

BILLIE JEAN CAPPS

Interview 193a

May 10, 2010, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, long-time Diboll teacher Billie Jean Capps reminisces about her 38 years in local education. The interview focuses on the integration of Diboll's schools, and Mrs. Capps discusses her experiences as an elementary teacher during that process. Mrs. Capps talks about Mr. Pate and the other administrator, the details involved with combining classes and teachers, and the attitudes of fellow teachers and parents. She mentions Odyessa Wallace and the Masseys, Valerie Anderson, and Odyessa Bray. Mrs. Capps grew up in the area and graduated from Diboll High School, and offers the perspective of someone who as observed the local schools as a student, teacher, and parent.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is May 10, 2010. I'm Patsy Colbert and I'm going to be interviewing Mrs. Billie Jean Capps today. We are here at the History Center. Mrs. Capps if you could let's just begin by telling me when and where you were born.

Billie Jean Capps (hereafter BJC): I was born in Orange, Texas in 1942 and I went to school there a couple of three years of my elementary life and dad just moved us around. So, I was mostly raised here in East Texas, but was born in Orange, Texas at the Frances Ann Hospital.

PC: Okay, tell us a little bit about your personal background and your family background and how you got to Diboll.

BJC: Well daddy was raised at Burke. His mother was a Fairchild and he went to school at Burke. He had an eighth grade education. Consequently, he was always obsessed with education after we came on the scene. But, we lived in Burke for awhile then we moved back to Orange, Texas. He was there during the war. We stayed there for about seven or eight years and he worked in the hulls of, or the bottoms of those ships putting in asbestos. Consequently he had asbestosis his later years in life. But, he moved us back here in 1955, the later part of '54 or first part of '55. We came back to East Texas. He started us in the school system at Burke, and decided he wanted a quality education for some reason or other. That didn't set well with some of the Burke residents when he did that. But anyway, I've been here ever since. There were six of us educated here at the Diboll School system. All of us received a college education with the exception of my younger brother who decided he could make more money doing something else, which was a thorn in daddy's flesh. But anyway, like I said because dad had the eighth grade education he was so obsessed with education. And, I remember when Donald told him that we were going to get married. I had only completed one year of college. He looked Donald square in the face and he said, "She will finish college." And Donald said, "Oh

yes sir.” And I did. (laughter) But anyways, our whole lives, young lives were here, here in Diboll. And we wouldn’t take anything for it.

PC: Well that is good.

BJC: He was a builder in the sixties. He built a number of homes in Diboll on 59 South, and out where we live on Ryan Chapel Road and then in Lufkin he had built a number of homes. And, then he went from the building business into kind of a place where he sold lumber and feed. He had kind of a feed store and a little nursery. It was called Country...his building business was called Countryside Builder. Then they turned that place into what they called The Garden Center. He had that for a number of years where he sold feed and gardening supplies and he did sell a few building supplies. And, then from there he started farming in the seventies and he farmed until the day he died. As a matter of fact his garden, all his garden was ready to harvest on the week that he died. He died in Tennessee. But, we thoroughly appreciate the fact that he was so bent on education because it really helped us as adults.

PC: Right. Well that is great. What year did you graduate from Diboll?

BJC: 1960.

PC: And tell me where you went to college.

BJC: I went to SFA, Stephen F. Austin all four years. Then, I had one year on a masters work but never completed that. So, I had a Bachelor of Science degree from SFA with lots of work, lots of extra training in other areas of education.

PC: And what year did you graduate from SFA?

BJC: I graduated in the fall of '64.

PC: Okay.

BJC: And began teaching that year, now that sounds a little bit contradictory but, Mr. Pate wanted a teacher, needed a teacher, a second grade teacher. So, he called me and asked me if I would come to work in '64. And I told him I said, “Well I’m still working on a correspondence course.” I was taking a correspondence course just to finish three hours of credit in an elective, and I was taking a Bible course. That was going to get my degree, I was not going to walk they were going to mail me my degree. I told Mr. Pate I said, “Mr. Pate I’m not fully certified yet, I have these three hours and I’m taking this course.” He said, “That is okay I can get you an emergency certificate.” He said, “We need you.” And so, he got me an emergency teaching certificate for that first year. Cut my pay in half, \$4200 was base pay then, and it cut my pay in half for that first year. Then, of course I finished that three hour elective in the Bible course and was fully certified the next year. So, to make up for the fact that I didn’t draw but a half a salary that year, Mrs. Burkhalter and Mr. Pate asked me to teach in Head Start. That was the

first year that they began head start and so, I started working in the Head Start Program that summer and worked two summers in Head Start and that helped me to make up for that lost pay on that emergency certificate.

