



1-22-1979

## Interview with Cynthia Plair Roddey

Cynthia P. Roddey

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LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview #062  
RODDEY, Cynthia

**RODDEY, Cynthia**

Winthrop's first African American graduate student

*At Winthrop:* 1964-1967

*Interviewed:* January 22, 1979, April 29, 1981, September 4, 1994, September 12, 2012

*Interviewer:* Cynthia Wilson, James D. Mackey, Paul Finkelstein, and Robert Ryals

*Transcription by:* Steve Blankenship

*Index by:* Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

*Length:* 4 hours, 28 minutes

Abstract: In her four interviews with Cynthia Wilson on January 22, 1979, James D. Mackey on April 29, 1981, Paul Finkelstein on September 4, 1994, and Robert Ryals on September 12, 2012, Cynthia Roddey shares her experiences at Winthrop from 1964-1967. Roddey details the process of applying to Winthrop, the reaction she received from the Winthrop and Rock Hill community, and her participation in student life. Roddey includes her insight on race relations today and her hopes for the future. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Integration, Segregation, Desegregation, Civil Rights Movement, Racism, Teaching, Arnetta Gladden Mackey, MAT, NAACP, American Dream, Politics, Family, XI Delta chapter of Sigma Beta Sorority

**Interview Session I (January 22, 1979): Digital File**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer referring to historic document.
00:00:20	<i>Question:</i> What was going through your mind when you were waiting in Tillman? <i>Answer:</i> They are always late. CR had never been on campus. Wanted to find out where her classes were.
00:00:50	<i>Question:</i> Why Winthrop? <i>Answer:</i> It was a matter of convenience. CR interested in Library Science courses – Winthrop also had the courses CR wanted to take.
00:01:25	<i>Question:</i> What was your husband's reaction at the time? <i>Answer:</i> Supportive. Looked after the children, so CR could have time to study.

- 00:01:50 *Question:* Community reactions? *Answer:* CR tells a story about a neighbor who protected her.
- 00:02:20 *Question:* Why didn't you want to be photographed? *Answer:* CR refers to the violence that erupted from integration. CR wanted to avoid that. CR concerned about safety.
- 00:03:18 *Question:* What special precautions were taken? *Answer:* The only communication CR received from the college was to be at Tillman Hall. The weekend before CR attended Winthrop, police told CR they would be there to protect her.
- 00:04:25 *Question:* Were you surprised to receive an acceptance letter from Winthrop? *Answer:* Yes. CR thought some of her friends were more qualified.
- 00:04:50 *Question:* In the first week of classes, how did Winthrop react? *Answer:* CR says she was ignored. CR speculates they didn't want to hurt her feelings, but they didn't know how to talk to her. CR didn't make close friends. CR closer with professors.
- 00:05:45 *Question:* Graduate work? *Answer:* Finished at Winthrop. Got an MAT. Oral Exam.
- 00:06:05 *Question:* Difficult to get a job? *Answer:* Certified in elementary education and Library Science. Got a job in Charlotte.
- 00:06:45 *Question:* Where do you work? *Answer:* Charlotte. Media Specialist.
- 00:07:05 *Question:* Apathy amongst students? *Answer:* Now is not a time for marching in the streets. Students apathetic because there is no united front. CR offers advice to students.
- 00:09:27 *End of interview*

**Interview Session II (April 29, 1981): Digital File**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer's Introductions

- 00:00:17 *Question:* When were you born? *Answer:* 1940.
- 00:00:21 *Question:* What high school? *Answer:* Immanuel Lutheran High School in Greensboro, North Carolina.
- 00:00:30 *Question:* Why Winthrop? *Answer:* By accident. Trying to get certified – would have had to drive to Columbia. A friend mentioned to her that she should go to Winthrop (before it integrated). Not hard to get accepted. It was a matter of sending in a postcard.
- 00:01:40 *Question:* How did Winthrop react? *Answer:* CR refers to the Indian Caste System. CR didn't have any friends. Was the only black student for a summer.
- 00:02:20 *Question:* How did the public react? *Answer:* CR went to Winthrop in a non-political way. Didn't have all the publicity of others.
- 00:02:55 *Question:* Major? *Answer:* MAT in Library Sciences and English.
- 00:03:00 *Question:* Did being black affect your grades? *Answer:* In one instance. CR talks about this event.
- 00:04:00 *Question:* Racism? *Answer:* CR was ignored. No overt racism. People went out of their way to be nice – especially the professors. Winthrop was concerned about her personal safety. CR did not live on campus – “no social threat.”
- 00:05:15 *Question:* Students give you a hard time? *Answer:* Always nice. One incident.
- 00:05:59 *Question:* Activities? *Answer:* Spent most of her time studying and working. Had a family that needed to be taken care of. CR went to summer night classes. CR says this was an entirely different experience for black students that lived on campus and participated in activities. CR is a Delta.
- 00:08:05 *Question:* Pressure? *Answer:* Pressure working a full time, keeping up family responsibilities, and studying. CR only got one “C”.
- 00:08:40 *Question:* Did it affect your home life? *Answer:* Husband and parents helped. Family support was helpful.
- 00:09:17 *Question:* Easy to get a job? *Answer:* CR tried to get a job in Charlotte. “Who you know, pays off.” A supervisor helped CR get a job. Required black teachers/librarians to get certificates.
- 00:10:27 *Question:* Do you think other blacks have gained from your experience? *Answer:*

Yes. Made it a matter of convenience. CR's grandfather helped build Winthrop. "The only barrier was the fact that my face was black."

- 00:11:09 *Question:* Friendship? *Answer:* Open but did not have graduate degrees. Atlanta was the closest black library school that was certified.
- 00:11:50 *Question:* Support from black community? *Answer:* Neighbors nice. CR recalls the news coming out of Alabama and Mississippi. Neighbors guarded the house.
- 00:12:28 *Question:* Racial tension? *Answer:* CR refers to newspaper articles. CR says Winthrop took care of problems. Rock Hill did not have the same climate as other cities. There were no vocal, black leaders in Rock Hill.
- 00:14:00 *Question:* Did you participate in sit-ins? *Answer:* Did not. Participated at Johnson Smith. CR talks about non-violent, passive protests.
- 00:15:00 *Question:* Sit-in at Johnson Smith? *Answer:* Trying to integrate a lunch room. The manager did not want that. One of the girls in the protest could pass as white – went inside and ate and got back in line.
- 00:17:00 *Question:* What do you think would help blacks? *Answer:* CR says to stick with education – not necessarily college education. School prepares you. Have to have tools and skills for jobs. "Black people need to be prepared...to do more than one thing." CR encourages people to be involved – it doesn't all happen in the classroom. Educated in terms of religion.
- 00:20:28 *End of Interview*

### **Interview Session III (September 4, 1994): Digital File**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer's Introduction
00:00:12	<i>Question:</i> Born? <i>Answer:</i> April 6, 1940.
00:00:15	<i>Question:</i> Upbringing? <i>Answer:</i> Grew up during the war. Was raised by grandparents. Had an extended family. Had a lot of exposure because of traveling, as a child. CR recalls seeing her first opera. Exposed to music, books, and art.
00:02:15	<i>Question:</i> Did this exposure affect attitude towards higher education? <i>Answer:</i> Grew up in an educational environment. Read bible every day. Sang every day.

Learned something every day.

- 00:03:05 *Question:* Contradicting stereotypes? *Answer:* Education a constant part of her life.
- 00:03:35 *Question:* Date married? *Answer:* December 23, 1961. Happily married. Children moved out.
- 00:04:10 *Question:* Most significant event in your life? *Answer:* Can't pin point one thing. CR says everything happens for a reason. CR received an international award – one of 81 women who make a difference. CR was nominated for this award – unaware of how she influenced this person who nominated her. CR refers to convocation speech. CR talks about having no idea the influence she's had on people's lives.
- 00:08:44 *Question:* Personal mentors? *Answer:* Family. Grandfather – self-educated man who became an entrepreneur (Isaac G. Plair). CR's grandfather always helped people. Elementary school teachers – demanded students to have self-respect. CR talks about how advanced her curriculum was in elementary school.
- 00:10:45 *Question:* Education? *Answer:* First grade in Charlotte. CR started reading at 3 years old. CR tested by aunt. Went off to boarding school at Immanuel Lutheran College – “cleanliness next to Godliness.” Prepared her for college. Went to a Presbyterian College – teachers cared about you. CR was academically prepared for Winthrop.
- 00:13:50 **[no question]** When CR taught in Charlotte, her best students were in special education classes. CR talks about schools lowering standards.
- 00:15:45 *Question:* Other awards? *Answer:* Xi Beta Chapter called the Visible Woman. Asked to speak at convocation.
- 00:16:15 *Question:* Retired? *Answer:* Charlotte/Mecklenberg School System as a media coordinator – in charge of print and non-print materials. Retired from Kennedy Middle School.
- 00:16:55 *Question:* Accomplishments at work? *Answer:* Last three years were the best. Had kids that she had taught when they were in kindergarten. CR could see how much these students had grown.
- 00:18:00 *Question:* Your application was considered quiet? *Answer:* Other schools had started integrating. The controversy was over in the courts by the time that CR applied to Winthrop. Not sponsored by an political organization. Did not want to

have picture taken. Winthrop didn't want all of the media on campus. There was a simple announcement that she enrolled.

- 00:19:20 **[no question]** Talking about protests on Winthrop.
- 00:20:20 *Question:* 1961, Joe Johnson introduced a resolution to integrate colleges – was that observable on campus? *Answer:* No hostility on campus. There was no interaction between CR and other students. CR talked to the maids and cooks who she went to school with. CR developed relationship with a handful of professors – older, married, and lived off campus. CR says her experience was unusual compared to other experiences. Interviewer refers to postcards at the archives. Interviewer reads off postcards sent to Winthrop about integration. CR responds to these postcards. CR talks about report from Governor Holland – says they wanted to go coed before integration.
- 00:24:22 *Question:* Compare Winthrop experience to Johnson C. Smith? *Answer:* At Smith, faculty was integrated. CR didn't feel challenged at Winthrop – except at Dr. Murdy's class. CR says methods of teaching different.
- 00:26:45 *Question:* Turned lack of resources in black schools into an advantage? *Answer:* Yes. Schools were resourceful. Made what they needed. There were no manuals to teach you how to teach. Teachers had to be innovative.
- 00:28:05 *Question:* Aware of movement? *Answer:* CR looking for a job after she had her second child. Decided she wanted to become a librarian. CR's coworkers were applying to Winthrop – CR shocked that she was admitted.
- 00:30:05 *Question:* Grandfather and Winthrop? *Answer:* CR's father always told people she would go to Winthrop. CR's grandfather helped paint Tillman Hall.
- 00:31:08 *Question:* What contact did you have from Winthrop? *Answer:* A lot of people did not know she was a student – CR associated with maids and cooks at Winthrop. CR had no social contact.
- 00:31:55 *Question:* Insight into how Dolores Johnson and Arnetta Gladden Mackey's experience differed from yours? *Answer:* CR says they were harassed. Harvey Ghent's sister did not have a pleasant time. CR not a part of the alumni association. "I did not feel like it was my school."
- 00:34:10 *Question:* Difficulties of going back to school? *Answer:* Support from family and neighbors.
- 00:35:30 *Question:* Status as a female college affected admittance? *Answer:* Yes. A black

male would have been unquestionable. Talks about teaching etiquette not education.

