

MARY INGRAM

Interview 191a

April 23, 2010, at Diboll High School, Diboll, Texas

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, long-time Diboll teacher and counselor Mary Ingram reminisces about her years in education, particularly during the late 1960's during racial integration and desegregation in Diboll. Mrs. Ingram talks about teaching mixed race classes for the first time, teaching at H.G. Temple School as a white teacher before full integration, and the interactions between both races of students and teachers. Mrs. Ingram does not remember many difficulties between the races during the integration process.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is Friday April 23, 2010 and I'm Patsy Colbert and I'm going to be interviewing Mrs. Mary Ingram, counselor at the Diboll High school today. Mrs. Ingram if you will let's just begin by telling us when and where you were born?

Mary Ingram (hereafter AT): Ewe! (laughter) I was born in Center, Texas, September 7, 1942.

PC: Okay, and just share with us a little bit about your personal background, your family background growing up and just some early background history.

MI: Okay, I was an only child. My parents were Eula Mae and Nathaniel Wilson. I graduated from Center High School in 1960, went to...is that what you want?

PC: Yes.

MI: Went to Stephen F. Austin, graduated in 1964, and got my Masters in Counseling in 1968.

PC: Okay, good. Well that was part of my next question, your educational level so you just answered that. Today the purpose of our interview mainly is to talk about the integration of Diboll schools. And to get to that and to set the stage, just tell me about your earliest experience with the other races. Did you grow up around black people?

MI: Yes, my dad was a farmer and he worked for the highway department, but we had a guy that worked for us that his name was Henry, that was black and he was like a member of the family. He worked for different people so I never thought of color too much. He ate with us and all that. It was no distinction. I can remember going to the movies, and I thought of this the other day, going to the movies in Center, though and they had a section for the blacks in the upstairs and the whites downstairs. But, I never thought anything about it, you know.

PC: Right. So you were used to being around them growing up, with your dad.

MI: Yes.

PC: Well that is good, that is great.

MI: Definitely, definitely.

PC: When did you begin teaching in Diboll?

MI: Let's see, Woody and I married in July of '66. I started teaching in, I guess September of '66.

PC: September '66.

MI: Yes.

PC: And what position did you begin?

MI: Oh...I wasn't certified. I had a masters...well no I had my bachelors then. I had my Bachelors in Business and a position they had opening was seventh grade World...U.S...Texas History. It was Texas History is what it was then and I had a class of like 35 boys. They were large classes then but I was pretty small at the time and (laughter) and since then you know, they go "Oh Mrs. Ingram I remember when you whipped me." But, I could not hit hard, you know. It was still where they, and then Mr. Porter that you're probably going to interview, he would sometimes take over and Mrs. Stubblefield. It was like, I think there were like maybe five or six teachers in that Junior High wing down there.

PC: Okay.

MI: But, they hired me for that then. But I mean big, I won't ever forget that class. I don't think they will forget me either. (laughter)

PC: And where was the Jr. High?

MI: It is where the Jr. High is right now.

PC: Where it is now.

MI: Yes, it was like one wing was the Junior High and the other wing was the High School.

PC: Okay.

MI: Like one end of the hall.

PC: Okay. Yes, you were pretty young then when you began teaching.

MI: Yes, I was like 23.

PC: I guess discipline problems could be a problem. (laughter)

MI: It really wasn't (laughter) because a lot of them had like crushes. They go, "You didn't know it but, I had a crush on you back then."

PC: What was your first knowledge of integration?

MI: I guess when it became a law. I mean, that is when you first heard about it more or less. And, then like when we came to Diboll it was like emphasized that they were going...like you say "when was the first" I guess that first or second year that I was here is when I can remember some of the boys, the high school boys, they started coming to high school over there. There was a girl name Queen Esther, somebody that was...there were only one or two little black girls in the Junior High. But, most of them stayed at Temple over there then. But, the high school boys because of football athletics they came to high school.

PC: Yes, that is right, that is right. '65 according to the record, '65 was Freedom of Choice year for Diboll School. And, '66 the school board voted to bring over just the athletic program, which was the male seniors.

MI: Yes.

PC: Then in 1967 the high school was fully integrated and then fall of '68 was full integration.

