents when they were living, and they had a farm so mother always got the butter from them. And when mother got ready to—they would bring milk and butter on the weekend, and there was a man called Stanley Edwards, you know where the midway barbershop is? Mr. Stanley was their great grandfather, so mother would get eggs and some fresh vegetables from him. But when mother got ready to build a house, dad, they would get the buttermilk from. And dad was master carpenter, so a lot of these houses that you go in, these big historical houses, would have the crown mold, he did that. If you ever go to the Chapel, that whole altar, he made that.

HV: Really?

EF: So, she told mom and dad that she wanted to buy a little piece of land and build a house. And so—but she told, you know, she didn't have the money, so she asked my old if she would loan her the money and she would pay her back. So when she got ready and they told her yes, and they loved the life she lived, and she had been a wonderful child. So they did a search title for where we were, and that's when they found out that there was heir property, and they couldn't find all of the heirs. And dad said, "Don't worry, I know somebody that's got some property and I'll talk to him." And he was dying from cancer, and mother said dad told him, "You've been a son of a gun in your life." He said, "If you ever go and do anything for anybody

you need to sell your property to Anne Foster," and he said, "That's so ruthless," and he said, "Well, if you say so, I'll do it." So he sold mother this property here. And so mother paid my old in the time that she had said she would pay it. Then when she got ready to build a house, the bank that's on the corner now RBC, was Orange Savings and Loan. And they all knew dad, so dad said, "I'm gonna tell you what you have to do. You're going to have to tell a lie, but you do exactly what I tell you to do. When you do what I tell you to do, you get on your knees and ask god for forgiveness." So she did what dad told her, I don't know what she said, she never told me. And so she did that and she got the loan and so dad and Mr. Campbell built the house, this house right here for her. The front part of it is fifty years old in October, and we had a fire and I added to it in 2002 when we had the fire.

HV: The front part of it had that special architecture then?

EF: Yeah, it doesn't have any of the crown. I hate that I don't have that crown now. So there was something else I wanted to tell you about. I can't think of what it was.

HV: So basically, your family has been on this block for 70 years, and for 50 years in this house. Now tell me a little more about Lincoln.

EF: It was Orange County that I went to, I didn't realize that they had changed the name to Lincoln High.

HV: So it's in the same spot where you went to school is where Lincoln High is now?

EF: No, the OCTS is over here, on Caldwell. And my mother's father was one of the ones that laid the cornerstone, they were all masons. And so I went to what they called Northside, but was OCTS, from 1945 which was when I started until—and so my class was the first class that went all the way through from the 7th to the 12th grade, yeah our class. And we had, let's see did we have, we didn't have May Day activities that was for the elementary. Let's see, what did we

do, we played, we had Phys. Ed. then, so they played a lot of baseball then. And we didn't have a, there was no gym at Lincoln, we didn't have a gym at Lincoln. We practiced at Northside for basketball and football. It was the funnest thing when other schools came here to play basketball they over there they had two poles in the middle of the floor and the teams weren't used to that and it just completely threw them off. We were, we always won.

HV: It reminds me, in Bolivia and South America, their stadium is at about 15,000 feet altitude, so they get used to it and other teams can't breathe, so they always win. So for a while the soccer federation—illegal to play big international games there because people couldn't play, they couldn't breathe. It's not a bad strategy right? And what do you remember about broader Chapel Hill, you said your mom worked down at—

EF: On Fridays where there's a place down, you know where Panera's is? Right across the street, that was A&P. So on Fridays we could go to A&P to meet mother to bring the groceries back, because like I said, she walked everywhere. She learned to drive when she was 40 I think, same time I did, and I was 40 or 41. So she walked everywhere and we would meet her. We could not go, the furthest we could go downtown and the only time was when we was going to Rose's, because that was when the Whitmeir's owned Rose's which is right down the end section of Columbia and Franklin, so we could go there. We couldn't go on campus, my best friend would ride her bicycle all down there. I don't know why we can't go down there.

HV: And the town wouldn't allow it or your parents wouldn't allow it?

EF: Our parents wouldn't allow it. Because they didn't want nobody messing with us, and then we went uptown, what we called uptown. Sweet shop, that was in Carrboro that was where the Hollywood Theatre was and that was for the black people, and I worked at the Hollywood Theatre.

HV: When did that close down?

EF: I don't know, when his wife had a beauty shop so they had— Do you know where the theatre was, the black theatre? Do you know where there's a repair shop called Peacemaker, when you come in up Franklin Street headed to Carrboro, and there's the black church, St. Paul's. Then there's a car shop, that used to be The Boards Service Station, then the next place, that's where the theatre was, and that's why now it's called Peacemaker, and he's black and does excellent work. Oh yes, and then so the next building was Mr. Din's Sweet Shop and his wife's beauty parlor. And that's where all the black kids went.