00:36:50 *Question:* Did you feel you were being educated to take a subservient role in society? *Answer:* CR speculates they didn't want integration, because they didn't want black people to know how slow they were. CR did not feel academically challenged. CR recalls writing a paper for a term paper.

00:39:18 *Question:* Issues confronting current black, college students today? *Answer:* CR says students will have a rude awakening. Black students today have been shielded from racial tension and prejudice. Even Winthrop will insulate these students to admit and retain black students. CR says black students need to give back to other black students who may have no hope or who need more assistance.

00:42:25 *Question:* Are the Ebonites at Winthrop and the NAACP doing enough to turn students into mentors? *Answer:* CR says they do an excellent job, but there isn't enough of them. They do what they can. CR says black churches may need to do more.

00:43:50 *Question:* Who is emerging as leaders in the black community? *Answer:* It will take more than one group. It has to start in the home.

00:45:05 *Question:* Thoughts about programs for minorities? *Answer:* CR talks about the people giving the government guidance, not the other way around. Civic duties.

00:45:50 *Question:* What does Winthrop mean to you? *Answer:* Has a different feeling about Winthrop – it's "growing on me." The presence of black faculty and the Black Alumni Association has made CR view Winthrop differently. CR started working with the Black Alumni Association and that helped her get re-interested in Winthrop.

00:47:50 *Question:* Recommendations for youth going to college and getting involved? *Answer:* Everyone always has something their interested in and the college can provide avenues to pursue or you can create your own student group. Get involved so you're interested in coming back to Winthrop each semester.

00:48:55 *Question:* Final thoughts? *Answer:* We can all excel at something. Strive for excellence. Behavior and attitude are important.

00:49:52 *End of Interview*

**Interview Session IV (September 12, 2012): Digital File**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer's Introduction
00:00:47	<p><i>Question:</i> Applying as the First African-American to Attend Winthrop? <i>Answer:</i> My Winthrop Experience: I am Cynthia Plair Roddey, the first American-African enrollee and the first African-American graduate at Winthrop College. In the spring of 1964, by working in an interim English position at Emmett Scott High School, I often lunched with another English instructor, Mrs. Louise Rinehart. One day we were discussing my plans for the coming year. I did not have a contract for the fall term. I told her of my wish to complete the certification as a school librarian, which I had started at Johnson C. Smith University. I needed 6 more hours and was considering [Clark] Atlanta University or Benedict College [in Columbia]. At the time I had two toddlers, age 2 and 1, and finding childcare for them was proving to be a major problem. That ruled out Atlanta because I would need to stay on the campus. Benedict would be 150 miles daily round-trip, presenting some challenges for transportation and study-time while caring for family. Mrs. Rinehart suggested that I consider Winthrop College, which was within walking distance from my house. She explained that Harvey Gantt had won his suit to desegregate South Carolina institutions of higher education and was attending Clemson University. She also said that a group of black school teachers were in the process of applying to Winthrop. A few days after this conversation, I requested and received an application. I filled it out and promptly submitted the form. While I was waiting for a reply I had a most disturbing conversation with the Rock Hill Assistant School Superintendent during commencement exercises. When I told him of my plans to attend graduate school, I did not tell him where. He spoke very disparagingly of my plans: <i>They are just going to teach you a lot of stuff that you will never need or use.</i> As a black teacher in 1964, with the first stages of desegregating South Carolina public schools underway, I was fully aware that one of the criteria for keeping one's job was by the degrees that one had earned. Even having an advanced degree would not guarantee employment, but it certainly would give one an edge. Hearing this white administrator - a black teacher not seeking a higher education degree was typical of that time of institutional racism. This white [school's] administration did not allow or encourage a black teacher to improve her status. I had met my first obstacle. If black teachers would become more highly qualified in skills, they would be a threat to his job; he did not have a doctorate degree. In early June I received a postcard with notification of the acceptance to the second summer school term. Watching the national news on a 13 inch black-and-white TV, there were reports of violence, as black students pressed for civil rights, <i>excuse me</i>, that is, black <i>citizens</i> pressed for civil rights, I had justification to be</p>

afraid for the safety of my family. When the news of my acceptance became public, it was mistakenly thought that my mother, who was Jordan Plair, also a teacher, was going to be the student. Wishing to insure the safety of her grandchildren, she did not correct the error. However, the news was proudly shared with immediate family and trusted friends. A few days before I started class, I had a visit with Mr. Brown Edgars and Mr. Beatty Patton. With rifles in hand, they informed that there would be a 24 hour watch on my home. They encouraged me and wished me well. My husband and I were most appreciative of the concern and support of those who lived around us, but not everyone was supportive. I got an irate call from Mr. W.S. Witherspoon, representing the NAACP. He demanded to know who gave me permission to apply at Winthrop. As a college student at Johnson C. Smith, I was a very active member of the campus chapter, but had not affiliated with the Rock Hill chapter after graduation. I was unaware that the chapter had collected a high school senior, Arnetta Gladden Mackey, to attend Winthrop in the fall of 1964. This conversation, unfortunately, resulted in my support of other civil rights groups, and I never, even until today, [thought of] renewing membership with the NAACP. However, the local chapter, many years later, presented me with an educational award. Others too felt that I should not be the first to enroll at Winthrop College. There were letters from former alumni, dignified little old ladies in hats and gloves, appalled by the change that would be wrought upon the whites-only woman's campus.

00:06:26

*Question:* Student Life at Winthrop? *Answer:* But for the most part, my matriculation was quiet. There were only two incidents that I can recall that had racial overtones; [the first was] in my library administration class, which was taught by a fellow librarian in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The final grade was a C. During the session, generally whenever I spoke in class, I would be rudely interrupted by a few of the other students, and negative comments were made. The teacher never addressed the issue; and finally I stopped participating in class. She told me my grade was low because I did not take part in the discussions. This person had recently graduated from Winthrop with a MAT, and, with disdain, let me know that she did not think that I was not up to doing graduate work. However, in that same term, I felt academically vindicated when I earned an A in *John Milton*, taught by Professor [Louise] Murdy, PHD. The second instance was in a children's literature class. Someone told me that she hoped I would not be offended when she did her report on Uncle Remus, because of the dialect. *Of course not*, I replied. Dialects of North Carolina, Appalachia, South Carolina low-country, and the Mississippi Delta are all legitimate versions of language and linguists. At the end of the session, an instructor called me outside of the classroom to tell me that I was the first black student, and she was pleased to have had me in her class. She ended the conversation with: *I can see that the problem is going to be with the rednecks*. During my three years at

Winthrop I did not make any friendships with my classmates. I was ignored, often not spoken to. I was never invited to study groups, lunch or any other campus social events. My friends on campus were former schoolmates who were employees, or some white staff members and faculty, who made a special effort to insure my success as a student. I regret not attending my graduation; my husband and mother were *very* disappointed. They had supported me financially and sacrificed [a lot], doing whatever was necessary to provide child care so that I could attend classes and study. However, I was just tired of the stress and strain of being the *first*. As soon as I finished my orals, I went with my husband and my boys on a *long* and relaxing vacation on the Atlantic coast. Since graduation, I have had many opportunities to visit the campus and appreciate being asked to serve on various committees and speak at various public events. I am very humble and proud to be honored by the Roddey McMillan [Record] and [through] the Dr. Cynthia P. Roddey Scholarship, established by the Xi Beta chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, of which I am a lifetime member. This year is the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my graduation, [and] I decided to attend this alumni reunion, my first one. As I become more elderly and less mobile, this may be one of the last times I can physically be at such a milestone event. *No*, I will still not know any classmates; but I can recall the good times I shared with my former elementary classmate who were Winthrop employees, during lunchtimes, and the many kindnesses of Dr. Harrar, and others who have passed on. I will always hold a personal memorial for Arnetta Gladden Mackey, one of the four young black undergraduates, who endured many ignorant acts of prejudice with courage and dignity. I commend all of those brave students who were the first to challenge the barriers to deny African-American students access to equal opportunities in education. The first laws prohibiting blacks from being educated were passed in South Carolina in 1740, nearly 275 years ago; and this state is still struggling with providing equal education for all of its citizens. It may not be in my lifetime, but I'm optimistic that Winthrop University will be among those institutions fostering, as it has since 1968, diversity and integration until there are parities and learning opportunities for all South Carolina citizens.

00:11:29 [no question] RR: Beautiful, absolutely beautiful. This is extremely well thought-out, well written and extremely well documented. Gosh. I thank you, because hearing that from a trailblazer such as yourself--- and I know that probably over the years, at times, probably in some ways, this may have been a little uncomfortable being a torch bearer in that regard. *Answer:*

CR: I think, at first, I did not realize the impact it would have on me personally and the impact it would have on other students coming after me, and, even in passing, the faculty and administration. We've had black vice-presidents here at the college; and maybe one day we will have a [black] college or university president. But I had no idea at all; it was not a political agenda. It was just a

personal need that I had, later on realizing that I was making a statement without really *knowing*. When you think of all safety issues involved, my husband could have lost his job. I had a friend who *did* lose her job because she said *yes*. She thought I should go to Winthrop; and she was *fired* for that. And you just don't realize the ramifications. When I come back on campus, or when I am someplace, and meet former students, they tell me of what it has meant to them for me to have gone *first*. I did not realize how much courage that took at the time, when you talk about the 1960's, when they were shooting at students. We look at Dorothy Counts, having to drop out. I even look at the young lady [Shannon Faulkner] who went to the Citadel, what she had to face. So it was a time, without me realizing - and I think that when you are in your twenties, you don't feel that anything is going to happen to you, and that you will live forever. I didn't realize the seriousness of what I had undertaken. I have also thought that, at some point, I would like to do some research on the other first-time people who had integrated. The psychological effect---- because years later I went back and thought: *I don't know anybody in my class. Why should I go to homecoming, what would be the point of going? You know you have the parties and the social stuff. Who would I talk to?* When I come back to the black alumni, *and I'm it*, of the class of 66, *I talk to myself*. We don't realize the psychological ramifications of being the *first*. So I did get some anger, after years of thinking about how I was treated. But now I have reached a stage of mellowing. I think that I was looking through rose-colored glasses at Winthrop, you know. But I don't feel the anger. I understand what was going on and why people were acting the way they were. If you saw John Lewis speaking at the Democratic Convention, he talked about the Rock Hill citizen who came up and apologized for beating him when he was a freedom rider. So I am sure that the little old ladies who wrote those letters now, over a period of time, would see that the university has not been distraught. It has been gone to big and better things. They probably have changed their political thoughts too.