PC: So you got extra pay for teaching in the Head Start?

BJC: Yes, we got extra pay. That was a federal program and it was funded by the federal government and we got extra pay for that.

PC: And who did you work with in the Head Start Program? Who was over that at the time?

BJC: Well Mrs. Bea directed it that summer. I cannot remember all the teachers that were there. There was a first grade teacher and myself and I know that two of the T.A.'s, teacher assistants that we had, Margie Harrell was one that first year and, Linda Hendry, Linda Chandler. They were both teacher assistants that first year that we did Head Start, that first summer that we did Head Start. It wasn't called Even Start. It's called Even Start now or something else I think. But anyhow, it was called Head Start at that particular time and it gave children that...most all of our children that were going to be in first grade came because we could absorb the numbers but, basically it was for those that needed an extra push. Those from lower income families.

PC: Just needed extra help.

BJC: Yes, we concentrated on reading and math.

PC: Okay. Now, did they come to the elementary school for the program?

BJC: Yes, we had it at the elementary school and they were fed breakfast and they were fed lunch. They went home after lunch and the buses did run and it was like regular school time during the summer time and called Head Start.

PC: So, you began teaching in the fall of '64 and what position were you first hired for?

BJC: Second grade.

PC: Second grade.

BJC: I taught that for about ten years and then I took a leave of absence to have another daughter and I came back after that next year and the only position they had was a third grade position. That was the only year I taught third grade was that particular year.

PC: Okay. And, our main focus today of the interview is really to talk about integration and to help us gather the history pertaining to Diboll Schools being integrated and desegregation. What was your first knowledge of integration?

BJC: Well, it was pretty heavily publicized in the press, in the newspapers and so forth. We had a lot of publicity. I don't know how many schools in our area opened it up. I think Mr. Pate maybe was one of the very first ones just to open it up for anybody to come, he and the school board made the decision. But, most of our information came through the school, through the school personnel and then what we read in the newspapers.

PC: Okay, so that is how you really come to know about it was through the Free Press or the paper and then just word of mouth with what was going on with the administration.

BJC: Or just word of mouth, right.

PC: Had you had an earlier experience of being around the black race, like throughout your childhood or before integration took place? Had you had any experiences of being around the other race?

BJC: Yes, we did. My dad did not...there was not a prejudice bone in dad's body. He always raised us to understand that God created all human beings and it didn't make any difference what color they were. So, and he had ladies that worked for him. I forgot to say that he did have a restaurant in Diboll for a couple of years. It's where The Everything Store is now. Mr. Powell was there and had, the building was quite large so Dad occupied half the building and Mr. Powell had his grocery store in the other half. We called it the Eight Bakers Café. That was from 1958 through part of '60. He didn't keep it very long, but it was called the Eight Bakers Café. And, we had black ladies that worked for us there, the cooks. I worked the night shift one particular summer because he didn't have anybody else to do it and he kept the café open 24 hours a day. I worked with Velma Levine, she is still around here, and she and I had a wonderful summer. And, I never worried about any kind of protection because Velma was my protection at night when we waited on those truck drivers. Of course, we didn't have any serious problems. But anyway, yes and Dad taught us to respect all races. I wasn't prejudice as such like some because that is just the way kids were brought up in East Texas, or some kids, to be wary of other races. But, we were not because of the way daddy brought us up.

PC: Okay.

BJC: And so, it really wasn't a problem with me to know that we were going to have other races in our classrooms or whatever. And, my philosophy in school was that I'm not teaching blacks or whites I'm teaching children. It was not a real problem. It was for some, but not with me.

PC: Well good. Did y'all serve black people at the restaurant?

BJC: No, we were not fully integrated then and I cannot remember any...it was not because Daddy wouldn't serve them. He would have, had they come in. But, I think everything was still pretty much integrated [segregated] there. I can't remember. I can't remember that any blacks came in to be served lunch or whatever.

PC: In that time frame they would have just known, you know, everybody knew where their places were?

BJC: Right, and they didn't, they just didn't come in. They had their own places, you know.

PC: Right. What were your feelings about integration when you first got the news or felt like it was going to happen in the school system as far as you being a teacher then? How did you feel about integration?

BJC: Well, I really...like I said, I really didn't...wasn't concerned about the fact that we were going to have another race, you know, in our school system. What we were concerned about was how we were going to absorb the children and how they were going to interact with the other children and the teacher problem too. We wondered, well their teachers and all black teachers on the black campus and how are they going to be absorbed into the system. Did it mean having to move us, or there were going to be a lot of decisions made in that respect.

