Melanie D. Hazlewood

Helen Gregory: Eighth grade science teacher at Clarksville High School (later becoming Bluestone High School) during the time of integration.

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Tape # Hazlewood/Gregory -01

Melanie Hazlewood: I'm Melanie Hazlewood and I am here with Mrs. Helen Gregory, who was a teacher during the time of integration and the first question I would like to ask is where did you grow up?

Helen Gregory: Lynchburg, Virginia.

Melanie Hazlewood: Okay, So you're not a native of Mecklenburg County?

Helen Gregory: No.

Melanie Hazlewood: Okay, and did you go to college in Lynchburg as well?

Helen Gregory: No. I went to JMU. It was Madison in those days.

Melanie Hazlewood: Uh huh, And um, describe the type of college. I mean, was it integrated at the time or...

Helen Gregory: No. It was all women at that time. And lights were out at ten o'clock and we had housemothers. And um, just because lights were out at ten didn't mean that you all went to bed at ten o'clock. Lights were out at ten o'clock and we had a housemother. There were no men allowed on campus except for special occasions. And then you met them in Alumni Hall. And dances were in the gym and we danced all night. There was no sitting down. We called them dances and we danced.

Melanie Hazlewood: It was a whole lot different from college now.

Helen Gregory: Yeah. I don't know what some of the dances are. What is slap dancing? I read somewhere that they were doing slap dancing and I can't imagine what that would be. But, anyway, that's not part of your question.

Melanie Hazlewood: I don't know. When did you know that you wanted to become a teacher?
Helen Gregory: Well, you know, when I came along there were not a whole lot of openings for women. And, uh, teaching seemed the best at that time. Well, when I was in high school and we had people come to lecture about different professions and I thought teaching would be the good thing to do.

Melanie Hazlewood: Was there any specific thing that led you to teaching or just...

Helen Gregory: No really earth shattering moment.

Melanie Hazlewood: You just thought it would be the best profession as a female?

Helen Gregory: Yes, I did. Uh huh. Unless you wanted to be a secretary or a nurse there were very few other um, fields open to you.

Melanie Hazlewood: Was anybody else in your family ever a teacher?

Helen Gregory: No. I had two older brothers. They both went to Tech. One was in electrical engineering and one was in business and I was the only teacher in the family. My mother did not teach.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, where did you begin teaching?

Helen Gregory: In Clarksville.

Melanie Hazlewood: Oh, okay. Right here in Mecklenburg.

Helen Gregory: Yeah! I came to Clarksville and taught at Clarksville High School. That's when I met my husband. He lived here in Boydton and uh, two years... I taught at Clarksville for two years and then we were married. And I stopped teaching for a while.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, what was a day like at Clarksville High School?

Helen Gregory: Well, you taught so many different things in those days. I taught home economics, general science, biology, girl's physical ed. You had a full day. There were no planning periods. Yeah.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, were most of the teachers white like yourself?

Helen Gregory: Oh, yes. All of them were. All children were white and all teachers were white.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, when was that? If you don't mind my asking.
Helen Gregory: No. I graduated in 42. So, that was June of 43.

Melanie Hazlewood: That was way before integration in schools.

Helen Gregory: Oh, yes.

Melanie Hazlewood: Especially around this area.

Helen Gregory: Oh, it wasn’t even thought of. No. Gracious no.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, were you teaching in ’54 when the Brown Decision came down?

Helen Gregory: Ah, Yes, I had gone back to teaching then.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, what was the atmosphere like in the school when the decision came down, as far as…

Helen Gregory: Leery. Um, we didn’t know if this was going to work. It seemed impossible. And, when they finally decided to, I didn’t think it was right to close the schools to keep from integration, but I didn’t think I could do that. So, I decided to drop out for a while. But, I didn’t stay out long. I had a friend who was going into the hospital for a hysterectomy, who needed someone to help her for six weeks. So, I couldn’t say no, I went back. And, then I kept going back whenever they needed something else. So, eventually I just went back to full-time teaching. And, it wasn’t that bad. Ya know? One of the funniest things… The spring before the next season when we were going to be integrated, the cheerleaders from the black school came over to practice with the cheerleaders from Bluestone. And they were in the gym and I’m sure the Bluestone cheerleaders went over to the black school too and they were getting ready for the fall to cheer together. So, I sat down in the gym to watch. And, um, the black girls were doing pretty good. They learned the white moves, but the white girls never got the black girls’ moves. They got it together before the fall and they worked together okay. But, it was really funny to watch them.