00:15:49 [no question] RR: Yes Ma'am. You just brought up the Democratic Convention, and I was curious about your opinions about it. There was a column that appeared in this past Sunday's *Rock Hill Herald* that was speaking to the *Friendship Nine*, the fact that they were excluded from attending the convention. I don't believe that it was a deliberate oversight, but it does bring up the question..... *Answer:*

CR: I am sure that they had such a long list, that they had to prioritize that list. I thought it was most inclusive: women, minorities, and various religious groups, across-the-board kind-of-thing, but I'm sure they had to choose. Having John Lewis there for me just brought everybody in. I would have fallen under that umbrella. So I didn't necessarily need to be there to speak, because he was there speaking for me. And perhaps, in his own way, he was speaking for the *Friendship Nine*. That is the way that I see it. They couldn't have everybody

there. But he was a great one there to represent us because we know what he went through.

RR: Mayor Gantt, as well?

CR: I'll go back and read that article.

RR: Yes Ma'am. It was by Andrew Dys.

RR: Of course, we are living in an era now where we have had the first African-American president, President Obama, so you have seen a great deal of political change and acceptance unfold in statewide and nationwide politics; but what are some areas that we still need, in your opinion, some progressive changes in?

CR: I think one of the things is the disrespect they have paid to President Obama, that is, *Obama*. He is not *Mr. President* as others have been addressed. They don't realize his awesomeness and what he really has accomplished. If you haven't walked in those shoes, you don't really understand the magnitude in what he has done as a person, not only being black as a *person*, but all of the things that he has had to overcome to get to that position. As for his personality, intellect, and coolness under pressure, people don't know how to handle this, because this is not stereotypical of how black men act. So they can't put him in a box and predict how he is going to respond. They have never really seen the *real* Obama; they've seen the *political* Obama. I am sure, behind those doors in the oval office, he goes to the *hood* when he has to, as past presidents have done as well. But I would like us accept that, if he goes back, he will be *the* President of the United States. He has said and done some things that I don't agree with, but I still respect him as the president. Just as I didn't agree with a lot of what President Bush did, he was still the president; so you respect the office, you know. But I would like to see us come to the fact that the person representing the *country* as next president may be Mexican-American. The next president may be Asian-American. It will be a long time before we get another *WASP* in there, because of the demographics of the country. *It is changing*. So, this is the reality, whether they want to face up to it or not; *that is going to be the reality*. He won't be the last black president; so we've got to adjust; we've got to learn how to accommodate. We've got to learn how to respect other views. I teach African-American literature. Today we were talking about it in class, comparing my cultural background, and came across religious views. So everybody in my class said: *Ok, Christian values - everybody does not have Christian values. What do we mean by Christian?* We are talking about Christ-like. We have to understand, as I was telling my class, that we are very diverse in here, so we have to talk about *values* that work for the *good*, because they don't necessarily have to be Christian to work for the good. So this is where so many wear blinders; we can't see right

from left; and we haven't been able to accept other people's views. They have rights to their opinions. Our country is changing. I don't agree with same-sex marriage. I wish they would say *family union*, because I think that families can be made of various persons; they don't have to be male-female. You may have grand mammas, aunts, uncles, cousins, and *whomever*. So I would like to see those people, who live together as family, allowed to have certain benefits. This has nothing to do with being married; that's my own personal take on it. There are views of people who want it one way or the other; and neither would be inclusive.

00:22:47

*Question:* Earlier you mentioned of the possibility that the next president could be an Hispanic-American. What are your views about what is happening today with a lot of the Hispanic population, including those Hispanics who are here who have not necessarily had the opportunity to go through the proper channels to be in this country? What are your opinions of the treatment of those people? *Answer:*

CR: A lot of those people did not come here on their own; they were brought here by their parents. They have worked and made contributions to society, and there is no way for us to catch all of the illegal immigrants and run them all back. So, I agree with the amnesty program of people signing up and going through the process of becoming full-fledged citizens. They do make great contributions to the country; *they work!* People say: *they don't pay taxes.* Well, if they are working on a job, and have social security cards, obviously they are paying taxes. You know, we have so much misinformation about them that I would like to see an amnesty program. There is no way that we can just round them all up, like we tried to do with the Japanese-Americans during WWII, fence them in, then send them back. I think that it is not practical nor is it realistic. More are coming while we are trying to fence in the ones that we have. And I think that they would be willing to come forward if they knew that nobody would be deported, for the exception of criminals. A lot of people came here because they were hungry and looking for better jobs in this land of opportunity [we call] *the American Dream*. The question is: *What is the American Dream?* Has the *American Dream* changed? Can I expect my children to own a home, have a good job? I stayed in one job for 37 years; that is not going to happen to my children. The whole dynamic - we are looking at a global situation. It is no longer our little South Carolina and the United States. Everything we do is connected globally now. We impact the whole world with what we do and what we say; it happens instantly now. While we're sitting here talking, you can take my picture and *flash it to Sweden!* It's in *real* time. I don't know if you have read *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, who wrote about the brave new world we live in; I think much of it is coming true. I read that book in 1954 as a freshman in college; and that, besides the Bible, has become the one book that I remember, because I see so much of it happening. Growing up with Dick Tracy, as he talks to his watch. *It is*

*happening!*

00:26:34

**[no question]** RR: Along with that, globalization also brings greater opportunities. For, in the best term I can find to describe, it is a type of *cultural assimilation* where, instead of the separation of races that we are seeing, we are seeing a mixture of bi-racial, tri-racial, and quadruple-racial types of communities. *Answer:*

CR: You can't look at a person and say that she is black, or that she is white; you can't tell. I have two beautiful poems. One was written by a young lady who is Greek and black. Everybody thinks that she is Mexican because of the color of her skin; but she is not. She wrote the most beautiful poem *The Colors in Me*. I'm talking about her looking black to me. I wouldn't know that she was not black, but we were talking about living in America as a minority; for she *is* a minority. I have a Panamanian-black student. I have another student who wrote about "That's not my name" because she is very fair, nice hair, beautiful eyes. People *called her out* by her name. She said: *That is not me; you don't know me; that's the outside that you see, and that's not the person*. That made me think about my class too, because I am teaching African-American lit. We really need to be teaching Panamanian-Africanism. I couldn't convince my dean to teach that. He wouldn't take that class. I just see us becoming more diverse, when I look at my own grandchildren and my children.

RR: And I recall reading in one interview that you mentioned that you have a native-American white ancestor.

CR: I have been very fortunate that I have been able to research it back to find that the Plairs came to South Carolina in the 1700's. They owned slaves in Fairfield County, SC, where some of them settled. The slaves took the names of those who came over from Europe. On one side of my family I have some cousins that I can research back to the Cherokee and the Catawba Indians. I think that most people in SC are racially-mixed in some form, [as are] some of my family from the Sharon area. You can go up there and look at them! The classic example is my grandmother's family of four sisters. My grandmother, Sarah, was the oldest; and had she chosen, she could have passed for white from her hair and skin color. The next sister would fit onto any Indian reservation, with the hair down to the waste, the skin figures, and the coloring. The next sister, Smiley, was black and darker with different hair texture; and the baby sister had brunette hair, light eyes, and could have chosen to pass as black if she wanted to. These were all full blooded sisters. If you talk to other African-Americans they can tell you the same thing.

CR: My uncles are all very, very dark, all the other way up to very, very fair. But

they are all brothers and sisters; they are all family and I claim all of them. Remember, *one drop can make you black*. If they had one drop of blood (laughter), married and fostered into the family, they are family to me. Some people have hang-ups about half brothers and sisters; I don't have that. They are my brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. We have such a short time here on earth, and that to me is not an issue that I want to waste my time on trying to decide. We are all humans, so I would rather spend my time with the humankind rather than worrying about all these other kinds. We don't have enough time for that. And I think that people need to come to that realization when they are talking of making policies, determining where the infrastructure is going to go in the cities, and [planning] where to put the schools. We are going to have to look at where the needs are and who needs it.

00:32:03

*Question:* Dynamics of segregation, de-segregation, integration, and re-segregation? *Answer:* RR: Yes Ma'am. And that brings up another question that I have. When I was doing my research, [I found that] you worked with several years with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system, and you came there at a time when, I believe, there was busing – '67 to '68. If you would please, what are some of the insights that you had or recall at that time when you were working?

CR: When I was working in 1954, the same year that I started here in August to work in York, I went to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. They were still segregated, and I was transferred from one high school to another high school for integration purposes. They were trying to put [black] teachers there and [with it] had sensitivity training. I didn't go. I was just berated when I [finally] did show up; and I thought to myself: *Why, I think that I know how to get along with white people. White people need to learn how to get along with me! I don't know need to come here to this training.* But I worked at Olympic High School, where there were riots there in the school. We had a young man in one of my classes whose uncle was a *Klansman*. But he took the black history class, the first time offered in the high schools. He became so liberal once he got into that class, after learning some things about black people and what contributions they made in history. But, *you see*, he had been taught differently, not seeing the other side. I would think in two or three years' time I saw integrated couples on campus. Young high school kids were a little more flexible; interracial mixing was starting to happen. Of course, because of where they lived, they were sociable at school, but at night went back to their still-segregated neighborhoods. But it's only when you integrate the whole unit, not only the schools, the neighborhoods, and the jobs, that you have *true integration*. What we had was de-segregation, because it was so isolated, but, you know, now we have re-segregation in schools because whites are moving out of the inner-city and leaving the blacks in certain school areas. You [now] have affluent blacks [leading to another issue] in classism. Besides

racism, people are facing classism believing: *If I can afford one of those 1.4 million dollar homes, then I can take my family out there in Ballantyne. I won't be there with those people off of I-85, over there in that area.* So the distribution of the wealth has also changed the dynamics of things: the haves and have-nots.

00:36:00

*Question:* Plans A & B: Alternatives in Teaching and Learning? *Answer:* RR: What are your opinions about charter schools and the impact that charter schools may have, or not have, on types of classism that you speak of?

CR: I don't know a whole lot about them. I went to a parochial and private school, so I personally am not totally in favor of public education, the way that we have it set up in the United States. The classes are too big; we don't have the resources for everybody. I do think that not everyone needs to go to college; [therefore] *you need plan A and plan B.* If you want to go to college and take those classes, *fine.* A lot of kids have an A average, but they don't necessarily want to go to college. They may want to be cooks, barbers or yardmen; [and] they should have that choice. They took vocational training *out* of the schools and need to put it back, because teachers do not *make the money.* A plumber *makes the money.* Somebody who is fixing our air conditioner will *make the money.* About the service industry - We are placing the emphasis on higher education; *yes,* we need it for those technical jobs because *you don't have enough jobs for everybody who wants to go to college.* There are going to be but so many slots, so, *what are you going to do if you can't get the job and you majored in communications? What is plan B? I hope that you can cut somebody's hair!*

RR: I'm very glad that you brought this up because, I also remember in previous interviews, you discussed that need to have a plan B. How long has that been an ingrained philosophy?

CR: For me?

RR: Yes Ma'am.