PC: So, your concerns were more about the staff placement and student placement as well?

BJC: Yes, and how the students were going to react to each other.

PC: Now we know from the record that 1965 was when they had Freedom of Choice and you had just started teaching in the fall of '64. Do you remember anything specific about the Freedom of Choice year? And again, according to the records we only had one student that first year which was Valerie Anderson, to come over, to come to the white school. Do you remember anything about her experience?

BJC: We had really anticipated a number of black students coming over and we were ready. We were ready psychologically, spiritually and we were just ready to have them and to invite them into our classrooms. But that first year we were all a little bit disappointed because only one student chose to come. But, you know what? She turned out to be a real blessing. I believe it was Mrs. Rogers they placed her in, Mrs. Katherine Rogers room, if I'm not mistaken. You might need to look that up. Because, she was one of the seasoned teachers, you know, she had been there awhile.

PC: Okay.

BJC: She was one of the older teachers and they placed her there because she had a wonderful rapport with children and they thought that Valerie would fit in that particular atmosphere, educational atmosphere with Mrs. Rogers. And so, we had no problems. I cannot remember one single problem we had. Not even with the parents. Now parents were...they had a lot of questions. They would ask teachers what was going to happen. We didn't know. All we knew was that the process was going on and that it was going to happen because it had become a federal law but we really didn't know what to...we knew

that as teachers we were more concerned about teaching children than we were about the race of the child in the classroom.

PC: Right. You mentioned that y'all were ready, what steps did you take to prepare yourselves and the campus? In the thoughts...because you really didn't know how many you were going to have until right before school I guess.

BJC: Well our numbers were great back then in second grade. I had 30 to sometimes 33 children. And now they don't. The teachers now days do not know how blessed they are to have the smaller classrooms. And yet they still need smaller numbers of students because of the very...kids that they have in their classrooms now days. They are not like the ones that they would sit in their desk all day long and they would work because they were brought up that way by their parents. Now, we have free spirits in the classroom, I call them. But anyway, what I did in my second grade classroom after that first year was, we talked that whole year, you know, about getting along. The second grade class does community. Our social studies part of our curriculum focused on the community. So, we talked about the community. And, we talked about the fact that we didn't know much about our black community because they had always been in one certain place and we were always in this particular place. But, we talked about getting along. And, we talked about that it takes all kinds to make community. And, I tried to prepare my second grade students because they were going to move on up and probably have more of the black students the next year. I tried to come at it from a positive viewpoint, you know. We all need to know each other and we all have something to contribute. So, that is the only way I knew how to handle it, you know.

PC: Right.

BJC: And to answer questions as the kids would ask them, you know. And of course kids were picking up some of the concerns from their parents, you know, and so forth, and they would bring them into the classroom. But, they were not that bad.

PC: Right.

BJC: They were not that bad, they were questions that could be answered.

PC: So, you really added that part to your curriculum with the community. You really stressed the mixing of the races to prepare the children for what you knew was going to happen probably in the future.

BJC: Yes. Even our text books were pretty much integrated [segregated]. The Dick Jane series, they were all on the white folks. I think the black community had to do those text books too. But, anyway we talked about what if this child is a different color? What if Jane was a different color? What if Sally is a different color, you know?

PC: Oh, okay.

BJC: And tried to prepare them to understand that we are all going to be in the classroom together and we can get along and we can contribute to each other and we can learn from each other.

PC: Now, was that something that you had to get approved by your principal or by Mr. Pate or did y'all just do that on your own?

BJC: No, no, I think they were very supportive. It was the fact that it was going to happen and there was a very positive on the elementary level. Now I think there was some concerns in the sports realm and I don't know about those.

PC: Sure.

BJC: But, I think there were some concerns there with the athletic programs and those kinds of things. But, on the elementary level our kids were so tiny, so small rather, and so young we had a chance to mold them. And, we had a chance to instill in them the fact that we all respect each other. And they listened. I can't remember us having any serious problems at all.

PC: And, maybe that helped instill that sense of security.

BJC: It did, it certainly did.

PC: That is great. The following year in '66 is when they moved the high school boys over for athletics. In '66 the school board voted to end the athletic program and they took the male seniors over to the white school in '66. Then in '67 the high schools were fully integrated. In 66 and 67 they had approximately 40 students, the second year of Freedom of Choice to enroll in the white schools. Did you have any black students in your class that second year? This would have been like in 66.