Melanie Hazlewood: What were their, um relationships like… I mean between the blacks and the whites?

Helen Gregory: Sort of skeptical of each other. Didn’t know whether to trust you or not, that kind of thing.
Melanie Hazlewood: Because they had never been around each other before, certainly not in a school environment.

Helen Gregory: No. For the most part they were just... excuse me just a second. The telephone would ring. [pause] But, you know it's a funny thing. Um... it didn't take you long to realize that all white children weren't smart and weren't clean and all black children dirty and dumb.

Melanie Hazlewood: Was that the general opinion?

Helen Gregory: Sure. Uh huh.

Melanie Hazlewood: From most of the faculty? Most of the faculty had that opinion of the black students?

Helen Gregory: Uh huh. We didn't expect them to be able to make it in the classes with the white students. But, that wasn't the case.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think that the standards at the black schools were lower than the standards at the white schools.

Helen Gregory: Sure. Not as much was expected of them. They had very little supervision. Their materials were brought to them, you know, and they were left pretty much alone. So, I guess they did pretty good to do as well as they did.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, in what year here in Mecklenburg County did you really see full integration?

Helen Gregory: Oh, gee. I've forgotten what year it was.

Melanie Hazlewood: Was it 1970?

Helen Gregory: Probably so.

Melanie Hazlewood: You think so? I know my mother graduated from Bluestone in 1969 and she said that the next year was full integration.

Helen Gregory: I believe she and my son graduated together. Is that right?

Melanie Hazlewood: I'm not sure.
Helen Gregory: I’m not sure about that either.

Melanie Hazlewood: Are you familiar with the Massive Resistance movement that was here in Virginia.

Helen Gregory: You mean the Farmville area?

Melanie Hazlewood: Yes ma’am.

Helen Gregory: Sure. Yeah.

Melanie Hazlewood: How did that impact Mecklenburg County? All of the things that were going on in Farmville?

Helen Gregory: I don’t think it... In my little world, we watched with interest what they were doing and didn’t think they were doing it right. But, rather admired their spunk I suppose in standing up for what they believed in... they were so opposed and this was their way of fighting it. But, of course, there is still some proof of that now. There are people who did not get the education they should have. Ya know... another funny thing. After I got back into teaching, we had this form to fill out for each class of whites and how many blacks in each class. So, I brought it home to fill it out that night and ya know, I couldn’t remember whether they were black or white. I went down the roll and I could not remember whether each child was black or white. They were all kids to be taught. And, um, I had to go back the next day and look at them to be sure. It is funny how it works that way. You forget whether they are black or white. They’re just students.

Melanie Hazlewood: That’s true. Do you think that the other teachers you were teaching with at the time felt the same way or were some of them opposed to integration?

Helen Gregory: Some did. Some did not. Well, some people just could not do that. My parents couldn’t have. They were dead by that time. The idea of their daughter teaching black children... they could not have accepted. It just was not acceptable. That lingers a long time.

[long pause]

Melanie Hazlewood: So, what grades did you teach?
Helen Gregory: Eighth grade science. General Science. My major was home economics and my minor was science. But, after teaching home ec. at Clarksville I taught General Science the rest of the time. I taught for thirty years all together.

Melanie Hazlewood: Was the school considered a good school or was it considered a poorer school?

Helen Gregory: Bluestone?

Melanie Hazlewood: Yes Ma’am.