MI: Yes, that is when the Junior High came.

PC: Okay, so you just come to know about it through hearing the talk of what was going on in the news.

MI: The news, and Diboll, really I guess really Diboll was probably one of the few that was Freedom of Choice really. I can't remember Center doing it or anything.

PC: Right, okay.

MI: They may have.

PC: What were your feelings about it? Do you remember if it was...

MI: It was just school. No big deal. Really it wasn't because the kids, the ones that came, you couldn't tell, they were just like everybody else, the blacks were like the whites, it was not...Diboll has always to me been it doesn't matter what color you are, you are just, you're a person. God made us all.

PC: Part of the community.

MI: God made us all.

PC: It never was...you just didn't have that feeling that it was separate.

MI: Not at the beginning.

PC: Everybody knew their place I guess.

MI: Not at the beginning. I don't think there was much discrimination then.

PC: Well you brought up about the schools, we know in that first year of Freedom of Choice that we had one student, Valerie Anderson, that signed up to go to elementary school. But then the next year, '66-67, there were forty students that chose to go to the white campuses.

MI: Oh, okay.

PC: So overall there were forty students. Do you remember anything about that? You were here, and I guess actually that was your first year, '66-67?

MI: That would be when, are you talking about when I went to the Junior School...Temple or to the?

PC: Well if you started September of '66, that school year, there were forty students across all three campuses that...

MI: Most of them were in the high school and they were the boy athletes. I didn't have too much to deal with them that year. It was the year that I went to Temple, 67-68 to the black school over there.

PC: Okay, tell me about that, going over there.

MI: It was like going to another campus. Margie Harrell and I worked together and I got to know her really well and Mr. Massey was the principal. It was just like school, it didn't matter what color it was. They didn't treat me any different and I didn't treat them any different.

PC: What was your purpose for going over there?

MI: I was the reading teacher that year.

PC: Okay, so you taught reading over there at certain times.

MI: Yes, I think it was like part time, yes. And that was when there was like, I think it was some kind of government program. I think it was a government program because when I first come here I did Head Start. And, that was another thing that was really helpful. I would go...you'd have to go visit all the homes. That's individually one to one and I got to see where people lived in all different kinds of areas.

PC: Oh, okay.

MI: I got to know all of them. That sort of helped getting to know people more. It helped to understand the community more because you saw everything, all kinds of groups.

PC: You saw all types of situations.

MI: Yes, uh-huh.

PC: I was just reading in the school board minutes where the Head Start program had started. So, you were kind of the overseer or responsible for that program.

MI: I can't remember who was over it. I was just like a, I don't know what they called it, a home visit or something like that. I just went into the homes and took information and brought it back to them. But, I don't remember who my boss was. I really don't.

PC: But that enabled you to learn community people and be in a setting, not just in school setting but in a home setting.

MI: Right, yes, definitely, in the home, definitely.

PC: Did you have any concerns about integration or any concerns when you were given that position to go teach reading over there?

MI: No, it was just like going to school.

PC: Just going to school, okay.

MI: There was not any different feeling because, I mean, I don't...people that knew the Massey's they had respect for the Massey's. And, Mrs. Sibley was over there. I'm trying to think of somebody...I mean it was just like school.

PC: Okay.

MI: Because it was black it didn't; no big deal.

PC: It just wasn't an issue, so no fears?

MI: Oh no, definitely not any fears!

PC: Is there anything looking back that you could say you learned from it, those early years?

MI: I learned a lot in those early years. (laughter) Not about integration but I learned a lot. Not...

PC: You know, from that experience of...

MI: See, I really didn't take it or think of it as any different as being at the high school, I mean at the other school. It was not...it was not different. It wasn't.

PC: Okay. So growing up in Center even though it was a segregated school and coming here and that was your first job it didn't, because you had been around blacks you just didn't see it any different. It was just normal. It just felt normal.

MI: Yes, it never really was. I just grew up on a farm type deal and, you know, my dad ran the store sometimes and whatever. We just had all kinds of people.

PC: Okay. What about the classroom experience, anything that you witnessed, you know, after integration? Is there anything you witnessed or experienced that you would want to share pertaining to integration issues?