HV: Now Mr. Baldwin had his wood yard down there, a little bit farther.

EF: No, that's another Baldwin, that's at Sunset. That was in Sunset.

HV: Down where the Baldwin Park is now or—?

EF: Yeah, well it maybe was, see I didn't go up.

HV: But y'all—

EF: See, momma was very strict on me since I was the first born.

HV: Yeah, the first is always the— I was the second born and I got to do things my sister couldn't.

EF: I remember one day standing in the kitchen and asking mother if I could wear lipstick and mother was like, no. And child me was like, "Why?" And usually I never ask questions, but this time I did and, mother said because I don't want her to wear lipstick and you're too young. They would question mother, I never questioned her. So as I think about it, I loved being home by myself, but they were all over the place. Everybody else say you the child that's the sister. Yeah, I'm that sister. Let me tell you—

HV: The physical layout, if here's your home fifty years ago, and you were to walk out, could you describe all up to Franklin Street? Because I know there's the first Mama Dip's and the separate clubs and where Greenbridge is now, and that chapel was across the street from where it is now. And that funeral home used to be the chapel and now it's—

EF: Bynum Weaver, yeah that's where the funeral home is now, but before that before they tore down where they are building now, that was a funeral home that was in memory of Mr. Bynum. But the Knott's Funeral Home was just a shack. And that's why when mother died we didn't have her wake there. Said I'm not having mother's wake here. So that's why we went to Durham and people followed us and came. So—

HV: Were you involved also in some of the marches like Harold?

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DISK 2

EF: No, he was at the forefront, now I did march in one or two of them because we had to take an oath not to become— And mother taught us to support each other if we were doing right. Mother was very upset because she had just built this house and we were the only Fosters in Chapel Hill, black or white, and he was always in the paper and momma thought she was going to lose her job, but she never suffered any repercussions, most of the people in charge were Jewish and she did not suffer any repercussions so John and I marched cause we were supporting him but mother never did because we was breaking the law, and she just did not do that. And when he got arrested, she made sure he got food and clean clothes and stuff, so we were in the background, but he was the one who was up front, he was the one who started it. He and all the guys from here, there was a rock wall and that's where they planned the sit in. He stopped—

HV: So you were on that rock wall planning the sit-ins?

EF: Yeah.

HV: I don't remember that but I've read about you doing that. How did y'all come to that?

EF: That was the hanging out wall. Just discussing things, they could go there because that was a safe place, after the Greensboro sit-ins. But everybody in Potter's Field and Sunset could go to the rock wall because everybody knew Miss Fanny and she had those ten or twelve grandchildren, and back in those days we all made. If somebody saw us doing something and they could say something to us and we could hope that they wouldn't tell our parents. That's right.

HV: Most of— a lot of the families around here, it was more scattered housing, it wasn't quite as dense then? Or was it changed?

EF: There was a number of houses and stuff. It was just so wonderful, I have tried to because I was just furious when the people start selling and they were building these places and all these students came over here and they were very disrespectful, and then I realized don't get mad at the students, it's your peers who did that. But I don't understand when they say that they can't afford to live here because I worked at the law school and I raised a child by myself, and I have had two mortgages on this house for remodeling and stuff. So don't tell me— I know everyone else got husbands and boyfriends and stuff, I don't want to hear that. And I think about how hard my momma worked. To sell this house would be to negate her very existence and I couldn't do that, and so I just said well, you know, change, it happens every day, so you just have to get used to it. I can say that the students have gotten much more…better, because now it's a— what is it when students do something they not supposed to? It's a violation of some sort.

I'm trying to think of exactly what it is, maybe it'll come to me before you leave, but yeah, they've gotten much, much better. And with the professors assigning students to come over here and learn, you know, about what this is, that black folks do live here, and blacks folks had a role in building, and university and the town.

HV: What— one of the things I was talking about, do you know Albert Williams, we went to his house and talked to him for a while.

EF: Did he tell you about how I slapped him? Harold doesn't remember it but he told me that they went in a huddle one day and he evidently had told Abbot something and he didn't do it. And Abbot said he slapped the daylights out of him and I told Harold and he said he don't remember that. I just always remember him being so big, they were close all the football, oh my God, the relationships that they built.

HV: One of the things that we're kind of exploring with this work is what is it that makes a neighborhood a real community, so what would you say— I mean all these stories speak to what makes a neighborhood, but could you talk about what has been the most valuable aspects of the neighborhood that you've grown up in? And if it has changed in ways, then what that change has been like?