BJC: Yes, I believe I had one student that year. Her name was Odyessa Bray.

PC: Okay.

BJC: She was either that year or the next year. She was in my class and, I can remember Odyessa was a smart little girl but, Odyessa didn't want to be there any more than some of her friends wanted to be in the white school. She was...her parents were not fully agreeable to what was happening, nor was many people then. But, Odyessa wouldn't stay at school. Odyessa would slip out and run off. Her mother was just as sweet as she could be. She would come and she would say, "Now you need to get you a stick and whip Ody." And, I would say, "No ma'am I can't do that, I'm not going to do that." So, I remember a number of times that she would just slip out and she would leave. This was a second grader, she would leave. Most of the times we would catch her before she left the campus. She would leave the classroom and it would be at the most opportune times. My back would be turned or whatever, we would be going to the bathroom, or we would be headed for lunch or something. Not that I didn't keep my eyes on my children but, she

would pick her time just to kind of slip out. Well, Mrs. Bea had to coax her out from under a car one particular day because she got outside the building. Like I said, she very seldom got outside the building and she didn't do it all year long. But, right at first she did and that particular day she crawled under the car and she wouldn't come out. She and I were trying to coax her from out from under the car. Her mother would come up and talk to her and her mother was just as sweet as she could be. But, Odyessa had a problem.

PC: That would have probably been that first year of full integration, '68 then when there wasn't a choice then.

BJC: Probably so, right.

PC: They had the Freedom of Choice a couple of years and then full integration in 68.

BJC: You're probably right. I'd have to go back and look at my annuals or whatever.

PC: It's obvious that she...it was when she didn't have a choice to attend.

BJC: Well she had done first grade in the other school and she didn't want to be there.

PC: She just had a fear of being there in a new spot.

BJC: I cannot remember any other problems that we had from then on. We all had children, you know, how the federal government required so many blacks and whatever. And, they still do that in the classrooms to keep the classrooms balanced according to the races. But, I can't remember us having any problems, on the elementary campus. And, I'm sure there were on junior high and high school but, we didn't hear about those.

PC: Did your position change after integration due to staffing?

BJC: No.

PC: Okay.

BJC: Mrs. Massey came into first grade and Mr. Byrd came in on the campus. Those were the only two black teachers I believe we had right at first. But, nobody had to give up a position for them to be...because our numbers grew because the children came over. The black children came over and our numbers grew. So, there was no problem. Mrs. Massey was a...I did not know Mr. Byrd well but, Mrs. Massey was an excellent teacher. My daughter was in her class.

PC: Did you know Mrs. Massey before integration? Had you had any...

BJC: No, I had heard about Mrs. Massey. I had heard of her and Mr. Massey, but I had never, and maybe had met them one or two times but, I did not know her personally.

PC: But, you worked with her for many years I guess?

BJC: She was absolutely excellent. She taught those children when they were lining up to wash their hands because I know Charlotte got an excellent education in first grade. She got an excellent start in first grade with Mrs. Massey. She learned to read. Mrs. Massey was just a wonderful teacher.

PC: That is great. How did your fellow teachers and colleagues feel about integration? Was there much discussion about it in the staff room or the break room?

BJC: There was some discussion. We had one particular second grade teacher, I won't call any names, but she was very, very, prejudice. She really had problems knowing that she was going to have black children in her classroom and also knowing that she was going to have to interact with black teachers. Because...and it was the way she was raised. She was not a mean person by any means. It was the way that she was brought up. And, of course she made the statement that the education they gave was inferior to what we were so far. That settled itself, that solved itself, it worked itself out because she soon came to realize that race didn't matter when you are a school teacher, you know.

PC: Well that is good. And of course, you know, that is common, you know, over all the majority. But you're going to have that negative at some point.

BJC: That is the only thing negative that I can remember at all.

PC: Did you agree with the process that was taken on Freedom of Choice or when they integrated the high school and then the full integration? Did you agree with that process?

BJC: I think the process worked really well because first there was the Freedom of Choice, you know. And, that did work, or it did happen for the first couple of years but then when the federal government made it mandatory well we were prepared because it was done in steps and it wasn't such a shock. A culture shock so to speak, when all the students, you know, came over. When the schools changed see, when the plants, there was no longer any H.G. Temple School, or whatever. That changed and that whole situation. There was a lot of speculation, you know, about who is going to be where and what schools are not going to be used. Of course, we wound up using all of them, we had to. But, there was some speculation about those kinds of things, you know, about the school plants themselves and who was going to go where and what the process was going to be. But, it worked itself out. I guess maybe I don't bar trouble, and I don't think I was one to do that. I just took it as it came, just one step at a time and tried to cope with it.

PC: Was there any type of meeting from the administration and the school board where they got the teachers together and announced this plan of integration desegregation?

BJC: Oh yes. We were...if we were not informed in an actual meeting we were informed through memos and things like that. We knew what was going to happen. It

was not a big surprise. Nothing was a surprise. Even when the campuses were changed, you know, and redefined there was nothing that we were surprised about.

PC: Y'all were kept informed?

BJC: Yes, we were kept informed. Mr. Pate did a very good job of that. And, the school board, Mr. Pate and the school board did a very good job of that.

PC: Share a little bit about Mr. Pate, your working experience with Mr. Pate.

BJC: He was a wonderful, wonderful man. He cared about children and he was very, very concerned when all of this took place that everyone maintain their dignity and that everybody not...that nobody be thrown aside or overlooked or whatever. He was very, very careful about that. Mr. Pate was a Christian man and you know, a lot of what he did came from a Christian heart. He went to the Methodist Church and Mrs. Pate went to the Baptist Church by the way. (laughing) She and Billy Frank went to the Baptist Church. But anyway, he did a great job trying to keep everything on an even keel. There were some things. There were some rough edges. There were some bumps in the road and, you know, no way you can have it just totally smooth. But, he had a heart for people, you know, not just for the white people. He had a heart for the black people too because he knew they did not want to do what was mandated. He was trying...he tried to maintain the situation where everybody could keep their dignity, you know, and their integrity.

PC: To be a smooth process.

BJC: Now, that was my impression.

PC: Right.

BJC: Those that worked maybe more closely with the situation and the school board and like some of the others they may have had a different perspective. But, I didn't see that.

PC: Well that is great. And, that is what makes this unique. Everybody has their own unique experience from every direction. Depending on your situation and your lifestyle and how you were raised is going to have an effect on how you interpreted the situation and how you grew from it, so. Do you have a personal experience of anything happening in the context of integration that you would like to share?

BJC: Back to Mrs. Massey, now that year those of us who were teachers we were asked if our children could be placed in her room. Because there were parents who did not want their children in Mrs. Massey's room because she was a black teacher.

PC: Right.

BJC: But, I had no problem and I remember Charla [Capps] and Jerry Jenkins and a number of...I think the little Shadix girl. There were a number of students. I can't

remember all of their names but, anyhow, they were in her room and, she loved them and they loved her.

PC: Oh.

BJC: She was a grandmotherly type because she was up in years when she started teaching second grade there. I mean first grade there. But anyway, they loved her and she loved her children and there were no problems. I didn't have a problem with my daughter being in her room.

PC: Good. So, y'all were approached with "if" you would allow your children to be taught by Mrs. Massey that first year of her being placed on the elementary campus.

BJC: And see being a teacher, the child of a, or the teacher of a child, or having a child and being the teacher there too, that would let parents know that, "Hey these teachers are not upset with this" and their children are in that room.

PC: I see. It would give a message in different ways.

BJC: Right.

PC: Yes, that is wonderful.

BJC: That we were not keeping our children out of that classroom just because she was black.

PC: It kind of sent a message.

BJC: Yes, it did, or we hoped that it did.

PC: Did you have any personal knowledge of how decisions were made on the administrative level?

BJC: No I really don't. I know that they kept us informed. Mrs. Bea, she had some faculty meetings and she would keep us...as she would talk with Mr. Pate and the board or whomever, the people that were involved, she would let us know. She kept us informed through little faculty meetings or whatever.

PC: Okay.

BJC: She would tell us what was going to happen.

PC: So, you had informative meetings?

BJC: Yes we did.

PC: And she shared her knowledge of what was going to be taking place so you knew first hand.

BJC: Yes she did, we knew, right.

PC: That is great. Did you have any type of relationship with the school board members at that time?

BJC: Do you know, I cannot even remember who was on the school board at that time. That is just not in my memory.

PC: Okay.

BJC: It seemed to be a fairly smooth process because we didn't read much in the paper you know, dissent or anything in the paper.

PC: Okay. Were there any incidents during those early years of integration that you care to share, good or bad?

BJC: Not on the elementary campus. See, now we were unique because we were the little ones, we had the little ones there.

PC: Right.

BJC: And it's easier to mold the hearts and minds of the smaller ones.

PC: Right.

BJC: Because they are not set in their ways. They don't have those walls built so to speak. Those walls of prejudice built. And, I know that there were some problems in the athletic program and some other places but, not on the elementary campus. Mrs. Burkhalter was a wonderful leader. She was a grandmother too. As a matter of fact, I praise God that I had Mrs. Burkhalter and Claire Clifton to get my beginnings as a young teacher with those two. They helped me tremendously to get a good start. But, Mrs. Bea kept the dissention down. If there was any dissention that came up, you know, she handled it right up front. And, I cannot remember any serious problems that she did not solve in the very beginning and therefore they did not remain a problem. They were taken care of.

PC: Good.

BJC: She wanted to maintain that atmosphere of trust and she wanted to know that these people were welcome, that our black community was welcome. And, that we were there for one reason and that was to educate children. That was uppermost in her mind. We will educate all of these children.

PC: That is great, sounds like she was a good role model.

BJC: She was a wonderful role model.

PC: Being a teacher here in '65, the school board voted to implement the Freedom of Choice plan that year and they adopted a resolution for the fall registration that required a request for school assignment form to be completed by the parent. It had to be turned in by June the 10th of 1965 and there were three choices on that slip of paper, Diboll Elementary, Jr. High-Sr. High, or H. G. Temple. So, this was the way for them to choose which campus they were going to. Do you recall seeing those forms?

BJC: No, I don't recall seeing those forms. If those forms came to the school they came through the school office.

PC: Through the school office.

BJC: They did not come to the classroom, let's put it that way. They did not come to the classroom teachers. They came to the school office or the school administration, Mr. Pate.

PC: Okay. Like I say, we know that '66 year, the second year of Freedom of Choice there were forty students. Of course that was over all both white campuses so that wasn't a whole lot, but that would have been a great number taken away from H. G. Temple. That would have made a difference in their numbers.

BJC: Well we didn't, the classroom teachers never saw those forms. Those forms I think came through, like I said, the central office or the school office.

PC: Were you aware of any problems taking place on other campuses that you would have heard about or remember any particular incidents?

BJC: No, but there again, we were so intent on our campus of making things work till if there was...and I didn't stay in the...I made it a point to not stay in the teacher's lounge and not listen to things. Sometimes you get a preconceived idea of something that you shouldn't have. But anyway, I really don't. All I know is that I had my own classroom to take care of and our own grade level that we wanted to make sure that those children...the black children were welcome and that everything went well on our grade level. And, I think it was handled grade level by grade level, you know.

PC: How many black teachers came to the elementary campus that first year of full integration, do you remember?

BJC: I believe there were only two. I think it was just the two.

PC: Just the two, okay.

BJC: I believe that was the only two teachers that I can remember. There may have been more but I cannot remember.

PC: Okay.

BJC: We may have had some office help. I know Johnnie Mae Dixon was there from the very beginning, or she was there in the early beginnings. And, she was with us a long, long time. But, I cannot remember but those two teachers.

PC: Okay, and this little black student that you had in your class, Odyessa...

BJC: Odyessa Bray, she is still here.

PC: Odyessa Bray, okay, that is what I was going to ask you. She is still here?

BJC: She is still here. We often talk about her.

PC: She lives here in Diboll?

BJC: She lives here in Diboll?

PC: What is her married name?

BJC: Is she still a Bray.

PC: She might be a good one to interview then. Was she named after Mrs. Wallace, Odyessa Wallace?

BJC: You know, I don't know. That is a good question.

PC: It is a very uncommon name.

BJC: I see her every Thursday. She comes in the Outreach every Thursday to get groceries. She lost a daughter. I taught her daughter in school and she lost her daughter a couple of years ago and she's helping to raise a grandbaby now. But, Ody is quite a character.

PC: Do you know of any problems within the administration or the teachers on the other campuses encountered?

BJC: No, I really don't Patsy. I never did...I'm sure there were things that were going on but I may have blocked that part out because I just never did dwell on those kinds of things.

PC: Right.

BJC: I knew we had a responsibility and we had something we were challenged to do and we just had to do it.

PC: So overall your summation of the integration process, how would you explain that?

BJC: Well for our campus, and I think Diboll in general, there were some problems early on but, I think they were worked out because of the leadership that we had. Mr. Pate was so intent, and Mr. Massey was wonderful to get in there. When it became a reality what else can you do?

PC: Right.

BJC: When it's mandated by the government, you know, that this happen, what else can you do except come together and work together. The majority of us did. There were problems, there were antagonists. We even had some antagonists from out of town that came in. I can't remember exactly how that happened. But, there were antagonists as there always are in situations where things happen that are out of the ordinary. And, this was out of the ordinary.