MI: Not those first few years, I mean, it was really, really smooth.

PC: Okay.

MI: Maybe later, probably 10 years later there was a little more racial tension but not...and it would only be with one or two people anyway. I just didn't see any difference in it. I really didn't.

PC: Anything in that later time period that you just spoke of that you remember specifically?

MI: Not...sometimes girls...I think maybe...this might be something, I think sometimes the girls had a harder time adjusting maybe than the boys. They might have felt, I don't think there was ever really intentional discrimination but maybe they weren't quite as comfortable as the boys because athletics were probably more accepted than the others. And then a lot of times, you know, like you do, I don't care they have their cliques or they had their whatever sometimes, you know, the whites would sit together and the blacks but you would see them talking, it wasn't...I just don't ever think it was ever a big deal here. Not like other people and the northerners make it to be.

PC: Okay. So, even with your fellow teachers and colleagues was there any...you know, how did they feel about integration? Like as far as the teachers discussing it in the staff room, was there a discussion?

MI: No, because you just didn't discuss it. I mean you know like, some of them are just like family, Margie, Mr. Porter, you know, you just don't think about color.

PC: Okay. Well that is good, that is good. Okay, so as far as being in agreement with the decision of Freedom of Choice that had actually already taken place before your first year but, then with the full integration when they voted to go full integration, did you agree with that process?

MI: Yes, because I mean it wasn't, it just made us a larger school and it was not... everybody just got along, they really did. I think they did.

PC: That is good. Did your position change after full integration in the fall of '68? Do you remember if your position changed with them trying to accommodate the teachers from H. G. Temple School? Was there any great changes in faculty? And if there was, was there any problems with it or were people dissatisfied with it?

MI: My position changed but it wasn't because of integration it was because somebody resigned and left. Because I was a business teacher and she left and I got her job.

PC: Okay, and what was her name?

MI: Oh gosh, I think it was Treva Mead or somebody like that. She's been long gone, for a long time. But you know, with business teachers until they die you don't get a job. It's not an opening. And so like in '70 I had Elizabeth in February and then in that spring Mr. Ramsey and Mr. Foster came and wanted to know if I wanted to be counselor because I got my counseling degree in '68. But, it wasn't...I mean I've always bragged about that I always told Mac Mitchell, he was one of the first athletes to get in the deal because of who he was because I was his General Business teacher. (laughter) So, I got to teach some of the...I moved from the Junior High to High School for two years so I got to teach some of the boys. I mean they respected you. There was not...it's like Margie told me one time when I used to do homebound over there, "Mary don't worry about our people bothering you or anything. It's those that might come through, you know, driving through town or something." So, it was never...I never had any fear at all.

PC: Okay, good.

MI: And I don't know, teachers were just...it was just people, people interacting with people.

PC: When did you become counselor?

MI: In '70, the fall of '70.

PC: In 1970, and you're still holding that position.

MI: Still holding that position.

PC: Any plans for retirement?

MI: Not yet. Well, you know I did retire in 2005 and rehire.

PC: You did?

MI: So, and I thought the other day I thought, it's been five years. I didn't realize that.

PC: So in your early years of teaching at H.G. Temple School and doing the in home visits that you talked about...

MI: Yes, that was in the summer I did the Head Start.

PC: Involved with Head Start; so you had a lot of involvement with Margie Harrell and the Housing Authority and the programs through that?

MI: And through that Head Start you got to see, like we discussed a little bit, the different types of people. You got to understand where they were coming from so when they came to school you could understand, you know, maybe is the dad in the home, or not in the home, something like that. It helped to understand people better I think.

PC: It helped you to help them.

MI: Yes.

PC: Well that is great, that is good. Do you have any personal knowledge of how decisions were made on the administrative level pertaining to full integration or staff placements or anything like that?

MI: I don't think it involved staff placement. I can remember, this is interesting, when we had like homecoming queens, we would have co-homecoming queens. That was probably maybe when they first integrated so they wouldn't feel that, you know that they were outnumbered or something. You'd have co-favorites, co-this and co-that and that went on for a lot of years. I can't remember how many, but I know in the '70's it was to make everybody feel comfortable. But, as far as staffing I don't think there was ever an issue with staffing.

