

JERRY GARTMAN

Interview 200a

June 10, 2010, at his home in Bulverde, Texas

Becky Donahoe, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Becky Donahoe, Jerry Gartman reminisces about his years as an educator – teacher, principal, and coach, particularly in Diboll. Mr. Gartman worked as a teacher and coach during the racial integration years and later served as an elementary school principal and teacher. He reminisces about the integration process, school buildings, curriculum, and raising children in Diboll.

[Interviewer's Note: Mr. Gartman was in the '65 annual as Distributive Education teacher so he could have come here in '64. He was also DE teacher through spring of '67. He became principal of Junior High in fall of '67-68 school year.]

Becky Donahoe (hereafter BD): My name is Rebecca Donahoe and I am interviewing Mr. Jerry Gartman at his home in Bulverde, Texas. Today's date is June 10, 2010. I guess I need to put that on there, I forgot. Okay, Mr. Gartman first off and I didn't tell you this, but I do want to start with where you were born and just your family history a little bit.

Jerry Gartman (hereafter JG): I was born in Nacogdoches, Texas. My father was with Perry Brothers. He was transferred to Gatesville, Texas so I spent my first six or seven years in Gatesville, started to school there. Then we moved to Jacksonville and I went to school there and from there we moved to Tyler and I went to school there. Then when I was about eleven years old we moved to Nacogdoches, back to Nacogdoches and I was in the fifth grade there and skipped the sixth grade because of the twelve year rule that came in. I went to high school there and I graduated from high school. I went my freshman year to SMU and then I decided that it was much more feasible for me to go back to Stephen F. Austin. So, I went to Stephen F. Austin until 1949. I had enough good grade points that I could graduate at mid-term there even though I had joined the Air Force. So, I joined the Air Force in December 23, 1949 and I stayed in the Air Force until September 24, 1954.

BD: Four years.

JG: Yes, I have one son that was born in Liddell, Texas in October of 1955 and I entered the school business there and I was coaching football, basketball and teaching math in Liddell. Then from there I went to Livingston.

BD: What year was that?

JG: That was in '56.

BD: That is where I graduated in '68. (laughter)

JG: Oh! Anyway, I was coaching B team football and basketball and teaching typing and junior high math, I mean science. From there I went to...wait till that thing goes by. (heavy machinery noise) I went to Yokum in 1946.

Mrs. Judy Gartman (hereafter MJG) : Ugh-uh, '56.

BD: So, you were just one year in Livingston?

JG: Yes.

MJG: It would be '56, wouldn't be '46, pardon me.

JG: I mean '46, excuse me '56. I coached assistant high school football and I coached the track team and we went to the state track and I had one of my boys finish second in the hundred and two twenty in 3A.

BD: That is great.

JG: Then I bought a department store in Carthage, Texas. No I'm sorry, I went to work for Bell Brothers there and I stayed there until I was transferred to Austin, Texas and then I bought a department store in Carthage Texas.

BD: You came back huh?

JG: Yep, and I rented the department store until '62 and my wife, my first wife and I divorced then.

MJG: By that time they had four children.

JG: Yes.

BD: Oh, four kids.

MJG: See he just named the first one, there is four. There is three more in there.

BD: You want to list them right quick and we'll get it down.

JG: Well, Joe is the second oldest one. Louise is the third oldest one, she had to have a complete blood transfusion because she was in the wrong...

MJG: Transfer of blood.

JG: Yes, transfer of blood because hers was not compatible.

BD: Is that positive and negative that?

JG: Yes, it was one of those rare occasions and she came through it fine. Robbie was born in Carthage, the last of my little ones. After Carthage I moved to Lufkin, well I'm sorry, I moved to Edinburg and I was coaching the golf team and high school assistant coach. I went there at mid-term. After that I moved back to Lufkin, Texas so I could be with my parents there and two of my children came to live with me.

BD: Okay, so then while you were in Lufkin did you ever teach in Lufkin?

JG: I taught in Diboll.

BD: You just taught in Diboll, okay.

JG: I taught distributive education the first two years and then when James Simmons came there he hired me as one of the assistant football coaches.

MJG: You had known Jim from high school though.

JG: Yes, I knew Jim Simmons in high school. I stayed there in '64 I guess it was, one of those years in there I became Junior High principal. I had gone back to college and got my masters in education, secondary education and that put me eligible to become principal.

BD: So, that was '66 or so that you became principal?

JG: '65 I think.

BD: '65, okay.

JG: I would say '65. And, then I met Judy and married her in 1967.

BD: Okay, now whereabouts on the campuses in '65 where was the junior high then?

JG: Over there at the old...

BD: Elementary or primary?

JG: The black school.

BD: Okay even in '65?

JG: Was that the first year of integration?

BD: No '67 was the first year of integration. Was that your first year when they integrated?

JG: Yes, that was my first year.

BD: Okay, so that would have been '67. That would have given you time to get your masters and move on over, okay. Now, tell me a little bit about how Diboll eased into integration because I know it wasn't a one year total thing?

JG: It was like I said they brought the black kids over for athletic purposes and to let the other kids get acquainted with having a black co-student. And, that worked out real well so, my first year over there I had a little problem with some of the kids to come to school because the parents had allowed them to stay home when they didn't feel like it or this or that. Well, I just went out in the community there, the black community, when one was absent I'd go to the mother and say, "Momma you going to have to make that kid come to school because I'm going to take him." So, I would take them to school and from then on it was no problem.

BD: (laughing) Word got around.

JG: Word got around. I tried to be very cooperative with the parents and everybody and it worked out real fine for our junior high school.

BD: Ratio white to black roughly?

JG: Ratio?

BD: Yes, of your student body.

JG: I would say it was about five to one.

BD: White to black?

JG: Yes, white to black because that community, Mr. Arthur Temple had made it understood that the people that worked for him he knew everyone of them by name. And, he could go around and call them by name and that helped because they were co-working together in the Fiberboard plant and so forth. That helped quite a bit. Well, what helped also, my older son was on the football team and we would meet at our house every...

MJG: Thursday.

JG: ...Thursday night prior to a game that they were going to play. We would have cold drinks and popcorn. Oh they loved popcorn.

BD: Always popcorn huh? (laughter)

JG: Yes, and those kids were very good, the black kids would help sweep and clean up after it. My son would pick them up and carry them home, those that didn't have

transportation. He was very close to the black kids and very cooperative with them and that is the way the football team was too. They were quite together there. Well, that took care of my integration there. What else you want?

BD: How long were you principal?

JG: I was principal about three or four years there and then I went to the elementary school and I was principal there for three or four years. Then I went back teaching...

MJG: Remedial math.

JG: Remedial math in the junior high school for two or three years and then I went into the...if the kids were bad they would send them to.

BD: A.E.P. or something like that.

JG: Yes, and I stayed there until I retired.

BD: At first when you were over at Temple, the black teachers, how many black teachers did you have in comparison?

JG: I had four I think, one in English seventh grade and two in the fifth grade and there was a young fellow that was in the athletic department. Well it might have been, I think...

MJG: You had Mr. Porter.

JG: Yes, Mr. Porter, I had two then.

BD: Oh, you had Mr. Porter?

JG: Yes.

MJG: And Mrs. Hunt.

JG: Yes, that is what I said in seventh grade.

MJG: Yes, and the other bigger woman.

JG: The sisters.

BD: Was it Mrs. Wallace?

MJG: Yes, Mrs. Wallace.

BD: Mrs. Wallace, yes, Odeyssa.

JG: And her sister.

BD: Oh, I didn't know her sister taught. Oh my!

JG: What else?

BD: I'm trying to think of the logistics of it. That summer must have been awful busy when everybody was changing campuses.

JG: Well it wasn't overly busy we just took in the old black school and converted it into a bilingual school because we had to have...

MJG: Bi-racial.

JG: Yes, bi-racial and bilingual school because we had quite a few Spanish kids to come up. Some of them couldn't speak English so I had a lady that came in, I've forgotten her name but she taught Spanish, I mean bi-lingual.

BD: Right.

JG: And one of my little girls, I was very proud of and she graduated high school and went and worked in the bank. She was Teresa something.

BD: But she couldn't speak English when she started?

JG: That is right, didn't speak a word of English when she started but by the time she got through high school she was very proficient in English and Spanish.

BD: Wish all our kids could be.

MJG: Well and the same way with...she worked over there in the elementary school, real pretty.

BD: Veronica Cortes maybe.

MJG: No, before her. She was married, never mind. Remember her husband was a lawyer down in Mexico?

JG: Oh yes, oh...anyway.

MJG: Names?

BD: Senior moments, I know those. Well I guess I'm thinking curriculum. Was the curriculum a lot different that had been taught?

JG: No.

BD: You didn't see that much difference?

JG: No, not really that much difference except when Ross Perot came in and they made them start trying to teach the test business, TAAS, instead of letting them teach their subject. Well, I know one of my teachers had been gone to Mexico or someplace and came back with, you know, a lot of information for the kids and everything and, she wasn't allowed to teach it. And that to me was the turning point in the curriculum when they started that business of TAAS test. I can't stand it. I think it's all wrong.