EF: It has really been the respect of our elders, that's the bottom line, we respected the elders, and during that time we would all go to school to church, Sunday school, and if you did not go to Sunday School or church, there was no need to talk about going to the movie because if you didn't feel good enough to go to church—

HV: You didn't feel good enough to go to the movies.

EF: And so we got the same lesson in our core values from those three and each one reinforced you know what you learned at home.

HV: Church, school, and home.

EF: And it was always home, Sunday school and church, and then school. And they would just reinforce and you heard the same thing, the same thing was expected of you. Respect each other, doing your homework, doing work at home, assignments that you had to do. Help, like old people need something from the store, you don't charge them to go get something, you get killed. We would help each other practice. Her mother was white and her father was a slave, and her husband was one of the ministers at St. Joe's. She was a petite lady, real, real light-skinned, blue eyes, she always had a garden and had corn, so in the fall we were all everybody from the neighborhood would go help her, the corn would be stacked up to the ceiling and we would all go help her shuck corn. And I don't know who took the corn to Durham for her to grind the corn into meal, and that was money for her. And she had a spinning wheel, we were just hypnotized by it, because see, she was a free slave, she was allowed to stay home and she was taught to do things that ladies did, you know like knit, embroider, spin, she didn't have to do menial housework in the garden that kind of stuff. We were just really fascinated by that spinning wheel. Mr. Ed Stewart who lived diagonally across from her, he had a big garden, at the corner of Cotton and Brooks, they had this big garden, and the next house was our house, so Mr. Stewart, the day after Thanksgiving because we used to have some cold winters here. You know, guys would come help him, there was a lot of community stuff that was done, then they bought the children a log, and would play, but we could not get into arguments and fights. Which to me is so crazy because if you got into a disagreement and started fighting. But it worked it worked, so we learned how to work out our differences by talking and stuff, not fighting. It just was not allowed, just, even if, I don't even remember there was Sunset, Potter's Field, Windy Hill, Tin Top, there was no fighting. Even the competition and stuff, it was just no fighting. And the best

from each community would make up the teams, you know the basketball team, football team, and baseball and stuff like that.

HV: When and why did those names change? Did the town do that?

EF: Well, no, because we still know about it, but then they came and named it Northside because that was for voting and precincts and stuff. All the black people, let me see, from but say fifty on up know all of the black communities that were there. So that still has not changed for us, but it's, white people, you know, it's like what are you talking about? So we have to tell them the boundaries and the names and the street names and stuff. So it has not changed much.

HV: How would you describe the neighborhood today?

EF: Oh, they all gone, let's see. She lives across the street today, she's 96. Miss Willie Mae where the rock wall is, it's still there.

HV: Where is that?

EF: I'll show you. My mother's first cousin and his store come back down. The Merritt's, and that's it.

HV: The Mason's maybe?

EF: Yeah— that's a different area though, that's back where there's more houses in there.

HV: I've seen it happening on— I think it's moving this way. I think that Roberson is starting to change, but that North Graham is still mostly— and same with back in the area where Baldwin Park is.

EF: Miss Pendergraph, Miss Velma, and Kathy Atwater, and then Miss Gritty Grit's Aunt, and Miss Gracie, and then Kathy's sister, that's it!

HV: Are there any examples of next generation folks that have kept homes in this area?

EF: I'm it. We're it.

HV: Why do you think that is?

EF: I don't know, I really do not know. I'm sad that people say they can't afford it, and they go away and they don't pay their taxes and stuff, and I don't understand that they can't afford it, and then when they get ready to come back here, they really can't afford.

HV: Where do they move to?

EF: I have no idea, but certainly out of state. Out of Chapel Hill, but he and my sister moved down to Florida cause they don't like cold weather. And he just loathed cold weather, and he liked to stay warm. Since he had those strokes that's affected some—

HV: Tell me about post Lincoln High. What did you end up doing after you graduated?

EF: Oh you don't want to hear about that, that was a troubled time in my life, that was a troubled time in my life. And I got my life straightened out, and I'm so glad that I was here to help take care of mother, and we did a wonderful job of taking care of mother. I was thirty-nine when she died. I was thirty-seven when she was diagnosed because she was sick for two years. And so, but then, like I said, I got my life together, I had a wonderful daughter, and I worked at the law school. For the first time in a long time, I did what my mother advised me to do and just nothing ever went wrong from that point. When I was offered the job at the law school, there were two other places that had offered me a job, she said, "I want you to take the job at the law school." And I took it and it was the best thing that I could have ever done. And she had said that I want you to go back to school, and I said, "I know, mother, and I'm ready." All of sudden I knew the importance of an education. I had always heard of how important it was but I didn't do it, and so she said you gonna really, really have to hit the books. Because when I was in school I had to really hit the books. And I said, "I know, mother, and I'm ready to do it." Then in the mean time she got sick and I couldn't do it and somewhere in that period I said, I'm going to go