Helen Gregory: I think it umm… I never thought about it that way. I don’t suppose it ranked with the city schools and yet, it was a good county school. It didn’t carry some of the courses that some of the larger schools carry. Well, I go back a long ways from the Boydton High School and the Clarksville High School. That too was a good thing. When we had the Boydton High School here we that’s all we were responsible for. Anything that happened at the school, we all went. Whether we were involved or not. But, then when they went out of town of course, we didn’t feel responsible.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, do you think that the atmosphere of the neighborhood was closer then since the school was here and everybody spent a lot more time together.

Helen Gregory: Oh, yes. Sure. You knew the teachers and you knew the students and you knew their families and that’s the way it was.

Melanie Hazlewood: And that was before integration?

Helen Gregory: Yes. And then we went to the big school where we didn’t know all of the students and we didn’t know all of the teachers and it made a difference. But, then we integrated and we knew fewer.

Melanie Hazlewood: And you knew less about their ways of living?

Helen Gregory: Yes, or their backgrounds. We didn’t know what their feelings were about so many different things.

Melanie Hazlewood: Were any special efforts made to achieve integration in Mecklenburg County?

Helen Gregory: If there were I don’t know about them.
Melanie Hazlewood: So, it was basically just accepted and everybody adjusted together?

Helen Gregory: It was a law. There was nothing we could do.

Melanie Hazlewood: That’s right. Were the school districts redrawn after integration?

Helen Gregory: No. I don’t think so. Of course, the black school became the middle school and the high school joined Bluestone and Park View. We didn’t used to have a middle school.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, how did the integration of schools affect you personally?

Helen Gregory: Well, um, it made you a little leery you know. You weren’t as comfortable. I had to change my vocabulary. I used to say “son, do this”, or “boy, quit that”. And you know, you can’t say that anymore. So, you become a little more withdrawn and more cautious of what you say. It’s not as open as it was.

Melanie Hazlewood: Even then, did the black students use a different dialect that the white students?

Helen Gregory: Yeah, uh huh.

Melanie Hazlewood: I know you see that a lot today and I didn’t know if it was as evident then as it is now.

[pause]

Helen Gregory: Yeah. Looks to me like the dress code changed a lot after they integrated. Seems to me that the white students were trying to look more like the black students. Their clothes and their hair-dos… I couldn’t understand that. I still don’t.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, after integration did take place, did the white students and the black students really integrate or did they have like a black group over here and a white group over here?

Helen Gregory: Sure. Yeah.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, even though integration had been passed as a law, there was still segregation inside the school?
Helen Gregory: Still skeptical of each other and not quite trusting each other in some cases.

Melanie Hazlewood: Were your children in the school system at the time of integration?

Helen Gregory: Yes. Well, Henry graduated the year before integration. He was my only child. But, my grandsons, of course, came along after integration. They have adjusted beautifully. They seem to see no difference.

Melanie Hazlewood: Did you talk about integration in your home much?

Helen Gregory: Uh, Not a whole lot. Before it happened we did you. The pros and cons and whether this was going to happen and that was going to happen and we were I guess afraid. We did discuss it. Come to think of it, we did. Now, it's a done deed and so long ago that we don't talk about it at all. But, of course, we did at first. What we were afraid would happen.

Melanie Hazlewood: What kinds of things were you afraid of?

Helen Gregory: Uh... That discussions would lead to outside... someone getting hurt or taking a discussion too far.

Melanie Hazlewood: Between the white students and the black students?

Helen Gregory: Uh huh.

Melanie Hazlewood: Did integration have affects on your curriculum in the classroom? Did you have to change your curriculum at all?

Helen Gregory: No. Not in science. I mean, other than my vocabulary in talking to the students. No, that was fine. There didn't have to be a change there.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think they did in history and other subjects like that so they would cover black figures of importance?

Helen Gregory: Well, too you know the history of Virginia is not what is used to be.

Melanie Hazlewood: Did they change the textbooks at all?
Helen Gregory: That fourth grade textbook. It used to deal so much with the war between the states and it hardly mentions it now so I know the textbooks at that time were changed. Now, the science textbooks were not changed. Have you seen a fourth grade history book lately? It’s entirely different.

Melanie Hazlewood: I don’t think we covered as much when I came through the fourth grade. I don’t think we talked about it. I mean, of course, I learned about it at home.