CR: I think it probably started when I finished college. I told my mother that I didn't want to be a teacher; I wanted to be a religious social worker. I majored, in undergrad school, in religion, and got a minor in psychology and a double major in English because I liked English and enjoyed reading. I dropped out of the math program and got into the English program. My mother insisted that I go back and take teaching, beginning with practice teaching. Well, I fell in love and got a job with the "Y". They were going to send me out to do social work, but I was in love. So what can I do? I had to have a plan B, which was having the teaching credentials. So I have been in a classroom for 52 years, therefore I tell my students that they need [to prepare for] Plan B [and consider this]: *Your husband*

*may move to Ghana, or move to Liberia, or move to England. His job may take him there, so what are you going to do if you can only do one thing? Even if you go to college, you need to go to tech and pursue an alternative degree, so when you get laid off from your regular job, you will have something else to fall back on.* But most of the time guidance counselors don't do that with students; they just give them plan A; leaving the students frustrated when they can't do it. We have a lot of student athletes at my school. When their leg goes, what are you going to do? This is not a long-term career. Everybody thinks they are going to the *pros*. It's not going to happen; so, if you are good in history, then major in history; you might become a commentator. I also learned that everyone wants to be in communications. You don't make money in front of cameras; the money is made with the writers, and, I think, in radio with people who sell marketing. That is *where the money is*: behind the camera. Spielberg is paid to act as well, but he makes money in writing books and directing. So we have to learn that *you are going to have to get your hands dirty*. Nobody wants dirty hands; they all want to start off as vice-presidents or assistant to the president (laughter). Nobody wants to start in the mailroom where one can learn the logistics of the whole business and move on up. So, by the time that he gets to the top, he knows where the problems are and can solve them. But you have to get your hands dirty.

CR: A lot of young people are coming out, taking the administrative degrees, and becoming principals without becoming classroom teachers. Therefore, they can't empathize when that teacher comes in and tries to explain [the fact] that she has 35 five year-olds in her kindergarten class. She thinks: *what are you going to do all day, take them to the bathroom and wipe their noses?* But they can't see that. They say: *By October, you are supposed to have them at this benchmark.* That is one of the things learned from Chicago, how do you judge, or not, if someone is a good teacher? - By the test scores, if you have a perfect class, *yes*. But we don't have a textbook class! You are sending me kids, some with ADD, some from reform school and broken homes, some who are totally out of it, daydreaming, or [afflicted] with some health problems. I may have 30 kids and have 30 different IDPs to work with. So when I give them that standardized test, do you expect all of them to pass? *There is no way.* *Yes*, there are certain basic skills. They need to know their ABC's, and be able to write their names, these essential things that everybody needs to know how to do: reading, writing and arithmetic kind-of-thing. But there are just some skills that those kids are not going to learn. Their attention span is too short, but that same person may make a great horticulturalist. We have not come up with a test that you can say is standardized of one that fits all. How can you give a teacher a job description when you expect her to be a mother, father, parole officer, counselor, minister, and doctor? Wearing too many hats, she doesn't have time to teach.

00:43:00

*Question:* Do you have a good observation about some of the changes that have

occurred over time in educational assessments? What other observations have you made regarding changes in the classroom and the educational methods with students? *Answer:* CR: We have allowed our academic standards to be watered down so that an old school teacher like me, when teaching freshmen in college, has certain expectations from them, but they have not been taught skills. When I try to teach them through these skills, they become offended, [because] they have become so smart, and have been told how smart they are, and how good they are, because they are good athletes or good singers, or anything else. They were quiet in the classroom, didn't cause any trouble or were a discipline problem. So I spend a lot of my time just working on the basics. I tell them to write me one good sentence, don't give me 2 or 3 pages of bad sentences, just one good sentence. We've been practicing, in my conversation class this week, writing a one sentence essay, and you would be surprised how many sentences I got for a one sentence essay (laughter). One question in class this week was: *Which book have you read recently and what impact did it have on you?* They might say that they were reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; and it showed me the various situations that they have found themselves in that can have disastrous results. That is a long, complicated sentence, but that is the whole essay. I know that they read the book and know what it is about, but getting them to put it into one sentence grammatically is a challenge.

00:45:00

*Question:* Your children are now grown adults. A lot has been chronicled about your children and what happened after you graduated from Winthrop, when you became a career woman and, at the same time, a mother. What about your children? *Answer:* CR: I think that I was fortunate because I had so much family support from my in-laws, my mother, husband, and everybody. So the boys did not feel neglected; they had family supporting them a lot. My husband and I often talk about how blessed we were. The children tell me that *Mom, you are a trip*, because I do things that are *out of the box* for most parents. We tried to teach them that their choices have consequences, that you need an education or some kind of training so that you can work. We have been very fortunate.

Our oldest son finished USC-Lancaster and went into the Air Force to become a maintenance person on an aircraft. He got a job at US Air, stayed there for a number of years, got married, and had a family. He is now a communication engineer with a company in Virginia that deals in bandwidths and pictures for cable television, also dealing in government contracts. He is in the National Guard, so he goes out to Andrews [Air Force Base] when the president is flying out, because he is in communications. We have been truly blessed. He will turn 50 this year, and he has two sons: one in the Navy and one working and getting ready for school in Washington. Of the two, the oldest one finished high school at 16, and the next one was going into the Air Force Academy at 16, *thinking that I had ruined his oldest brother's life* (laughter). So he stayed back in high school

an extra year, losing his scholarship. I should have been the mama who said: *Boy, You are going to Colorado, even if it is cold out there!* He started at USC in Columbia, went to Winthrop for a semester, and was one of those kids, real bright, but, kind of, hadn't found himself yet, who went into the Navy. From his time as an intern at Duke Power, with training on that nuclear sub, he became a nuclear engineer. He went to UNC-Charlotte, got the mechanical engineer degree, and then went out to Berkeley, on a free ride, to finish as a nuclear engineer. Now he works for Florida Power and Light Company. He has a little family, a little girl, some older children, and has done very well.

I have a daughter, Oresa, who is divorced and living with me, with her twins. She is an entrepreneur and has a salon. She has been in a lot of different businesses, such as catering, and has worked at a shop that sells novelties, t-shirts and all that kind of stuff. She has also been in the record business - just a lot of entrepreneur stuff. The only thing that she ever asked for as a child was a cash register, at Christmastime. Hopefully, with her boys at home, she may go into childcare. We are hoping to have a home daycare because the boys are autistic and are in public school now. She has to quit [work] because she has to take them to all of those appointments, unable to take on a regular job, and having to be there to take them to different things. So, we thought, since she has to take care of them anyway, she may as well have a home daycare. I have been very fortunate with these children.

Thomas, the nuclear engineer, in his thirties, came home one Easter and said *Mama: I am going to sell my house and go back to school.* I said: *What are you going to be?* He said: *I am going to be a doctor or lawyer.* I said: *You're going to be 70 years old when you come out.* He said: *I guess I'm going to be a 70 year old doctor then* (laughter). They [the boys] didn't necessarily go straight out of high school into college. Like most young people, they found their way around. Jay decided, after the oldest one, that they realized that they needed that *piece of paper*. Thomas said: *I was doing the job, but not getting the money because he didn't have that piece of paper*, the reason he was going back. My daughter has an associate degree, and eventually she may want her bachelor's. I say that she doesn't have to. If she can make money for her family, then that is fine. I always say: *Monkey see, monkey do*. Her Dad and I would want our children to do as my parents modeled for me. Then, hopefully, our grandchildren will follow and do well. But they don't have to follow in my footsteps. I tried to make them realize that they are their own person. They don't have to be *Mama*. I said: *This is what I wanted to do and what I loved to do, but you don't have to because I did. You can blaze your own trail, be your own person.*

00:52:00

*Question:* You just mentioned your parents. What type of impact did they have on you and how you perceived your role in life and society, as a teacher and

educator? *Answer:* CR: My paternal grandfather was a builder and carpenter. He built a lot of houses, owned property, even worked on Tillman Hall as a painter. And he did not have a formal education, but he loved music and art. He exposed me to the fine arts, was civic minded, and well known in the community. My grandmother was much younger than my grandfather. Uneducated, yet self-taught, she founded seven churches and was a minister for fifty some years, until she was unable to do that. She was a mid-wife, owned a lot of property, and had a store and a garage. My grandparents were really hard-working people. So we *saw* that, you know. You had chores; there was no sitting down at their house. My mother's grandfather was a brick layer, even had, with other brick layers, a school in Rock Hill. He passed that on; his sons were bricklayers. My grandmother was a contemporary of Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and I'm trying to think of somebody else she told me: Mary McCloud Bethune. I am trying to remember if she went to Barber-Scotia [Livingston College]. I'm trying to remember some of the outstanding people in that period.

And while she [my grandmother] didn't get to finish school; all of her daughters became teachers. My mother and father were both teachers. As early as I can remember, I was reading at the age of 3. I think the first thing I read was Rock Hill Body Company, because my granddaddy had printed that sign. Every day they read the newspaper; listened to radio; and read the Bible. You know, there were no options aside from going to church. I mean, *we went to church*. My grandfather was an Episcopalian; my mother was Methodist; and Mama Jordan was Holiness. We had a kind of ecumenical family back then. I am Lutheran, my husband was Baptist; my children are Baptist, and I am truly ecumenical now because I attend Salvation Army Church (laughter). But religion was never a contention; we all went to the different churches. Wherever you were, you went to that church. Whatever house, you went to that church. I think that I was fortunate to have been born in 1940. I remember the day the war ended. You had the blackouts. My granddaddy had a 1935 Ford and my daddy was driving from Board Hill back to Brooklyn. He was not blowing the horn because this was an old car. He said: *We can't be blowing that horn*. People were flashing those lights, and stuff like that. I remember when the war ended. The neighborhood - neighbors said: *Don't worry about going to school, you just go there and learn, because the Klan had been going through, this kind of thing, and don't worry, you will be protected and your house will be watched all of the time*.

00:56:00

*Question:* So the Klan was in your neighborhood? *Answer:* CR: Yes, they had been in the neighborhood, and the talk was going on about it. That was not anything unusual for that period of time, what was going on with the beatings and that stuff. I would look at that little black and white television and ask: *Is this America, is this my country?* The stuff that we saw during the civil rights movement – Birmingham - we were actually looking at that, and I would think

that this is the kind of stuff that we hear about in other countries, in South Africa, where they have Apartheid. *But why is that happening here in my country?*

CR: Our neighborhood, Brooklyn, ran from Hagins Street, where that water tower is, all the way down to where the old Rock Hill Body Company, by the railroad and the bleachery, down in there. And that neighborhood had doctors, teachers, grave-yard diggers, just a whole cross-the-spectrum kind of thing. But all the children were protected; you could go to anybody's house and they would feed you, like *the village raising the child* kind-of-thing. So if you lived in Brooklyn, and you were doing something you had no business doing, you would have to worry because Mrs. Lizzie Skeet was going to get you; some other folks were going to get you; and the teachers lived in the community, so they knew your parents. So you couldn't cut up in school; you would get a whipping when you got home, kind of thing. But I think I was blessed to have been born during that time, to have been influenced by those teachers like Mrs. Adora and Paul Clark, Richard Boulware, and those who had gone to parochial schools. They demanded excellence from us because of the way that they had been taught and trained. We were doing Shakespeare and doing advanced math way beyond what the curriculum required. I remember in my eighth class that none of us had to take that test over because they didn't think the scores could be that high, [presuming] the teachers had changed the grades. But it was because of our exposure to it, you know.