PC: So that was the reason for the co-homecoming queens. That would be for the black students and then homecoming queen for the white students so they all felt a part.

MI: Yes, cause normally if the blacks voted for blacks and the whites voted for whites, they couldn't win so therefore it gave everybody a chance to be represented.

PC: Well that is good, that is good to know. How would you describe your relationship with the school board at that time that we are speaking of?

MI: I didn't have a relationship with the school board. (laughter) I might have known who they were but, you know, the only time I went to the school board was when what in 2005 when they did that rehire. I never had any...I think those men were respected men in the community and they did what they thought was right and fair and treated everybody the same.

PC: Okay.

MI: I didn't have any dealing with them.

PC: Well, you spoke of this a little bit earlier, but any incidents that happened during those early years of integration that you care to share? You spoke about it really wasn't until later but, just making sure that I covered that area. Nothing that you remember...

MI: Oh there was one girl that moved in from California that tried to stir up a little trouble. I don't remember her name or anything. But that was Mr. Porter and Mr. Massey...well I don't know if Mr. Massey was...but Mr. Porter could calm people down. It was not a real big deal. And then one time there was some boys that they were, I don't know if you'd say redneck would be the word, but maybe not as sensitive to people, to others. But, that was like I say, I can just remember that one year and a lot happening that year. But, that didn't last long.

PC: Okay.

MI: Because we had Mr. McCurry. We had good discipline. I was trying to think, I guess Mr. Ramsey was the principal then.

PC: Right. And, tell me about working with Mr. Massey. You went to the H.G. Temple School so he was the principal over there then and we know he was well respected, so did everything, your relationship with him was good?

MI: Oh yes, he was always nice to me. And I guess when you mentioned staffing a while ago, when he was principal at Temple over there, and then when they fully integrated, he became Assistant Principal at the high school under Mr. Ramsey.

PC: That is right, and then the next year I think he, well the very first year, according to the records, the very first year of full integration he declined the assistant principal ship and he taught math. And then the next year...

MI: He became principal.

PC: ...he became principal. He thought that was the best situation.

MI: Okay.

PC: So the students would feel comfortable to come to him, I think that is what he says in his oral history interview.

MI: Is he still alive?

PC: No, he is deceased. He was interviewed back in '85 when they did the book for the Cornbread Whistle.

MI: Oh, okay.

PC: He talks about them offering him that position actually but he declined it.

MI: Oh, I always thought he got...

PC: The first year he taught math, he chose that, thinking that would be the best transition. And, even for I guess, the white students that he wouldn't be in an administrative position maybe.

MI: Yes, over them.

PC: But, that is what he chose to do and they were kind enough to accept that. Then the next year he took assistant principal. He was Assistant Principal when I was here under Mr. Ramsey.

MI: Was he?

PC: So, of course I just admired both of them and respected them and you. I agree with you. It seemed like it was always, there were a few problems but...

MI: But, not like in other cities.

PC: Yes, that is great. But you know, from the teaching side it's different than my perspective as a student, you know.

MI: It's just like kids were kids.

PC: Good.

MI: I tell my kids now, like my mother, little girls are little girls. Like at 3 years old they are going to fuss and at 90 years old they are throwing stuff in the nursing home. (laughter) I mean, you know, they do not change. (laughter) Women do not change.

PC: That is cute. How was your relationship with the teachers of the other race after integration?

MI: They were just like everybody else. I mean, you know, you interacted with them. If we had meetings, parties or whatever they were invited. Everybody was the same. It was not any...maybe with one or two older ones there might have been...I mean, I don't think it was because of black and white though. I just don't think there was a big difference. I mean you know, we'd sit there at the table everybody there now and we did then. So, it's not any different.

PC: Okay. What about in the community, you know, like if you went to the grocery store or you know, to the picture show or you know, outside of the school did you notice any situations with whites and blacks at that time?

MI: Not really Patsy, I really didn't. I don't think so.

PC: Well good. You might not have been here at the time, but in '65 according to the school board records they adopted a resolution for the fall registration of that year and they had to request which school they would go to. But, you wouldn't know anything about that since you didn't start until '66.