PC: Right. It was something new.

BJC: Something new, that is right.

PC: What about in the community, outside of the school campus, the grocery store or the restaurants...

BJC: Oh, people were buzzing and there were a lot of people that were against it, you know, because of what it was going to do with the school. It was going to tear down the educational process in the school and the white kids were going to get an inferior education. All those things were said but, my dad handled all of that with us in the home. Of course, I wasn't in the home then but, there were...he was not the only one that wanted to see this work. There were a lot of folks in Diboll that wanted to see this work. Our people, our Temple people, the majority of them wanted to see it work. You know, because we were living here together, and why not come together as an entire community as an integrated community. But, there were lots of folks that didn't like it.

PC: Were there any particular incidents outside the community that you remember?

BJC: Not that I remember, things happened, but there again, I choose to dwell on the good things that happened and not the bad.

PC: That is good, that is great.

BJC: But, we never talked about it in our home, you know. When we would all come together as a family, Dad there was always the positive side of it that, you know, that he

would talk with us about it, you know. He was pretty much a positive person in that respect.

PC: Well that helped you in your decision making and the way you looked at it.

BJC: And I was blessed by having someone like Marvin Baker and Frances that didn't see the ugly side of life. They raised us to be positive. We were poor but we didn't know it, you know. (laughter)

PC: Right.

BJC: But anyway, Dad believed in the fact that all men were created equal and he said...he believed too that all men ought to work. He didn't like lazy people. I've heard him say lots about lazy people. But, anyway he never was a part of down grading. And, there were people that were. We went to church with folks that didn't appreciate what was going on. But, there was nothing they could do about it.

PC: Right.

BJC: I can remember from the pulpit, you know, it was not addressed every Sunday, this is the way it's going to be. I remember that Dan Smith was our pastor then when we integrated. Or, had C.B. Bass come then? Anyhow, we were taught even in the church that God created all people. There were no problems in the church with it. As a matter of fact during revival we would invite our black friends to come and they just chose not to. And, that was okay. We chose not to become a part of their community affairs or whatever.

PC: Are you saying these sermons were during the time that integration was being implemented?

BJC: Yes, there were some that were going around, but they were all positive.

PC: Positive messages.

BJC: The ones I heard were all positive, yes.

PC: Well that is great. That would help to get that out to people.

BJC: Well, I think everybody realized this was a reality. This is something that we've never done before and we can either live with it and make it work or we can go against it and it will never work. It'll be nothing but total misery for everybody.

PC: Right, well that is good that it was even, you know, even at church you got positive messages through your pastor.

BJC: Right, exactly right.

PC: That is great. And what year did you retire Mrs. Capps?

BJC: Sixty-five, I mean '05, sixty five (laughter) I retired in '05. I think it was '05

PC: You would have had forty years.

BJC: I had thirty eight years because I took out to have two babies.

PC: Okay, you had thirty eight years of service. Wow, that is wonderful. Is there anything that I haven't asked you, or any comments you would like to add pertaining to integration or your experience as a whole about your school days?

BJC: You know, we've had some wonderful examples of black kids that have gone on to really excel in the world and Valerie was one of them. She was the first one there and she really excelled in the world, you know. She became quite successful in her adult life. And, she was...I ran into her not too long ago. It's been several years ago rather. But, she is just the sweetest thing, you know, and she always had that kind of attitude. Now, I think there was some criticism of her parents when they put her at the school. That was the freedom of choice year.

PC: Right. Do you know anything about that, her parent's decision or how that came about or anything?

BJC: I did know, but I have forgotten. They wanted her to get a good education. I don't remember exactly what the determining factor was for her mother to finally move her into the white school. But, she fit in and she was an excellent student, you know, and nobody had any problems with her.

PC: It was just like she was...

BJC: As a matter of fact, we sort of thought she was our...this is our...what do you say...our trophy. Things are working out, you know, because, she did so well.

PC: Well, that is great. This is pertaining to Diboll Day but we know from the records in '62 and '64 we found photographs of the black Diboll Day queens. Do you remember anything about the Diboll Day queens races, them having separate races?

BJC: No, I really don't Patsy. I never got involved that way in Diboll Day. We always came and took part in the activities and whatever but I did not know how they determined those because I just never did. I'm sure it was publicized.

PC: Well we know that they had separate queen's races before integration.