There were no escalators in Rock Hill, but I knew what escalators were because I had read about them. And I also had been to Charlotte where Ivey's and Belk's had them. But, you see, our children were not exposed to this. You would be surprised by the number of children, when I worked in Charlotte, who had never been from their neighborhood to the *square* downtown.

*Today you don't have the exposure* – like, I am talking about to the children in my class, when I mention certain books: *Today I found a list of 100 books that you should have read before you go to college, and a list of 53 that you should read before you leave college*; and handed them the list, telling them: *You have four years, 2 books a month for the next how many months you are in school. You should be able to do this.* Nobody has said to them: *You need to read.* I read cereal boxes, and soup can boxes. That is casual reading, but you would be surprised how much you would learn. Going back to casual reading, I have been a lifelong reader.

01:00:40

**[no question]** I think a good teacher is a good student. You learn from the students. I got papers [back] today from [the students] who were supposed to do *comparing*, with a sweet note from my Angela. Somebody gave me a chart. I wasn't even thinking of a chart when I told them to make a comparison. Another

person had a checklist. You just assume they were going to write paragraphs. *You can't assume anything.* So I learned that, *ok.* Somebody asked me: *Can I do a graph?* So I replied: *If you going to do a graph, you could do two pie graphs. Then you could have religion, school; a great idea!* So next time I may make that an assignment to use pie graphs and to use power points. So these kids [today] have technology. When I came along we had pencils. So their thinking is widely different, far different from the way we thought. But I don't say they *have* to do it this way; as long as they complete their assignment and if they get it correct. I tell them: *If you give it to me in whatever format, as long as it's MLA, we are all right.* So there are so many ways of doing things now; you can't just do it one way anymore. If teachers are not willing to accommodate different types of learning styles, then they will not be very good teachers. I am very critical of myself when students don't do an assignment, thinking that I didn't explain it [well]. I start with myself and go back to look at what the assignment was, and ask myself: *was it clear, was it ambiguous?* Then, *no,* sometimes they are late, they didn't listen; then I start to look into *why* the assignment went wrong. I try not to give F's. I give I's, which mean *you need to see me.* Either I did not explain it well or it wasn't understood. I am becoming less rigid. Like today, somebody brought me a paper. I said: *Well, I have seen this paper already one time today* (laughter). *Would you like to have until Monday to go back and redo this?* In other words, I could have slapped an F on it and given it back. But I don't think that is really teaching them because they will accept an F: [They reason:] *Well I turned it in and made an F on it.* But when I made him realize: *You could put this in his own words, you can use this, but you need to rewrite it because I have already seen that one time.* Well, I have professors who have a fit because their students have their telephones, sitting there texting each other, across the room, the answers to the questions. I don't care, because, most of the time, they cannot write it grammatically correct (laughter). So I grade them on the content and the grammar. They are probably going to end up with a 65 or a 60 when I get through grading their papers. So I don't feel like they are cheating. *Yes, let them use that texting.*

01:04:30

**[no question]** Maybe I am getting too old for this job, feeling that my time is about up - 52 years. I enjoy teaching the internet to senior citizens. That is the most innovative, energizing class that you would ever want to teach. To teach somebody, they have to be 55 and over and have never sat in front of a computer before. And by the end of the semester they are doing greeting cards; they are doing stationery, they are emailing; don't let them find jokes (laughter). I had one, Mr. Therrell, who was on the city council, who was in my class. He would find a joke and mail it to someone. That was the joy of his day (laughter). But I think I am a work-in-progress still. I feel comfortable with myself; like when I got that thing from the alumni. I thought: *I am going to this reunion. I won't know anybody there, but this maybe one of the few times that I'll be physically*

*able to go. I think I'll go and see what this is all about.*

01:06:00 Question: I have a question that I have had in my mind from the earlier interviews that you had done; and you had hinted at this, maybe not hinted, but you did a pretty good job of expressing how you felt. You had been progressive at the time. You were an African-American woman, married, with two kids, and you were a graduate student in the 1960's, when it was very uncommon. Today it is everywhere. But we all also talked a little bit about, what you could call, an *insider/outside type of status* and some of the psychological impact that that had. To what degree did you feel like an outsider then versus, like, now? Answer: CR: Well, at the time, I was taking care of two toddlers and commuting to work. I didn't have time to be really involved. I would say that this was a two way street. If there were honor societies, I didn't seek them out. I think I had a knack for singing in the choir but I didn't come to a lot of activities on campus. So there would have been more of a two-way street if I had become involved in some stuff, like the newspaper or study groups. I don't remember anyone inviting me to study with them, or anybody saying: *Let's have lunch today*, nothing like that. There was one teacher - one of my sons had an English teacher who was working on her degree at the same time; and I might see her in the bank, but never here on campus. We were not taking the same courses, that kind of thing. So it was, kind of, like being an invisible person. You are sitting there, you are in class, but you are not *there*. Like, somebody might turn around and say: *Did you get your assignment?* I had no conversation with anybody. I think too, if I had been an undergrad; that being the difference, then I would talk to other undergraduate students. I had one of them to tell me of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her coming here. She came back to a black alumni event; she had not set her foot on this campus in 25 years because of the treatment that she got in the dormitory and the negativity that she felt. *Now see, I never thought that.* When I think of going to homecoming, I go to Johnson C. Smith. I didn't think of coming to Winthrop because I didn't feel like Winthrop was my home school. I just didn't feel that bonding. I think once they got the black alumni advisory group, it made a big difference, because then I came back to a lot of things. I went to Dr. DiGiorgio's Christmas parties, where I felt comfortable. Like, I never even thought about coming over here for anything. I now think that the campus is beautiful; at night it is marvelous. When I compare that to when I was here before, and how I think now, with so many black students, nobody pays us any attention *again* (laughter), because we are being *assimilated*.

01:10:00 *Question:* Do you think that perhaps we are heading toward a color blind society? *Answer:* CR: It won't be in my lifetime, or probably not in your lifetime. It's going to take a long, long time. This is so ingrained in our institutions. If you just listen today to the rhetoric of this political campaign, in Romney's diatribe, without even having the facts, assumptions are being perpetrated. I don't know

how we are going to stop it. The disadvantage for young black people is that they don't understand the struggle or know what this was all about. They look at us and say: *What are you talking about; what's your problem?* We talk to them about their image, the way they wear their hair, the way they talk, the way they dress, and the way they use language. *This is important.* They don't see that until they go out there and see the real world, or it meets them. Then they start being turned down on their jobs. One look at their name, and they are tossed aside automatically. They've got to be the superstar. They have to be something really, really special. So, how do you get them to understand *what* the struggle was about, so that they can appreciate it, so they can grasp that history and make it part of their legacy? *I want to do better, you need to open the door for me, I want to go in and get a seat at the table; then I want to move up to the head of the table.* How do we get them to understand that, and to appreciate the blood and the tears that went into it? I think part of it is the family structure. I knew one of my great-grandparents who died in 1943. I don't remember much about her, but I remember when she died, looking at her in the coffin, then being brought back home. We couldn't go to the funeral because we were about two and three years old; but I remember that. With having stories told about your family, and having a sense of history and belonging, there is loss in that. You have to be very careful, especially with elementary children when you have them write their biography; because a lot of them don't know *who* their parents are. They've always lived with grandmamma; there has always been an uncle or somebody in the house, not daddy, but some uncle or somebody, or some man. Little children just tell everything. In my assignments I stop asking them for their biographical information because it is embarrassing sometimes for some of the children. A sister-in-law, who teaches African-American studies, said that she puts a *Who Am I* on her papers. And in that, you are not asked specifically for parentage and siblings. They can say: *I am so much like my mama or aunt;* that way it can get it without them feeling like they are going to be embarrassed by it.

01:14:14

*Question:* Do you think that there may be a disconnection between today's college generation and their roots, their family history, or do you think perhaps there is an evolution in their understanding of family and community? *Answer:* CR: Well, somehow or another, when I was coming along in the 40's and 50's, Dr. Spock came along with this thing. We swung way over this way from being so lenient. So, those parents' children said: *We don't want our children acting like theirs.* So, they went back the other way. There doesn't seem to be any movement now; there is *stagnation*; and we've hit this void here. Either you have those students who have family and community support or you have these other children, over there, who are seeking support. It's not that they don't want it; it's just not there for them. How do we bridge that? Some of them get it through athletics; some of them are fortunate enough to find internships, working or finding it through the

church; but not enough of them do. We have too many of them who are left behind. You talk about *no child left behind*; we have too many of them left behind. And the language is different; sometimes I say: *What planet did you drop off from this morning* (laughter)? Because you are talking, the language is so different. I even went to a site where I was looking for those books. I couldn't print that out [because of] the language and the cursing it in; I said: *I can't take this to my class*. Even though the information and the book they were recommending were good; I couldn't recommend that site.

CR: We don't have any standards of decorum anymore. My teachers used to say: *You don't have any couth or behavior*. We had this discussion about Madea, the character in Tyler Perry. I was telling the class about this stereotype: this is someone's grandma who smokes pot, carries a pistol, curses, and will hit you *up side of your head*. And some of the people said: *She is a good character*. I said: *Yes, and she teaches good lessons, but that is not the person I want to represent me as an African-American grandma*. Not to declare that Claire Huxtable would be the perfect grandmother either, because she is the other extreme. She's too good - *a goody two shoes*. But they will identify with Madea before they identify with Claire, because they see so many people in the hood like Madea, and can identify with her. So, we talked about Tyler Perry, the character, whose message is good. *But the one who is bringing the message is not necessarily the good*. And trying to have them to think critically - there is nothing wrong [with that]. I enjoy watching Madea, but what do you bring away from her? A lot of people bring [back] the boisterousness, uncouthness, the funny side; and they forget all about what she is saying: that she says you need to take care of family, to work, to be kind, and to take care of the less fortunate. She has a good message; but it is lost in the character. And, of course, he [Tyler Perry] has been criticized for this; but this is his way for getting out his message. I think he does a good job. He not only has her, but he has other good characters. Do you watch Mr. Brown?

RR: Yes.

CR: Mr. Brown is a good character, but luckily he's got Will, who can counterbalance that, and that was what was wrong with the early TV programs. They had *Amos and Andy*, but they didn't have anything to counter that, so that you could see the other side.

RR: Right, Right. Exactly.

CR: I also noticed with the new fall programs, I didn't see too many black or minority programs in the fall lineup either this year.

01:19:17 *Question:* It is interesting that you bring up proprietary. I grew up watching on Saturday morning Bill Cosby, with a lot of the same messages that you mention that were also taught or instilled in that type of Saturday morning program. At the same time do you think that, perhaps maybe, there were some stereotypes that were reinforced in that type of programming? *Answer:* CR: Yes, [Some of the stereotypes were reinforced by] the way the kids were dressed, and some of the activities that they were involved in. As for Fat Albert, now many of our little children look like him. But, in some times, I guess you have to look at the whole context of getting the message across. You can't always come out and see it directly in the message; so, sometimes the artists used subconscious and subliminal messages. In my grandfather's era, a black man didn't go downtown dressed with a tie and shirt on; he always wore overalls with a hat and jacket. [To wear a shirt and tie] people would say that was being an Uncle Tom. But those men who did that were able to take care of business, and be able to get loans and able do all of this other stuff.

