Emily-Anne Story
October 14-15, 2002
Tape Number 1

Carol Turner a Caucasian teacher in Virginia during the time of integration.
Emily-Anne Story, interviewer, a student at Longwood University.
October 13, 2002

Emily-Anne Story: This is an interview of Carol Turner by Emily-Anne Story on
October 13, 2002.

Emily-Anne Story: Where did you grow up?
Carol Turner: Norfolk, Virginia

Emily-Anne Story: Where and when did you go to college and could you describe the
type of college you attended.
Carol Turner: I went to Westhampton College at the University of Richmond
from 1960 to 1964. It is a liberal arts school and I majored in
music education and what kind of things did you want to know?

Emily-Anne Story: Like the size, was it public or private.
Carol Turner: It's private, at that time it was considered a Baptist college, the
Baptist owned the buildings. Now I think it's a lot looser than that.
There were 500 at Westhampton, so there were about 145 in my
class.

Emily-Anne Story: Was it integrated or was it segregated?
Carol Turner: It was a very white college, in fact in my tenure there, an African
student came and was an exchange student from Africa, but there
were no African-Americans at the university.

Emily-Anne Story: When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?
Carol Turner: I think forever. I think I like to talk and I think I liked kids and I
liked music, so I wanted to be a music teacher, but I know that that
really became more definitive in high school, in the last years of
high school.

Emily-Anne Story: Tell me about your teaching career, like where did you begin
teaching, and how many different schools did you teach at, and
were they similar in teaching styles and make-up.
Carol Turner: My first teaching job was in Chesterfield County, I got that right out of college in 1964 and I taught there for almost 2 years until my first child was born. And you could only teach five months so you had to stop if you were pregnant and I taught music and actually it was a pretty rural county at the time and so I traveled around to four schools and was a day at each school and don’t remember about the fifth day, I guess I went back to two of the larger ones. I taught all, and it took to probably back then it might have gone to even to 7th grade, I really don’t remember how high elementary went then. But I taught all the classes and did chorus and my schools, the further out in the county, oh I’m trying to remember, I don’t think there were many black children, but I do think there were some, but I really can’t remember.

Emily-Anne Story: Were you teaching when the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision came down, which would have been 1954?

Carol Turner: No, but I was in high school.

Emily-Anne Story: OK, well that will work. Do you remember what it was like hearing about it?

Carol Turner: Well, I remember that I never could understand why schools were separate even then, and so I was excited about the idea of schools becoming more integrated. In my particular school in 1959, I was a junior, one black student enrolled in our high school, and so the schools in Norfolk were closed for a year. They shut down all the schools and I never could understand that kind of mentality.

Emily-Anne Story: What did your parents feel?

Carol Turner: My parents were [one word inaudible]. My father was very “Archie Bunkerish” and so there was a lot of discussion going on in my household and of course I was at the age where I liked to stir things up anyhow, so we had a lot of discussions about that kind of thing. He did not understand integration at all because he had grown up in a white area that was sort of lower middle class and was very afraid of black people that had to go through their neighborhood to get home, and ran and that kind of thing, so he never understood. So I didn’t understand. They set up tutoring groups, and I went to a tutoring group for a year until finally we went back to school the next year.

Emily-Anne Story: When your school closed, do you remember hearing anything about the massive resistance movement?
homes or anything, but they knew that I was a safe person and so they were comfortable with me I think.

Emily-Anne Story: Were there any differences with the administrators, or was it the same feeling?

Carol Turner: The same feeling I think. They were protective of me. At one point, I remember, getting a call on the intercom saying they were locking me in my classroom after school because there was some type of unrest. I don’t remember what that was, but the high school was connected and you had the older students too, and there was some type of unrest, and so they just locked me in until they got it straight. I felt very much on the cutting edge. Really, the whole process I felt excited that I got to be a part of it.

Emily-Anne Story: Definitely! So there weren’t any special measures put into place because you were there...have you retired?

Carol Turner: Yeah, I guess you could say so, I don’t teach any longer in a school.

Emily-Anne Story: How do you think the school systems have changed since the time of integration?

Carol Turner: Well, I think that definitely education wise, the opportunities for African-Americans are far greater. I mean, back then, they were separate and different; I mean they didn’t have; I was looking at a picture of my classroom, and it had nothing in it except one bulletin board. I don’t remember struggling for things, but I just remember that it was very bleak compared to what I am used to today. And, of course, I sure the other schools didn’t have what they do today, but I’m off the subject!

Emily-Anne Story: How do you think the school systems have changed?

Carol Turner: I think that definitely we are in a better place. Since all of my children went to public school in Richmond, while most of my friends moved to the suburbs. Had the white people been willing to give it a chance and stay in place, so that the schools could have been integrated without going completely to the black domination of the schools, because they’re like 90% black in Richmond probably, I think we’d be a lot further along and know a lot more about living together, but that didn’t happen. But I still think that we are a lot further along than we were before.
Emily-Anne Story: Reflecting on the past, what can you think of that would have made desegregation easier in your area?

Carol Turner: I don’t think it could have been done any differently. I know people are very opposed to busing, but it wouldn’t have happened on its own. So, for me, busing was a necessary evil. I just feel like it had to be done that way and I fault our community for not being willing to give it a try and to make it work. I can’t think of a better solution.

Emily-Anne Story: Going with that, for your senior year when you went back to school, did you go to the school you were originally going to?

Carol Turner: Yes

Emily-Anne Story: So were black students bussed into you?

Carol Turner: No, just one girl, because I think at that point you just had to enroll. I’m not sure that they were bussing at that point, so it was not a whole group of people yet. But I do remember that she still did enroll and I guess the thing that I remember the most, because I thought it was so stupid, was that, she was a junior I believe, they collected class dues secretly, so she wouldn’t pay her dues and therefore couldn’t go to the dances, because that would have been horrible had she showed up at a dance and someone danced with her. I remember that they were still being very sneaky at that point, and it was still trying to resist, but she persevered and nothing bad happened at all. It was a very smooth year as I remember.

Emily-Anne Story: What effect do you think integration had on the education of black and white children? Do you think like having them integrated it was a more positive thing emotionally as well as for the level of education they received?

Carol Turner: I think it was definitely a positive thing, everybody suffered emotionally, but I do think there is just so much to learn from one another and I think that that, I don’t think that anybody suffered educationally. I do not think that my children suffered by being in a predominately black school. I feel that they learned so much more about life than I could ever had taught them, and so I guess it’s what your priorities are. My kids are all college graduates and they went on, and I just don’t think they suffered. I think it would have been a much richer experience had there been more white children, but that didn’t happen, so I think educationally we’re ahead of the game.
Emily-Anne Story: Is there anything you would like to comment on or add?

Carol Turner: No, I can still see that classroom that I was teaching with wall to wall children and we have come so far from that. Literally, I had over 30 children with one teacher. You didn’t have all the centers and places to go, you just learned what was in the book. And another interesting part which we didn’t mention, although I don’t know if it has anything to do with anything, but, in that particular school they were alphabetical in putting them in classes. So all the ABCs were in one class, and half of my class had the same last name which was Alston. The teachers told me that was because when they stopped working on plantations, they often took the name of the plantation owner. So they were still in the same area as poor tenant farmers. It was an amazing year. Another thing I remember is how little some of them came to school. They didn’t choose what they had to do. They had to work in the fields, they came late, and they left early in the spring to work in the fields. They had to learn everything in this little block of time, but we have to be further long than we were then.

Emily-Anne Story: How long did you teach at that school?

Carol Turner: Only for a year.

Emily-Anne Story: Then what did you do?

Carol Turner: I had children. I was pregnant and back then you could not teach and be pregnant, so it sort of ended your career for a while anyhow.

Emily-Anne Story: I think that’s all I had – Thank You!