BJC: They still have done that in the past even with our Hispanic groups. They will have separate...they have done that in the past too. Just having somebody representing but

then they've done away with it all together now, you know. You don't single out any race now but, that has been done in the past.

PC: Speaking of Hispanics, do you remember any specifics of how the administration handled the increase of Hispanic students in the fall of '69 when Temple Industries moved 34 Hispanic families to Diboll from the Valley?

BJC: Well those numbers were determined...our numbers in the classroom were determined by the numbers that we had enrolled and they had to add, I'm sure, a teacher or two. Because, then the classroom numbers were not set in stone like they are now. The numbers are set in stone, the 22 or whatever ratio now and the federal government did that. But, no the teachers were added as the student body grew, the teachers were added, so...

PC: Were there any problems that first year that you remember with having the influx of Hispanic students?

BJC: I do know that we had some that could not speak any English, you know. We had to work with...we had a guy that taught ESL [English as a Second Language]. We had a program that was created by the Federal Government also that took those children in to teach them English, you know. And, they had to function in English and so, they took them in and we had some good ESL teachers in the past. But, that was the main thing, the language barrier. I had several that came through my classroom that I just learned to communicate with. There would be one child that might speak English and one child that wouldn't and I used my children to help me communicate.

PC: Okay.

BJC: I would [say], "You speak English very well, will you help me communicate to this child what I want him to do?" And, you know, that is how I worked those problems out in my classroom.

PC: Oh, that is neat. So really the main issue would have been just the language barrier.

BJC: Yes, the language barrier, right. And, the number of kids in the classroom, it did increase the numbers.

PC: It increased the numbers.

BJC: We had to increase our personnel as that grew.

PC: Okay. Well anything else you would like to share about your teaching days at Diboll ISD?

BJC: I tell you what I wouldn't take anything for my teaching days. I loved every minute of it. Went through I don't know how many superintendents. Mr. Pate was my

first, then I had...oh shoot...I can't remember. They went to our church. My memory is not the best in the world, but I went through several superintendents and several principals but, just kept right on going.

PC: One other question that comes to my mind, is back to this Head Start program. This seems to have come up in several of my recent interviews. Was this Head Start Program particularly for the underprivileged children of low income?

BJC: It was, right.

PC: And what was that program?

BJC: Well it was just basically giving them a head start in math and reading and life skills so to speak.

PC: Okay.

BJC: It was a wonderful...it's not like it is now. It's not a total play program. I think they have a total play program in some situations now. We taught, we actually taught.

PC: And this was during the summer?

BJC: Yes, and we had a teacher assistant. I never had...we never had had teacher assistants before, but we had a little...in my classroom I had a little Linda helped me. Linda Hendry, was one of my helpers, and then the next year Jimmie...Jimmie...she used to work over at the Housing Authority.

PC: Woodard.

BJC: Parish, she was Jimmie Parish then. She was one of our helpers that year. So, we really had a good time that year.

PC: Now was this at the elementary campus?

BJC: Yes, we met on the elementary campus, right.

PC: Okay, and Margie Harrell assisted with that too?

BJC: Margie Harrell was one of the TA's and so was Linda Chandler and Jimmie Parish.

PC: Okay.

BJC: Those were the three that I remember.

PC: Okay.

BJC: It sure did help my salary that first year because I didn't have any salary to speak of.

PC: Mr. Pate recruited you and you only got half your salary due to your certificate.

BJC: I do remember when that happened when I received that emergency certificate there were a couple on the school board that didn't like it. I can't remember...I think one of them was...oh I can't remember who it was, it may have been Dr. Hoot's wife, anyhow, there were a couple of people on the school board and I really felt bad. I didn't pay any attention to the negative stuff around me but it really hurt my feelings you know, when they said something about the fact that I wasn't qualified. I just had that three hour course, that Bible course that I was taking and, I remember Opal Franks came and set my mind to ease and she told me she said, "Honey you just don't pay any attention to that kind of stuff." She said, "You're going to teach with us and you're going to be a good teacher." So, I appreciate Mr. Pate giving me my start on that.

PC: That is wonderful. That is great. Well, Mrs. Capps I thank you for sitting down me today and sharing your experience at Diboll ISD and I appreciate your time.

BJC: Well I've enjoyed it very much. This is a wonderful city. All of my children, all six of us received our education in this school system, the Bakers. And, all four of my daughters received their education in this school system and all of them are certified teachers now. This is a good place. A child can get an education anywhere he goes to school if he so desires to.

PC: That is great, that is wonderful. Well, thank you Mrs. Capps.

END OF INTERVIEW