Helen Gregory: Yes, and in Virginia, it’s part of your heritage to know about the war.

Melanie Hazlewood: Especially if your family was involved.

Helen Gregory: Uh huh. Exactly.

Melanie Hazlewood: How about the parent/teacher relations? I’m sure you had parent/teacher conferences. How did you interact with the black parents?

Helen Gregory: Well, uh, most of them were just okay. The ones that I knew here in Boydton were the ones that had worked for me at different times and things like that and their children were fine and they would call me and ask me different things... One called one day and said, “Ms. Helen, my boy came home today sick at his stomach. What did you all feed him in the cafeteria today?” I said, I don’t know. I didn’t come home sick at my stomach and I ate in the cafeteria. What’s wrong with you. But, you know... things like that. They didn’t hesitate to call and continue the relationship that we had.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, you didn’t see any difference between relationships with white parents as opposed to relationships with black parents?

Helen Gregory: I had none. But, I saw some that were different. But, I didn’t have that problem.

Melanie Hazlewood: Can you describe some that were different?

Helen Gregory: Well, I remember one teacher who was teaching the child of a teacher who was black and teaching there and she thought she was harassed. This black teacher would come around and talk to her about the grades this child was getting and she thought it shouldn’t be that way. What it was, the teacher was very just. But, she had
to have something done about the harassment. Anyway, things like that did happen, but, not a whole lot. The black teachers didn’t trust the white teachers to a really great extent you know. You’re teaching my child and you’re prejudice.

Melanie Hazlewood: You think they had that opinion of the white teachers?

Helen Gregory: Some of them. Yes.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, when you saw full integration, were there as many blacks as whites or more whites?

Helen Gregory: No. There were not. It looks like to me like each year there come more black students Bluestone. It’s a bunch. Isn’t it 50% now?

Melanie Hazlewood: I think it’s 60%.

Helen Gregory: Okay, 60. And, I’m sure it was nothing like that when we started out. I don’t know where those black kids are coming from.

Melanie Hazlewood: Why do you think that is?

Helen Gregory: Of course, some of them were living with grandparents here and their parents were other places. I don’t know.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think at that time (after integration), did any of the white parents send their children off to live somewhere else so they wouldn’t be in an integrated school?

Helen Gregory: Oh, sure. Of course, there was a private school in South Hill that was a very good private school and was there for a number of years. Anyway, that school opened and a lot of our students went there. My daughter-in-law was one that went to the private school in South Hill. Her father was very opposed to integration. He couldn’t stand for his daughter to go so he sent her to the private school in South Hill. That’s a long way from the other side of Clarksville. So, she had a long ride every morning. But, those parents felt so strongly, they worked real hard at that private school to make it real good.

Melanie Hazlewood: Was Bluestone typical of the other public schools in the area at that time?

Helen Gregory: So far as I know it was.
Melanie Hazlewood: The ratio of black to white was basically the same?

Helen Gregory: So far as I know.

Melanie Hazlewood: How did the people in your family feel about integration?

Helen Gregory: Well, uh, as I say my parents would not have tolerated it. And, my older brothers were very skeptical too. They didn’t think that I ought to be teaching in an integrated school. But, everybody had to adjust. That’s what it came down to.

Melanie Hazlewood: How about the other teachers and administrators in the school system at the time… How did they adjust to integration?

Helen Gregory: Well, there were very few black teachers in our school. There were very few. I felt really sorry for them because they were very few. They got along okay I think… they weren’t good buddies, ya know, the black teachers and the white teachers. But, ya know, there weren’t many. [several words inaudible]

[pause]

Melanie Hazlewood: Were integration issues discussed at the faculty meetings?

Helen Gregory: Not that I remember. Not as such anyway. Ya know, they didn’t bring out the fact that this is an integration problem. That was smoothed over.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, you’re saying that everybody just kind of adjusted to it and didn’t really talk about it a lot?

Helen Gregory: Uh huh, uh huh. It was a done deed. There wasn’t much you could do or say to change it. You just had to learn to live with it.

Melanie Hazlewood: How did the parents of the students in the community respond to the integration?

Helen Gregory: A lot of them didn’t like it. But, as I said, unless you went to the private school you had to adjust. And, uh, you heard grumbling and pointing out facts about this, that, and the other. But, I don’t think there was any great discontent with the parents. Of course, there’s some always. But, it wasn’t a problem, the parents adjusting, I don’t think.
Melanie Hazlewood: Were there any conflicts that you know of?

Helen Gregory: Well, every now and then, like the two teachers who I mentioned. Ya know, the black student and the black mother and the white teacher. There were a few like that, but ah that mother didn’t think her child was being graded as well as he should have been. It really wasn’t true. But, they wanted to be sure that they weren’t being mistreated.

Melanie Hazlewood: So, you have retired?

Helen Gregory: Yes!

Melanie Hazlewood: You seem very happy about that.

Helen Gregory: Well, the time had come. And, um, it was a good time while things were still smooth sailing.

Melanie Hazlewood: What year did you retire?

Helen Gregory: I beg you pardon?

Melanie Hazlewood: What year did you retire?

Helen Gregory: Let’s see. I retired when I was… Twenty years ago. Can you believe it?

Melanie Hazlewood: My goodness.

Helen Gregory: Twenty years… My goodness… what has happened to that twenty years?

Melanie Hazlewood: Well, let’s talk about what’s happened in the school system in those twenty years. I mean, ya know, we’ve already talked about some things… about how things have changed in schools. But, what do you think the major things are that have changed?

Helen Gregory: Well, sitting on the outside, looking in… the appearance… the dress codes are so strange. It’s not just the children, but the faculty too. The language is so different. That’s what strikes me when I get around them. I’m told there is a dress code, ya know… that this shouldn’t be worn like that and that shouldn’t be worn like that. But, looks to me like they’re… of course, I’m just old fashioned too.
Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think that students get away with a lot of things now that they wouldn’t have gotten away with then?

Helen Gregory: No, gracious.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think that’s the difference in the teachers, or in the school system itself and the rules in the school system.

Helen Gregory: No... times have changed. More is accepted now than it was then.

Melanie Hazlewood: How do you think race relations have changed in this area since...

Helen Gregory: Seems to me that they have progressed. And, sitting on the sidelines, it seems to me that the students are getting along okay. I still have some good black friends that I think the world of. But, I still don’t invite them for dinner. It’s just different.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think it’s just different for you or is it different for everybody?

Helen Gregory: It’s different for my age group. [several words inaudible]

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think it’ll always be that way?

Helen Gregory: For my age group it will. But, now... there are young ones that feel very differently. And, that’s fine. There are so many mixed couples now. That’s a little different for me to understand. But, then I don’t have to. I feel sorry for their children. They don’t know who they are. One parent is white and one parent is black. [several words inaudible] I wish them well because that couldn’t be easy.

Melanie Hazlewood: They don’t fit in one category or the other.

Helen Gregory: Exactly.

Melanie Hazlewood: Actually, I think now they put a blank on standardized tests and everything for those children. Do you think there is anything as you look back now that would have made desegregation easier in this area?

Helen Gregory: I can’t think what it would have been.
Melanie Hazlewood: I guess it's like you have said several times... everybody just adjusted to it because they knew they had to.

Helen Gregory: Exactly. [several words inaudible]

Tape flip

Melanie Hazlewood: We were still talking about desegregation and what would have made desegregation easier during that time. And, you said unless they had closed the schools, and you didn't want to do that of course. Do you think that was ever considered around here?

Helen Gregory: I don't think so. I think the private schools were the answer here. People who felt that strongly about integration went to the private schools.

Melanie Hazlewood: It was the same way in Farmville.

Helen Gregory: Exactly.

Melanie Hazlewood: And a lot of the black students were sent to live with family members in other places where they could go to a good school.

Helen Gregory: Right... and some didn't get to go at all. And, that was the sad part.

Melanie Hazlewood: Well, there were some white kids that also didn't get to go.

Helen Gregory: Right. You're right.