RR: The message was that they were dealing on the same plane.

CR: That's right, that's right. If you think about the timing back in the 40's and 50's they could dress up when they were at home in their neighborhoods on Saturdays and Sundays, whatever they want to do, but [in order to achieve what they needed to do] they weren't being Uncle Toms. They were using any means necessary; I guess, that is where I'll go, by any means necessary to get what needs that I can get for my family.

RR: So, it was like playing up a differential role but really.....

01:22:10 **[no question]** CR: I can't remember the author, but there is a book called *We Wear the Mask* [by Rafia Zarar]. So, a black person has two faces: the one they need to use in the white world, and the one they have in the black world. And we have always had to wear the mask.

RR: Did you feel like you had to wear that mask on you while attending Winthrop?

CR: I think that I just went to class, to library, to home. So I didn't have that interaction, but I am sure that those undergraduates did. Because I am sure that there were many times when they did, times when they felt like slapping someone upside of their head when they said some of those things to them, just really *showing up and showing out*. But they couldn't do that. They had to have that mask on to keep that dignified persona because that was what was expected of them. To start cursing, throwing things and acting out, *they couldn't do that*. And if you think about it, you hear about people losing their jobs, wearing Afro hairdos, and dressing a certain kind of way; because it doesn't fit the corporate

image. *And it is hard for young people, because I am me. I am not going to change for anybody.* [To simplify:] *Do you want a paycheck? Do you want to eat? You can't eat that attitude, so from 9 to 5 you are going to have that tie on, but as soon as you go out and get in your car, you can take it off. You are on your own time; do what you want to, let your hair down* (laughter)! But getting them to understand that - they don't understand why they have to do it. It is because they don't realize the history of how far we have come from having to step off the sidewalk, to be able to walk proudly down the middle of the sidewalk if we want to. We don't have to move over; and that was quite a struggle.

01:25:00 *Question:* Yes, speaking of the time of sidewalks and integration, when bathrooms and water fountains were marked *white men or colored*, while attending classes at Winthrop, did you ever encounter...? *Answer:* CR: No, they had not marked the bathrooms (laughter). As I've said, they ignored me. The week before school opened, two police officers came. They were Mr. Roseboro, and I can't remember his first name, yes, Frank Berry. They were probably two of the first black policemen on that Rock Hill police force, and they came out to tell me that they were going to be my security, and not to pay them any attention, and so when I left home that morning they followed me to campus. I arrived early. I think my time was 8 [something] for registration, but I arrived early because I didn't know the campus and didn't know where the bathroom was. I was upstairs in the Tillman Hall, when there was this rushing around, as if security was not expecting me. Typically, *black people are always late*, and no one was looking for me to be early (laughter). So that threw a wrench in the security plan. But registration went smoothly; and afterwards I got my books, id, and all of that. Dr. Davis [the college president] called me in and asked how did I want to handle the press, did I want to go out and meet them? I said: *No. I would prefer the college to handle the press release, and all of that, because I had seen what had happened on other college campuses.* I was here to study. I didn't want the media and want them following me home, and all of that. Afterwards, I went downtown and got some stuff, and Mr. Roseboro and those folks followed me. It was funny, when I got to my house they were just waiving. They told me to ignore them; but I think they were really proud for me for that day, you know. And in a way, I think, Winthrop was a peaceful integration because it was not court ordered. It was a woman's college and the police department had worked together, because nobody could come on campus without a legitimate reason; they just didn't have people *wandering* through. So I think that I got off to a good start. And that may have had, maybe, a positive effect for the other students, because it did not interrupt anything. You know, it did not inconvenience them anyway.

01:27:49 *Question:* Was that your first meeting with President Davis? You had no prior meetings or telephone conversations. *Answer:* CR: I just got that little card in the

mail, and I sent it back. They said what time to come and *that was it*. They didn't contact me or anything. And I think that if you look in the archives of things that I've read, the trustee board had decided it would be good business for South Carolina and for Winthrop not to go to court; that they were trying to bring in business in the upstate of South Carolina, and we wanted a good image. But, you know, can you just imagine if we had white women standing in line with placards and all of this other stuff; that would, you know, that wouldn't have bode well for the college. So I think they took a proactive approach to the desegregation. Also John T. Roddey was on the trustee board, and he was a relative of my husband, tracing back to the Roddey history. And my sister-in-law told me that he called her and wanted to know who I was. I kept saying that I know of approximately ten other people who had applied. Why was my application *the one*? Because I don't think I was the smartest person in those ten people who I know, but on paper it looked great: honor graduate, member of two honor societies, had passed the graduate record, and gotten certified as an elementary teacher by taking the national teacher's exam. On paper, just great, you know! But looking at the other people, what, and you know, what was it that kept them, or why weren't four or five of us chosen? Why was it just one? My sister said it was because of John T. Roddey, who was on the trustee board (laughter). I don't know if that was true or not, they told me, I think I read someplace, where Governor Hollings looked at my transcript, which I would have thought was illegal, why would the governor of the state be looking at my transcript?

CR: So it was a political issue, to have the college handle all of that.

RR: Right. And of course at the time you were filling out that application there were no check boxes, like what you see today, for white or African-American.

CR: They knew I was black from that application. They did know I was black. I'm almost positive they knew because the newspaper report came out that there was a black teacher who was planning to integrate. So if it wasn't on there, they had investigated it and found out that I was.

CR: I am quite sure, and I have always wondered why, that out of all of those applications, mine was the one chosen, because I would not have considered myself the best of the people applying. I thought that they were all a lot smarter. I wouldn't have picked myself as *the one*; and I don't think you can ask those people now how they could have chosen this *one* (laughter). Out of all of those chosen, it has been life changing, because at Charlotte-Mecklenburg I have a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law, who, with me, did practice teaching in Charlotte schools. We didn't even get interviews for the job. It was at that time when you had to know somebody.

CR: Her principal *recommended* her. My principal, where I was practice teaching, *didn't* recommend me; and Raymos [spelling?] *did not* get recommended. So we didn't get jobs in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. He worked in Monroe, and I was working in Rock Hill. But as soon as Dr. Hurrah called on the telephone and said that he has a student who needs a job; sight unseen, he told me: *Go on up to Charlotte, you have a job.* But it did open some doors for me economically. The experience that I had enabled me to be an assistant teaching principal and become a media coordinator, getting another certification, being a teacher-scholar, and things that South Carolina did not have career-wise. Being in Charlotte had an advantage. It meant a long commute, but I had an advantage; so it opened some doors for me.

01:33:15

*Question:* Do you think that part also helped open some doors for you growing up? Well, you mentioned family; you also lived in different areas of South Carolina. *Answer:* CR: I only lived in Rock Hill, but my grandparents were in Charlotte. I went to Greensboro and I went to Kinston. I have a younger brother who is 13 months younger. With a baby in the house, I tried to farm out babysitting to aunts and uncles and grandparents. The first opera I saw, my grandfather took me to see Porgy and Bess at Johnson C. Smith University back about 1944-45, something like that. I think that the exposure that I had made a great difference in my life, particularly being exposed to my grandfather playing the violin.

CR: My mother was a musician; anything that she heard, she could play. My daddy played a little bit and sang, and my grandmother composed songs around art. My granddaddy had etched an eagle in glass on my brother's bedroom door. He ornately decorated the child's bed and fireplace. The other grandfather cast flower pots from molds, one which I still have. Just being with creative people and being exposed to books [helped]. And I remember going to NAACP meetings in North Carolina. My uncle, who was a state secretary of the state NAACP, worked for NC Mutual Insurance Company. Seeing Thurgood Marshall, not at that age really knowing who he was, was there in the state meeting. I think that kind of exposure was an enrichment that you can't get just from books.

01:35:00

**[no question]** CR: Book learning is good. I also think that, besides that, if you don't have common sense you might as well not have book learning. I think that I have learned to use what I learned from books wisely. That is just the pattern, the perfect situation. But life is not perfect, so you have to adapt that to your situation where you are. And I think that I have become very apt at that. It has been a wonderful life. I have very few regrets. And I think that the Winthrop experience was a season that I had to go through. All of us have to go through changes. I went through Immanuel Lutheran Boarding School. It prepared me to go to

school anywhere. The education that I got at Western Elementary School, over there with the bathroom outdoors up on the hill, prepared me to go to Lutheran; and Lutheran prepared me to go to Johnson C. Smith. When I got to Winthrop, the curriculum was not nearly as stringent as what I had gone through at Johnson C. Smith.

CR: And when I think about it, to make an A in *John Milton*, you have to have exposure to mythology, religion, history, and theology. And so for me to be able to come out of that class with an A is a tribute to all of the other stuff that I had before I got here. And I am very thankful that I had those teachers who did not allow me to turn in chicken scratches; that I had to write correctly; that it had to be neat, and it had to have substance. It just couldn't look pretty; *it had to have some substance*. I am glad that they taught us how to think. Yes, you have heard somebody say something, but can you find other sources to support their theories? And if it is not there, then there is a fallacy in it, and can you find the fallacy? After you look at it, can you go back to them and say how you thought about so-and-so? I tell my children: *Be able to think on your own. You can't take that person's brain with you, relying on him to do your work. Yours has become a California raisin, drawn up for lack of use. Don't rely on your classmates. He might be right this time, but you can't trust that. Use your own brain.* I think that that is important to students.

01:38:54

*Question:* So, which teacher at Winthrop had the most profound influence?  
*Answer:* CR: Dr. [Joanne] Harrar [had the most profound influence], and I can't remember her first name for anything, was head of the library. I was taking library science, and I guess that her impact on me was that she did get me the job, and she did see me all the way through, up until I got ready to take my orals. I walked in and she wasn't in there; she was outside. There were three other people I didn't know, not one person. With the first question they asked, my mind went completely blank - nervous probably. I couldn't remember a thing. *Ok, let's go on to question #2.* And so by the time we got to the end, they went back to question #1. I just decided not to write a speech but take the oral instead. So I passed it. I didn't know what graduation would be like, with the media and all of that. I told my husband: *Let them mail it to me.* But by that time, after 3 years of constant studying and trying to keep up with all of these hours, I was very tired. And I said, *ok*, I just didn't know what to expect that day. There were times when I wish I had gone home. It probably wouldn't have been like the first day. It wouldn't have been a big deal by then because the other schools had graduated students.

RR: You've also acted as an advisor to the XI Delta chapter of Sigma Beta Sorority and served on the black alumni advisory committee. How did these

opportunities arise, and can you speak to your opinions in regard as to how black sororities and fraternities may have helped with integration of blacks to traditional white institutions over the years?