MJG: Children do not enjoy school anymore.

BD: Not like we did.

MJG: Because you could, in history you don't need to teach from a book. History should be...well follow the book of course but, you can interject history with so much more, little side lights that maybe go past history. I know just talking to Mr. McGilvra.

BD: Oh yes.

MJG: I could sit and talk with him.

BD: Forever...he's just got, yes, knows so much and knows the little things that make it interesting.

MJG: The little things that make history interesting.

BD: Right, I understand, been there done that.

JG: I know one thing that I remember quite well and it doesn't have anything to do with integration or anything but, my baseball team won. As far as they could go at that time was regional's but they won regional's. The Baker boys and David...

MJG: David Wimp.

JG: ...David Wimp, Mr. Arthurs' stepson. But, I remember that when Jim Simmons came in we didn't have anything but old football equipment, old jerseys, old shoulder pads and hip pads. And, Jim and I went to Mr. Arthur Temple and asked him would he help us in that matter and, he donated I don't know how much many it was but, we got all new jerseys and shoulder pads and hip pads and everything for them to start out the football season and, it really helped.

BD: He did a lot of nice things like that.

JG: Yes he did. What else you need now?

BD: Well I'm thinking the condition of the H. G. Temple School was it in good shape?

JG: It was in fairly good shape. It had to have quite a bit of work done on it to repair a few things but basically it was in pretty good shape. It was a solid building but, they built that little courtyard in between the buildings and that kind of spruced it up. But, it was pretty reasonable.

BD: Was there any objections from white parents that their kids were going to a black school?

JG: I didn't receive any complaints at all. They didn't seem to mind it because like I said their husbands most of them worked in the mill, the plants there. So, they were used to having blacks and whites together. But, it went I thought it went very well for as much problems as a lot of people had. I know we had, this is before total integration, one day there was a little problem in school. Nick Trout and I've forgotten who it was, a black boy, kind of brushed each other and looked like they were going to fight. Well I grabbed Nick and Mr. Bennis Franks grabbed the other one and we separated them and got them to talking and everything was all right.

BD: So that is just all you can even remember so, that is great.

JG: That is the only thing that ever happened that I can ever remember because, like I said, most of the time the kids were very cooperative and didn't mind the blacks.

BD: When you did things as a school did black parents participate? Like come to the football games or go to the baseball games and all that kind of stuff?

JG: Oh yes, oh yes.

BD: Okay.

JG: They came to nearly everything where their children were, yes they did.

BD: Okay, well that is great. Okay is there anything you would just like to add about Diboll, what it was like living there?

MJG: Love it, I loved it!

JG: Yes, it's a very good little town. It got a little bit when they changed the people in the main office over there of the Temple Industries, brought in the Yankees, pardon my expression, but their attitude changed quite a bit.

BD: It wasn't just a company town anymore, had to grow up.

MJG: I enjoyed growing up in Diboll. Of course, I'd lived there all my life.

BD: Right.

MJG: And raising children there was great. I think of the poor city children, you know, because kids could walk to school if they wanted to. From where we lived school was right at the end of the street.

BD: Yes.

MJG: To me it was the kids enjoyed it, of course, they got bored because there wasn't a lot to do, you know, but they were able to walk to the picture show.

BD: And do those sorts of things, right.

MJG: It was a lot of togetherness I think and I enjoyed it and I know my kids did.

BD: Now tell me, your parents, this is Judy, this is Mr. Gartman's wife, and, your maiden name was?

MJG: Jordan, mother is I think she taught world history.

BD: And her name?

MJG: Ervella Jordan and my daddy was Willis Jordan. He was shop foreman for Temple for all his life. Mother was a homemaker and my brother, I am the youngest of four and all of us graduated from Diboll. My brother the same year he did, whatever year that was because they are the same age.

JG: '47.

MJG: And that was the year I started to school.

BD: Oh me. (laughing) Okay, well I want to thank you for this.

MJG: Of course my sister is Jimmie Beth Durham.

BD: Okay, I just wanted to add a little bit so everybody knows kind of.

MJG: Yes, of course when Jerry moved to Diboll we met and we married, okay.

BD: Yes, okay.

JG: Fort-three years ago.

BD: Well what Charles says about us it's forever. (laughing)

JG: Well that is the way it's been for us.

MJG: Well next month will be forty-three years we've been married.

END OF INTERVIEW