MI: I don't know anything about that.

PC: I didn't know if they still did that the second year or if your first year you saw anything like that.

MI: They would already have been registered by the time I got here that August or September. They started school then, they would have already registered.

PC: Okay, because that was for the '66-67 they had those forty students so this slip of paper was sent home and they had to register by June of that summer and they had to choose which school. So, I didn't know if your position as counselor you had any dealings with those early forms when these forty students chose.

MI: No, all I remember I think her name was Queen Esther, there was one Queen and I thought that was an unusual name. And, there was another little girl. Maybe a name you might notice that I had not heard of before in Center but, not a big deal. It just wasn't a big deal.

PC: Okay, any comments that you want to add or something I haven't asked you pertaining to integration you can think of? Someone in particular that was a mentor during your time here or just anything you want to share about your teaching experience?

MI: Probably Margie Harrell, I mean, Margie helped a lot that first year that I was there. They just accepted you but I think being accepted by her probably helped. Mr. Porter was always a big influence I think on kids and teachers. Like I say, when I was tiny and I didn't really like to paddle, but with those boys they were almost as old as I was; some of them, at the time. They are still around you know, "You taught me and you whipped me."

I go, "No forget that, I don't remember." (laughter) But, I would have to give a lot to Mr. Porter and Margie as far as the blacks. And Mr. Massey too but I was closer to Mr. Porter because he was down there with us in our wing, in that Junior High wing down there.

PC: And, what was Margie's position at the time?

MI: Margie, she was my aid when I went to Junior School over there.

PC: Aid for...

MI: In reading over there. She was a teacher aide in 67-68. I believe she said she went to work for housing in '68 so that would have been after that school year.

PC: Mr. Porter's position was what?

MI: He was at the Junior High, I think he was at the Diboll Junior High, he would have been there.

PC: But, y'all worked together?

MI: Yes, he was my assistant principal in high school, in later years. Now he is subbing so you know, it's just been like...

PC: Okay, we talked a lot about integration and it seems like from your experience it was just a smooth process.

MI: Yes, I would definitely say so.

PC: There is really not anything other than just good things to say overall.

MI: Yes, to me it was not a major deal.

PC: Okay, anything that you want to share about your teaching experience at Diboll as a whole that you would like to share with us?

MI: It's been fun! (laughter)

PC: It's been fun! (laughter)

MI: It's been fun, challenging, exciting, stressful, especially graduation and all. That is really about it. It's been a great place to work.

PC: What brought you to Diboll?

MI: Woody was, okay, we were from Center and we liked to hunt and fish so Diboll didn't have a dentist and it was close. We didn't want to live in Center so, Monk Warner,

Woody stopped by the filling station and talked to Monk Warner and some Austin, I can't remember his first name and they said, "Yes we need a dentist." And, I think he had to get something, Joe Denman and Mr. Stubblefield they sort of recruited and said, "Yes, we need a dentist for the town" and all that stuff. So, we started out here. Not a dime in our pocket. (laughter)

PC: And been here ever since.

MI: I know when I moved here I took a thousand dollar cut from Houston to come here because they paid more in Houston. I taught two years in Houston but, that is how we...it was really strange. But, it was good because we were far enough from home, yet close enough and stuff.

PC: And where did you get your college education from?

MI: SFA [Stephen F. Austin State University], yes my bachelors and masters there.

PC: And then you left there and went to Houston to teach?

MI: No, see I got my bachelors in '64. I taught two years in Houston and then Woody and I married and we came here and then after we were married I went and got my masters in 68. We didn't have kids until '70. So, it worked out.

PC: Okay, and getting ready for retirement?

MI: Not really, (laughter) I think you die when you retire. You see all these people and they die, and I don't want to retire yet.

PC: Well, you must love your job then.

MI: I really do like it. I'm thinking, "Oh what would it be like not to start?" And, then like Martha Jenkins said, "Mary there is life after school." And I thought, "There is, but you know," I mean, you know, everything has to come to an end so, but I'm not quite ready.

PC: Anything you want to share with me about just the changes from when you first started teaching to now? There has been a lot of changes.