Melanie Hazlewood: The poorer ones.

Helen Gregory: They were just as [several words inaudible] when the schools closed. The ones that were sent to the private schools turned out all right. But, as far as I know there were no black private schools.

[pause]

Melanie Hazlewood: I think we're covered all of these questions. So, let's now talk more freely about integration and education. Are there any other comments you would like to make or any stories you'd like to share?
Helen Gregory: I don’t know about stories, but, I wonder if the standards haven’t been lowered. More is accepted in the classroom and I don’t know. It seems to have been to me.

Melanie Hazlewood: I agree. Definitely. Of course, I wasn’t there when you were teaching, but, every teacher I have talked to who has even been teaching in the past thirty years... they just say so much has changed.

Helen Gregory: So much is accepted now that wasn’t accepted. The way students are acting. I liked it when teachers were respected and you didn’t have to support their way of living. They were accepted for who they were... they were to be respected.

Melanie Hazlewood: When integration did take place did the black students respect the white teachers as much as the white students did or was it different?

Helen Gregory: For the most part they did. There were some that looked at me and would speak out saying something that disagreed sometimes. And, it didn’t take a whole lot to take care of that.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think they were just bitter against white people all together?

Helen Gregory: Well, yes. And I think they wanted to say look at me! I’m here! And, I want your attention.

Melanie Hazlewood: Why do you think they felt that way?

Helen Gregory: Because, they thought if they didn’t show off a little bit that they wouldn’t be noticed. Not for their attire or personality or who their parents were. They were just... I want you to see me.

Melanie Hazlewood: I would think that would make it hard for you as a teacher to treat each of the students individually... or to treat them the same.

Helen Gregory: Before I stopped teaching down here... There was one black boy and he was doing something and I told him to sit down. And, he looked around at me and he said, “okay, honey”. Of course, the students were just as quiet as could be. They wanted to see a good fuss... they wanted to see what was going to be said. And, I said, “May I see you outside the door a minute?” I told him, “don’t you
dare call me honey... don't you dare. I'm going to write this up and send it to the office. You go in there sit down, behave yourself, and shut-up. He went on back at sat down. Well, the students, you know, were quiet waiting for something to happen and nothing had happened. We just went on with our class and it was improper language to teacher. So, he got a day of suspension or something like that. It didn't amount to much. Anyway, that was a very minor thing. But, it was one of the last impressions I have. No one had every tried to call me honey before and this was little black boy.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think you would have handled it any differently if it had been a white boy who had done it.

Helen Gregory: I don't see a white boy doing it. But, no I don't. I would have handled it the same way. Of course, you know, when something like that happens they really want to have some fun going on in the class... they want the dialogue. They want to see what I'm going to say and everybody is listening and enjoying. But, no. I would have handled it the same way looking back on it. That was just a minor thing.

Melanie Hazlewood: Well, it was a matter of respect for you.

Helen Gregory: Yeah. [long pause] I'm sure when you leave I'll think of things that I wish I had thought to tell you. But, I couldn't think what it was you wanted. I was glad I went back to teaching. I changed my mind about not teaching after integration. I'm glad I did. I'm glad I went back. I had some good years that I enjoyed. Enjoyed my students, enjoyed the teachers I taught with. So, they were good years and I'm glad I did it.

Melanie Hazlewood: Basically I just wanted to get an understanding of the differences between teaching before integration as opposed to after integration.

Helen Gregory: Seems to me it was a little more relaxed before integration. We were nervous about the black children... how we would integrate with them and not show favorites. And, it was just as demanding for the black children as it was the white children. They were not going to get by with not being. It's a little more tense. We finally got over it, but that's the way it started out. We were much aware that they were there. But, that faded into the background you know. Like I said, when I stopped to think if my students were black or white I couldn't remember.
Melanie Hazlewood: It just became a part of your everyday teaching career.

Helen Gregory: Uh huh. They were just students... all of them.

Melanie Hazlewood: Did any of the white teachers quit because of integration?

Helen Gregory: No. I don’t think so... I don’t think so. Looking back on it... I can’t think of any at all.