CR: I am a lifetime member of Delta Sigma Beta sorority and one of our policies is that the undergraduate chapter has to have a graduate advisor. So, by being a member of the Rock Hill chapter, you can train and become an advisor and work on campus. While I was here as an advisor, we took in white students; so Delta Sigma Theta is an integrated organization. It is not just black only [but] it is primarily. A majority of the members are black-educated college women, but it does not discriminate in terms of membership. By meeting the requirements, which are academic excellence, service, and potential for leadership, they are invited into membership. They don't apply but are invited. So, I think, having those adults on campus probably is maybe one of the reasons that a lot of kids stayed, because they had some identity and some unity on campus. Last spring I was here for Jazz night with the Deltas, and their program was integrated. They had white singers and students playing in the band. A man won the scholarship; a male student won the scholarship! So I think there was some activity there, a good thing; and I am sure that they do activities together with other sororities and fraternities that are not PanHellenic. I do see them sharing and doing things which, I think, help a lot. - [Three sentences are inaudible.] - As Deltas, we do a lot of volunteerism.

RR: Do you think that was also a way for you to feel more connected?

CR: Yes, it did. They gave me a sense of belonging because when I could come back I felt comfortable. They have had conferences here that I attended. The black alumni have had breakfasts, and have asked me to speak a couple of times. It does give me a sense of belonging. This is the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary; *what is the college going to do?* For the 30<sup>th</sup>, they asked me to be the convocation speaker, and they made a *big* to-do over the males who came. I even wrote Clyburn over this, whatever he was in South Carolina. They published a book that Harvey Gantt was in, but they didn't mention any of the black women who had integrated - Henrie Monteith at the University of South Carolina, didn't mention her. There's nothing about us; nobody has told our story, but it is always *Harvey*. I don't belittle what he did. He fought in a court case. I didn't have to do the court case. So he really was a trailblazer.

01:46:22 *Question:* Did he, in some respects, help to pave your way? *Answer:* CR: Yes, certainly, [he did pave the way] if you go and read the things that he said happened to him. Nothing like that happened to me. That was why I was looking at Winthrop through rose-colored glasses, because I didn't have anybody *calling*

*me out* for my name. I didn't have people writing on the walls or doing stuff to my car, you know, all of those kinds of things. I remember watching *Eyes on the Prize*, sitting down and looking at what was going on in other places at that time. I started thinking: *Wait a minute, maybe I did not get the physical and verbal abuse, but there was some psychological abuse there that I did not realize at the time.*

CR: There were a lot of pictures of me going around. So when I was walking across the campus, with the other maids, they thought I was one of the maids. They didn't know me. So, the other students, and those whom I had classes with, did not come up to say: *Welcome, Can we go to lunch together sometime or something?*

RR: Now, did that change when others were admitted?

CR: I think that for them, probably not [there was no change]. I think the change came with the ratio, when we started getting more and more black students, and they had more support of each other in the sororities and the fraternities. I think that is probably when the acceptance came, because, like I said, we had white members, and I think there were some black guys joining white fraternities. So I think that it was probably in the 80's and 90's before there were enough of them here to feel included. And too, the vice-president - I am trying to remember her name; she was on the school board in Charlotte, and David Belton was working here, when we started getting people here in administrative positions: Dr. Cain on the faculty, then Moody. Now you retain some black faculty over the years, so I think that that has made a difference.

01:49:26 *Question:* What do you think of the ratio? *Answer:* CR: We have the largest of the [South Carolina] state universities. I think that the ratio is higher at Winthrop than at any other state school, according to statistics. They have had those outreach programs, like Clemson; but I think that Winthrop works more with the counselors, and the alumni go back to their neighborhoods and talk about the school, encouraging those in the area to come here. That makes a big difference. Students are curious about coming here, and I think that it makes a big difference. Right now, we have had students from Clinton to come and become president's scholars, graduate, and come back to teach at Clinton. We have a young lady, in the NASA film program, coming to Winthrop in January to take environmental science. I have had some family members to come here too (laughter).

RR: Who was the girlfriend's name who suggested that you first come to Winthrop?

CR: Her name was Louise D. Rinehart.

RR: Louise Rinehart, was this also this the same girl who got fired from her job?

CR: No. The other lady was Ms. Callie Thompson. Ms. Callie's daughter and I were life-long friends. We still are. Mrs. Callie makes the best yeast rolls (laughter), and their house was over at the Todd Lumber Yard. Her daddy worked for the Todd Lumber Yard; and we would go from house to house in the afternoon after school to study. When you went to Mrs. Callie's you would get hot yeast rolls. She was a cook, and she said that her boss lady asked: "What do you think of that black girl going to that school?" She said, *Yes, I think she should go*, and [for that answer] she claimed that she fired her.

RR: Just for expressing her opinion?

CR: Yes. She said: *Since she [Cynthia Roddey] was qualified, she should go*. Mrs. Callie knew me all of my life, and her house was, like I said, in my neighborhood. There were five of us who are lifelong friends. One day [in grade school] we may study at my house, and tomorrow we may study at somebody else's house. But there was always corn bread or tea cake. Those five girls would always be there studying or playing after school. And that went on from first grade through eighth grade, until I left to go to boarding school.

RR: Truly a community.

01:52:41

**[no question]** CR: On Sundays the AME Zion Church had a program called *Buds of Promise*. The ladies would take us to church with them, and that meant that you had to be dressed correctly and sit like little ladies. They taught us etiquette and taught the *whole child*, one advantage of being in a segregated school. We lost a lot of that when our schools were desegregated because those teachers knew these children and knew their families. If you needed to wash your face, they would wash your face. If you needed a pair of socks, they would give you a pair of socks. They dressed you. I remember Mr. Boulware [spelling?] telling us to wash the bottom of the pots when you wash the dishes, and how to be a help with housekeeping. It was holistic learning. They taught you everything. You had to know how to speak. You had devotions and had to know hymns and Bible verses. It was just - you can't compare - I don't know anything that you can compare that to in terms of today's education. Today, my little boys are coming home in the afternoon. Last year they had homework. I think that yesterday was the first day they brought home homework (laughter). *They may be beginning K-5, but when they go to first grade they will be given homework. If you don't give them some this year, they won't want it then.* I told my daughter: *I am going to have to provide them with homework. I have parents who will step in and take up the slack. They have a reading list and you have to fill this thing out.* I said: *What*

*about the children who don't have books in their homes?* Some days she sends them books, and some days she doesn't send home books. That doesn't mean that she is a bad teacher; it doesn't mean that. It just means that she has ten children, ten males with learning disabilities and one little girl - 11 children in that class. There is a teacher and an aide, and there is no way she can meet the needs of those 11 children.

CR: One out of 88 children last year, a third of my class had some type of learning disability. I don't know how it is at Winthrop. They can't discriminate against them; they *must* take those with disabilities. I know that York Tech used to have a program for those with disabilities. But we are dealing more and more with that. That means that you need more and more personnel. I have always said: *You shouldn't let somebody come in there and work on your child's brain, with six weeks of practice teaching. You don't let a brain surgeon work in there without a year's internship.* And if I was director of the education program, I would insist on at least a year of practice teaching. Most of the time, they put you in with the master teacher and the best class. The first day that little 21 year old person will stand up there with her perfect lesson plan and read it before those 40 children; and a lot of these classes have 40 children in them. That's why she does not stay in education; she is not prepared. She knows the course work, but she doesn't know what to do when this child starts screaming. It may be because no one is paying him any attention, or that, all of a sudden, he is so excited, and he can't verbalize how he feels. He may be bored, tired, or sleepy; but if you have ten others doing the same thing, or doing something different, she is not prepared for that. Practice teaching does not prepare these young teachers in dealing with the myriad of problems.

01:57:35

**[no question]** CR: In the classroom that I was in, when the teacher said: *Sit down, shut up, take out your books*, you sat there, shut up and took out your book! That's not happening now. Sometimes they will ask you *why* (laughter)? Some college students ask: *Do I have to write this down* (laughter)? *Do you mean that I need to read this?* That is the way the situation is. And what are we going to do? One time I thought: *We don't really need teachers, we need robots.* I figured that out. Eventually, the average age of the faculty over at Clinton might be close to 60, because a lot of retired teachers are working there. The faculty is getting older and older, and can't cope with these young people. We really can't; but we try. We do the best that we can. Our skills are so outdated that we need to go back. I am always online reading some course, reading the research. One of the things that I wanted to teach is the five paragraph essay. There is someone online saying: *Don't teach the children that anymore, we don't need to teach that in college.* Looking at all the different methods, what is the best practice, what is working at this college may not work at another college. You have to keep up;

you can't just go in there.

CR: I had one psychology professor who taught normal psych, child psyche and adolescent psych; and she had one notebook for all three classes. It won't work; but I got all A's in those three. If you took one, you already had the other two! But she was a great teacher, she really was. Her thing was: *whatever you need to accomplish the mission, then that is what you use. You don't hesitate.* We called her Mama Byron. She didn't have children. *Everyone wonders how I can teach this.* [She would say]: *I have Baby Bryon at home.* Baby Byron was a baby doll. She would say: *If you don't have a hat, put a wig on.* She was allergic to wool because she always wore these beautiful silk dresses. In her class, back then, you had to write on the board. [Words of wisdom:] *You can't type; you can't type in front of your children, so you have to know how to write correctly.* This was common sense that you needed in the classroom: about life and how to deal with children. I remember, when walking across the campus, a boy and girl sat [high] at the same post. Mama Byron went over and got her down - correcting children when they need correcting - disciplining them. She was very, very blunt: *Come on over here, so and so.* And when I think about it, she was a great teacher. You knew that she cared about you as a person, that she wanted you to succeed and give you whatever you needed: eyeglasses, a hearing aid, tutoring, or whatever you needed to make you a success. I've had students to refuse to go get tutoring. It is not mandatory; it is a suggestion: *After looking after your work for the first few weeks. It would really help if you go to Trio and let them help you with your writing skills. I may not have time with my class load to take you individually, but they will schedule a time for you.* [They answer:] *I don't need that.* - Getting them to see that they need help, because you cannot require it - College is always self-disclosure. They don't have to tell you that they have a disability. You just start to notice it by their work a lot of times, because they don't read well, write well; they act tired in class. [As for] college students, they try to distract; they start looking [around too often]. These students need a little more help.

CR: Something that one of my co-workers taught me, and I am still using, is to see certain groups on certain days and see other groups on other days. I was so relieved because I was not trying to make the ones who couldn't do, do and keep the ones who could do from doing; so the ones who are capable, I can take them. I can give them the syllabus, and they can, pretty much, work on their own. So I can devote time to ten students who need help, opposed to having 23 in the class. And that comes from [experience] all of these years; it was so simple. The other simple thing I learned was [the value of] the whistle. I would tell them to stop talking, then blow a whistle to get their attention (laughter). I would say: *Who is being rude to me?* Everybody would start looking around, and one smarty would raise his hand, and I would say: *Well, thank you Johnny, I appreciate your honesty, but I need you to be quiet, please.* Some things you just learn through

the years working with children, especially with discipline. Not that there is much you can do discipline-wise but just blow a whistle. All of this time, when teaching, I have been pulling out my hair. I would now say: *Are you being rude?* And that is all it took (laughter)? There are some of these things that they don't teach you in practice teaching, not in a book. Other teachers use other devices to get discipline in the classroom. I just stop talking, [thinking]: *I am not going to try to talk over you. Whenever you are ready to learn, I'm ready to teach.* Especially with freshmen; they have to test the boundaries, and see what they can get by with. After the first nine weeks when they get those first term grades, I don't have much trouble, until the end of semester. They are making new friends; being away from home for the first time, having new liberties they didn't have; but they are [still] trying to taking advantage of me.