to evening college and see how I do. So I always thought that I had a problem in English and not math because I know I was good at math, so I decided to get that out of the way. Well, much to my surprise, I was excellent in English, I could not believe it. So I was like, and I remember mother telling me, now she struggled in English and she spoke so beautifully. "Mother, you just need to write the way you talk," but she just could not, you know, so every time so I think I took four semesters of English courses and every time I made an A- and I'm like okay, here, I haven't been to school in thirty years, and I graduated from this segregated school and you know, they make you think that our schools were inferior, compared to what theirs were. But we had good teachers. Oh, yes. And so we I figured it doesn't because I did so well, it didn't have anything to do with the school I graduated from, and I learned and made sure that my grandson knows this and I just told my daughter because I'd never studied because I didn't know what study meant, nobody told me what study meant. So I asked my grandson, Douglass, what— Now he's excellent in sports and he has writing talents, so I said, "Tell Granny how you study," and he said, "When I'm gonna have a test I go to the teacher to find out what's going to be," I said, "No. Tell me what you do every day when you're going to study." He said, "I—" What was it that he told me? I said, "Douglass, that is not studying, Granny is going to tell you because nobody ever told me." I was too proud to ask. I said studying is reading, it is nothing but reading the assigned. I said, "Take notes in class, and then when you come home, you are—" Outline is so important, because I had to outline when I went back to school for English and I said— plus, the law students have to outline all the time, I said that's what studying is. And nobody ever told me that, if I had known that I would have been— now, my sister was salutatorian because she was dark, the girl that was valedictorian was light-skinned. So everyone used to tell me how smart I was,

and I didn't know what they were talking about and didn't care. But I now know what studying is. I would have been the valedictorian in my class, you know. And so—

HV: One of the things that's been interesting hearing a lot of people's stories and going through a lot of library stuff and the church is that integration itself was so important, but the way that it happened, there were many things that were not good about the way that it happened.

EF: Because we didn't realize that you could not let, we thought that once the segregation, desegregation was law of the land that we would be accepted and I remember I was on the board, oh, and that's when I started working law school, I became involved in a lot of community stuff. And I've always been involved in community stuff in the black— because, you know, I love children. With a man who was a builder and this was over here in Chapel Hill, and we were trying to figure out what to do for the black children to help them to get better classroom grades, and this man said his son's best friend was a little black boy and he said to his son one day, "Dad," whatever the little boy's name was, "Dad, he's so smart, he knows all the answers to all the questions, and he raises his hand every day in class and the teacher will never call on him," see that's the kind of stuff, especially the little black boys, you can't legislate hearts, that's just, and Julius Chambers I got into so many arguments; I said, it's the worst thing that's ever happened. He said, "Mrs. Foster, how can you say that?" And he said when he, cause he went to Central, and then Dean Brandis took a chance and admitted because they have, the deans have a— none of the words that I want to use are coming to my mind today. They have a discretionary admissions, so was something about Julius Chambers that touched Dean Henry Brandis and he admitted him. When he admitted him, he was the lowest GPA in his class, when he graduated he was the Editor and Chief of Law Review. At some point during his undergraduate years he learned about the Jews and what happened to them. And in Germany, he

was like, why didn't I know that? Why was that kept out of the black schools? I said, why do you think? He said, I know now but at the time I did not understand. I said it's cause we went to a black school. They didn't want us to do another uprising, you know. And so I said it was just absolutely the worst thing because of the white teachers afraid discipline the black children because the black parents will think that you're picking on the children, and I said that everything— that the kids are the ones getting away with murder but it's really hurting them in the long run because of the way we've been treated. The first thing I said when we went to school, I said whatever my child is, if she does something that she's not supposed to do, do not hit her, tell me and I will take care of it. Well, I shouldn't have said that, I mean, you know, I don't like corporal punishment. I used to get mad at mother all the time, I should have been helping her. But she wasn't that kind of child anyway, she's the sweetest child we ever had, but I should have let them know that if she needed to be disciplined that it would be alright, but just not just don't hit her, that's what I should have said. But I didn't, you know. So there's no— the respect is gone, the respect is gone. And some of the— I'm sure that the younger teachers now don't harbor some of the prejudices that were harbored when integration first started and I thought, oh my god, what we subjected our children to for integration and it never has worked. It never worked.

HV: One of the, what— it seems to me that generally an American culture today even in a specific subset or community, and maybe this is an over generalization, but at least my sense is that the sense of community has really changed.

EF: Oh yeah cause--

HV: In all communities, there's exceptions but I mean—

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by David Coffey, October 28, 2011