Melanie Hazlewood: After integration, did a lot of black teachers come to teach at the school?

Helen Gregory: Yes. Gradually more black teachers came in. And, then principals and assistant principals and what not came in. They were white for a long time there: the principals and assistant principals and guidance and finally they came into guidance too.

Melanie Hazlewood: Did you ever teach under a black principal or assistant principal?

Helen Gregory: Uh huh.

Melanie Hazlewood: What was that like for the white teachers as opposed to the black teachers?

Helen Gregory: Well, I think we were both sort of skeptical of each other. Waiting to see how it was going to work. And, it worked out all right. I enjoyed the lady, a black lady. And, the guidance counselor, looked like to me was very outspoken. I had been used to working with guidance counselors that I had more in common with. I remember, I had a student and I thought maybe the guidance counselor... it was the first time I was over at that school... at the middle school. And, I thought maybe the student needed to talk to the guidance counselor. So, I went into the office and stood outside the door waiting to speak to her and I heard her say, “You’re nothing but a asshole... a black asshole”. Well, at that time I’d never heard anybody called that. I’d led a sheltered life and I thought gosh, I don’t think that guidance counselor can help me. So, I turned around and went on back. But, that was different. I’d never heard a guidance counselor use those terms before.

Melanie Hazlewood: And that guidance counselor was black?

Helen Gregory: Uh huh.
Melanie Hazlewood: And called a black student that name.

Helen Gregory: Come to find out later on her opinion of that student was right. I’d just never heard a teacher in a school use that language. I’d never heard anyone called that at that time. Since then I have. But, not then I hadn’t. And, it startled me so.

Melanie Hazlewood: I can only imagine.

Helen Gregory: Yeah, that was different. That black guidance counselor was different. And, working with her was different.

Melanie Hazlewood: How so?

Helen Gregory: Well, the language. I think she was skeptical of me and I sure was of her. So, the language there and the expectations were different. I didn’t seek her counseling after that... I didn’t think I needed it. I bet she could have taught me right many words I didn’t know. I’m sure that shouldn’t go into your report. But, that’s just something that I remembered. That was something that happened during integration. I think they were used to talking to their black students anyway they wanted to. This guidance counselor for instance. That was her way of talking to them. And, the black students were so used to it. They expected it. It was different.

Melanie Hazlewood: Did you ever see her interact with a white child? Did she handle a white child the same way she did that black child?

Helen Gregory: I gave her sort of a wide birth after that. I didn’t go in there too often. And, I don’t remember any white children mentioning anything about her. So. Apparently she didn’t. I don’t know. I can’t imagine her being different. I think she’d be the same to everybody. She was familiar with the black students... she knew them.

[long pause]

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you know if any of the black students from Prince Edward County coming here to public school?

Helen Gregory: I don’t know any of them. No. If they did I don’t know.

Melanie Hazlewood: We have covered all of the questions.
Helen Gregory: I can’t think of anything else that would interest you. Classes went on and I don’t remember any confrontations in the classes. That was a relief. I was afraid of that. If you keep them busy at what they enjoy doing. That’s one thing about General Science… it’s a lot of hands on and they like that. Like I said to begin with I found out quickly that all black children weren’t dumb and dirty. Nor were all white children clean and smart. So, we made it.

[long pause]

Melanie Hazlewood: After integration, were the black parents as involved in the school as the white parents?

Helen Gregory: No.

Melanie Hazlewood: Why do you think that is?

Helen Gregory: I think they were a little shy. Of course, some of them were very much in evidence. But, for the most part I didn’t think they were as involved.

Melanie Hazlewood: You think they were intimidated?

Helen Gregory: Uh huh. Some were very outspoken and very much in evidence. But, they were the minority.

Melanie Hazlewood: Do you think that made a difference in the education of that black students at all?

Helen Gregory: I don’t know. I still think that black students get a better education now that they have integrated. I think they are exposed to more different kinds of people and more equipment and things.

Melanie Hazlewood: They are held to higher standards as well. They are expected to perform on the same level as the white students.

Helen Gregory: That’s right.