02:05:40

*Question:* What was the most inspirational moment that you had with a student?  
*Answer:* CR: I think one that happened recently, this week on Monday, was with a student [named Chisolm], whose personalities clashed with mine last year. He is a basketball player; and just one day [last year] he went off in class. I don't know what happened; he just went *off*. Maybe there were other things going on; I don't know. I said: *You are going to have to leave my classroom, and you may not come back.* Well, the dean begged for me to take him back because he was a basketball player. He is in my class this year and recently he came to me. My students [for an assignment] have to write and choose an African-American writer, and from the standpoint of not being *just* a writer, try to narrow the topic down. Someone is doing Martin Luther King, maybe [about] peace and the war aspect. [My instructions are:] *We are not writing a long paper - but [should pick] some aspect of his life; maybe as a student; because he had a brilliant career as a student.* Chisolm said he wanted to do [Louis] Farrakhan or (Elijah) Muhammad, both Muslim leaders. I said: *Let's check and see if they had written any books, and they had.* - [He picked one] - And I said: *Ok, look at that, and do him as a writer rather than the spiritual leader.* He is going to look at his works to see what he wrote, and I said: *Fine.* He said: *Dr. Wright, I am so excited about this paper.* I thought: *What? I am so excited that he is doing this paper.* To get a student excited - He stayed back after class Monday, asking me to make sure that he was doing it *right*. And this was a student who been [in trouble] in my class. So somehow he has matured, and is a sophomore. Before, he was never in any trouble in that class; he just went *off* that day. But I think that whenever I can see that they have *found it*, it is *eureka*. With me it is what inspires me with my students, when I can *get* them. I have one student who I am about to become a *mama* to, I think (laughter). She hunts me out every day! She needs somebody who will listen to her. Now one time I had a student who [regularly] checked out a tape recorder; and I asked her: *What do you do with this tape recorder when you take it home each weekend?* She said: *I talk to it.* And I said: *Why?* I found out that she was 16 years old, dating someone 30 some years old, a much older man.

When she was in the vocational honor society, they had a banquet. She said [to me]: *Mama is not going to come*. And I asked: *Is your Mama not going to come to see you get this reward?* No, she said. So I went to the banquet with her. By the end of the year she was no longer checking out that tape recorder. Sometimes they will want you to *do* something for them, like needing somebody who will listen. And if you can find out what is bothering them, or some kind of hurt they have, you can let them know that everything is *all right*: [I told her:] *You are going to make it*. I have had students to come back and say, like the young boy going off to Livingston: *I would never have gotten on the school paper had you not encouraged me*. I said: *That was because you can write, you can really write!*" I know that it is just the little things you do, just saying, especially with little children: *Don't you look nice today, I like that hair pulled*. It is seeing them as a *person*.

CR: Somebody, somewhere along the way, like my freshman English teacher, Mrs. Woodard [spelling?], gave back my first paper with what looked like *the measles* on it, with all of the red marks (laughter). But it was ok. [She wrote] *You've got the content there, but you didn't execute the mechanics of it*. And I could become an English major from criticism [like that] in the very beginning. By the end of that semester I was getting A papers because she cared enough not to put an F, or little notes, up there. [Likewise] if the paper is not good, I would say: *You have a few good sentences*. You need that support, not just a low grade; but [I remark]: *You can bring the grade up if you do such-and-such*. I don't know how you learn or teach that. Maybe I really never wanted to teach; but perhaps I was born a teacher and didn't know it, without any idea that I had that talent. I have threatened to quit but [inaudible] told me the kids needed me. Then I thought: *Don't do that because they bring their children to see me; I have a lot of [former students who were] grandchildren who finished high school and college and they want me to see their children*. That makes me feel good, and I keep thinking: *Well, you don't see yourself as other people see you. I don't really see myself as a great somebody; I'm just me*. I think I'm willing to listen and that I am a good listener. I know that I talk too much, but I am willing to listen and give whatever talents I have, because the Lord is lending them to me. *They're his*. Because they are his, he can take them back anytime he gets ready. And so, therefore, I must share them because somebody one day shared with me. And I guess that is my philosophy: you can't get anything in your hands with your hands closed; with them open, you may lose everything in them, but something is always coming in.

02:13:13 *Question*: That's a great philosophy. How do you want to be remembered: a person, an educator, or a torch-bearer at Winthrop? *Answer*: CR: It is hard; you know, sometimes you have to step out and look at yourself. I guess [a memory of me] would be that *I gave of myself*. I am not selfish with my ideas; and if

somebody else has a good one, I think they are worthy of praise and should be acknowledged for it. I don't think that my ideas are always right; I'm not always right. But I'm willing to share my knowledge, my time, and myself because that is all that I have to give. I don't have any money; I do not have great wealth. But I think I am a fairly good writer; you'd be surprised to see how many people ask me to write things for them. I am willing to do that and there is no fee attached to it. [I tell my friends and students:] *Okay, I'll be happy to write up that plan for you; tell me what it is. I can write it; I know how to do that.* That is a talent I have. I think I would like to be remembered as *one who gave of herself*, because that is all that I have. That is all I brought into the world; that is all that I'm going to take out. *Has somebody seen a hearse rental car going behind a hearse (chuckle)?* You can't take it with you.

CR: And I think that you ought to use what you have while you are here to enjoy it. I love seeing my friends happy. I have 50 friends I met in college that I still see, and we communicate, and that kind of thing. And when I go there and I see them happy and enjoying life, when I hear about good things about Winthrop, you know, I think that is a *good* thing, things like that. I think that you need to let people know when they have done good. It is too late after they close the school down, and you say: *That was a good school; that really was a good school* (laughter). So I tell my children that I'm not leaving them anything. They are going to have to take up a collection to bury me, because what little I have, we are going to enjoy it together. I think that the best Christmas we ever had, we didn't give gifts. We went to my little son's house; he just bought a house in Wilmington. We went down there and we had egg nog; and I didn't know the egg nog was spiked up, you know, I kept drinking it from the large Coca Cola cups (laughter). But just we sat around and talked and enjoyed each other and ate, and we had one grandson so he had something under the tree. We decided not to give each other presents, that we would give to each other ourselves, just enjoy our own company. It was the best Christmas we ever had. Because sometimes money can't buy what you need. We needed family time because, luckily, Tommy just served eight years in the service; he was now home. Jay had served that time in the army; he was now home. You know, we were blessed to have them back home with us. So we were thankful. My children also said: *Mama, what date are we going to have Thanksgiving this year?* I said that I was thankful *all the time*. And because I have in-laws, I try to consider their feelings. You know, and I said the family may want to stay with Mama this year; so I'll have Thanksgiving the Sunday before Thanksgiving, or I may wait to have it the Sunday after Thanksgiving. I don't have to have it on Thanksgiving Day, because I'm thankful all the time. [The children would say:] *We would like for you to make up your mind so we can make plans* (laughter). And that is why my children tell me, that *I'm a trip* because they don't know what is going to come out of my mouth next. And I think that is a good thing for parents. You should

not be predictable. My students don't know what I'm going to say next. I *want* to keep them on their toes. Today I told them I had to leave early because I had an appointment and some place to go. They kept talking, and I said: *What time is it?* The president, who happened to be the student body president, said: *It's 4:00, Dr. Roddey.* [I replied:] *This day has gone by so fast. No, it is 3:20!* [I joked:] *Look at the person you selected to lead you all!* I enjoy my class, and probably I fuss about it. I look at the resources; I don't always have what I need to work with. I came through it a time when we didn't know anything about running those [inaudible] sheets off. Today I just make up my own questions, even though I have the book and the manual, and all of that. I don't follow that, you know. I didn't know anything about going out and buying something to put on the bulletin board. We made our own bulletin boards, kind of thing. You utilize what you have. Sometimes there is not always money in the budget. You get what you need [inaudible]. [At one time] they didn't have enough money to buy dictionaries. We can't moan and groan. I think that we do too much complaining.

02:20:00

**[no question]** I guess that I want to be at peace. I want peace of mind. At my age, I am 72 years old; I don't want to be concerned about stuff. I guess I am too close to going over to the other side. I don't have time for all this foolishness that is going on. *Yes*, there's going to be some bad days, and *yes*, we are going through hard times, but when was it when we weren't having some hard times? You think about the history of the United States. Some of us have had it a little bit better than others [have had it]. We never knew we were poor when we carried those [inaudible] large buckets as lunch boxes. We had no idea we were poor, because our bellies were full with whatever was in there; it could have been cornbread with molasses on it, or whatever else you had left over for lunch for the next day. But we *all* had something to eat. I remember when I said that I never wanted any more *mammy-made dresses*, because I was tall. When my Mama's dresses were too short, she would put flowers on them. I didn't want any more flour sacks, because during war time; they took those flour sacks back. I didn't want any more flour sack mammy-made dresses! [Now] I do make a dress if I need to make one. But we [always] had something to wear. My house was heated by a wood stove, but we had wood to put in it. And if you think about it, that was hard life coming up. We had a community bathroom out there over on Main Street, in a little row of houses with toilets in them, because not everybody had a bathroom in their house - *hard times!* We survived; we were healthy; we were happy; and you think about all the stuff. [Recently] I looked at the guy who was running in the Olympics with no legs. I thought about all the guys who were sitting in their homes someplace, watching it, just sitting there, not doing any kind of exercise, not involved in any kind of community service, and not using their legs to go find a job. So what are you complaining about, why are you complaining when you are truly, truly blessed?

02:22:37 **[no question]** CR: I sit here and look around. Winthrop is truly blessed; it really is. And the students who come here get a blessing, and hopefully they will take that blessing and bless somebody else. If they would give of themselves, then it won't be all about their paycheck.

RR: Or the color of their skin.....

CR: Yes. They won't have to decide whether or not they are gonna give CPR or not to a person [because of the color of their skin]. You know, because of the blood, they didn't use to share blood to save somebody's life. Hopefully, in time, we'll get to that place. But I think that the United States - their policies - we have a lot to pay for. We're still going to have some bad times; people are going to have to suffer as a result of government policies that have been made. As Bill Clinton said: *There is no way in the world in four years down the road, even if a Republican president had been in there, we would still be seeing this, and I think I hear economists saying that even four or five years, we're not going to be out of this.* And this is a global thing; it's not just happening here in the United States. That's what we have got to realize, this is not just us. But some of the decisions we make impact other nations. So we've got to think about that; because, if people are starving in China, we also have some people starving here too. So we've got to look at a global food plan, a global environment plan. And now that we are trying to get out there in space, we are going to have an intergalactic plan (laughter). We are going to have to think way beyond that.

RR: I have really been looking forward to meeting you and doing this oral history.

02:25:24 ***End of interview***