MI: Yes, like you had purple mimeograph paper and now you know everything is online. Well really it's as much paperless as you could get. Used to, you had to write transcripts by hand and now it's all on the computer. Kids are, basically kids are the same. I mean, people like I told you about the little girls, all that is the same, but I think kids are happy; it's harder now I really think. They have more decisions; they are tempted more by different... society's put so many... electronic devices. I mean, it's just really, I'm thinking when I see a kid with a phone, I'm thinking, what did they ever do without phones? You don't see many kids without phones.

PC: Yes, we didn't have them and now we can't see how we can live without them either.

MI: Yes, I don't use mine, but people just...electronics I guess has taken over. Used to, we did...I was trying to think the other day, who was it, like I said about Mac Mitchell, the black, I always tease him about that. Mr. Porter and I were reminiscing. I remember doing shorthand, and Nettie Mann, who is retired now, you know, she went to regional in shorthand. I taught her shorthand. Now shorthand, I was writing shorthand during mock trial and the kids were like, "What's that, what's that?" And they go, "I want to learn that." And I said, "No you don't because now they have Dictaphones and everything else, you don't even need it." But, it was fun to be able to do it.

PC: To learn it.

MI: Yes, and they were fascinated by it. That is obsolete now, typewriter is obsolete now. It's just society; it's changed.

PC: Yes, they need to teach typing though for computer. I guess they do.

MI: Well they call it keyboard but they don't emphasize it as much. There's letter, like letter form, and I have a tendency now to look at letter form. Some people don't use the right letter form, but that is not important to some of them now, so you just have to adjust to changes.

PC: It's not being taught anymore. They don't see it as a need.

MI: Yes, right, right. And then like principal, for a while we had like Mr. Ramsey for a long time and then Mr. Greer for a long time. Then, Mr. Baker and then it's just been like one year there was like a change every year in a principal. I'm thinking, "If you think I can't change that is wrong." (laughter)

PC: Yes, right.

MI: We've been through so many.

PC: One more question that I thought of is concerning the facilities and the campus at H. G. Temple School, did you notice a great difference in the H.G. Temple School and what materials you had access to, versus what you had at the Diboll Jr. High School.

MI: No, because there wasn't too much at either one back there then. (laughter)

PC: Okay.

MI: That was when those grants were coming through. They had the reading grants and all of that and they got what usually, what facilities not material supplies. They would be

the same for both campuses. But it was a short period of time, one or two years that it really...yes.

PC: What do you remember about Mrs. Odyessa Wallace? Did you work with her?

MI: Odyessa, she was there, probably what people would think of as a black teacher, probably strict, pretty strict. Yes, she was fine, I mean, just a person like everybody else.

PC: I remember Mrs. Sibley in my eighth grade.

MI: Yes they had two...probably Mrs. Sibley was over there before, both of them were over there I guess. They were sisters or something. They lived next to each other or something. I don't know, they were close.

PC: I don't know if they were related. I'm not sure.

MI: Maybe not. I can't remember. I don't know if those houses are still there or not.

PC: I remember in '71 when I came to Diboll, I remember Mrs. Sibley and Mrs. Wallace. I believe Mrs. Wallace, she never taught me; Mrs. Sibley taught me. She was real stern, what I remember about Mrs. Sibley, you know. She would pinch you on the ear.

MI: Yes, they were always dressed to a "T". You couldn't wear pants. I can remember when we first got to wear a pant suit.

PC: Oh really.

MI: I remember when the school board passed it to where teachers could wear pants. I had forgotten about that.

PC: Wow, would that have been in the seventies?

MI: Probably the seventies, yes.

PC: So that was a big deal.

MI: Oh that was a big deal. We thought it was the greatest thing.

PC: I remember being able to wear pants to school.

MI: And then shorts, you know kids couldn't wear shorts to school for a while. That was in the late eighties when ours, Elizabeth...yes.

PC: Okay, well Mrs. Ingram I can't think of anything else. You've answered all my questions. Is there anything else you care to share with me off the top of your head?

MI: No, not that I can think of.

PC: Well I really appreciate you taking your time today and helping us with this part of our history.

MI: I enjoyed doing it.

PC: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW