

Transcript of interview with Betty Spellmann by Callie Enlow, December 12, 2008

CALLIE ENLOW: Mrs. Spellmann, I just want to say before we get started that this is a project for the Georgetown Public Library and it will be part of their oral history about the integration years. Please say when you moved here.

BETTY SPELLMANN: We moved here in August of 1960 and we had already built our house. Norman had come down before we moved here from Dallas--he was teaching at SMU.

CALLIE ENLOW: Great, okay, so you moved here in 1960, and then when did you get involved with the CBS?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, I guess right from the beginning. I was on a committee to inspect the facilities at Carver.

CALLIE ENLOW: Right. And who else was on that committee?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Our next door neighbor, Jay Wolf, and Bob Brown, who was a physics professor, then a young woman named Billie somebody who lived up on Hutto Road, and her husband taught here, but they, you know....

CALLIE ENLOW: And on that committee, were there also some other people from the Georgetown schools?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, Bill Lott was on the committee, and let me see, who else was on there...I mentioned Bob Brown...

CALLIE ENLOW: ...and Jay Wolf...

BETTY SPELLMANN:...and Billie somebody...I don't know, there weren't too many of us really. I think that Billie and I were the only two women.

CALLIE ENLOW: And how did you get involved on that board...on that committee?

BETTY SPELLMANN: I was, you know, active in the PTA. A couple of years later I became PTA program chairman and then PTA president, you know, as you do when your kids are at school. Mark, our oldest, was in second grade when we moved here.

CALLIE ENLOW: Okay, okay. So then from the committee, how did that evolve into you becoming involved with the Communities (sic) for Better Schools?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, that was what it was for in the first place...you know...we first met at Dr. Eb Girvin's house, in his back yard, you know it was nice weather and we all just sat out there, and there were a lot of people there. And you see a lot of those names, like Wendell Osborn...and I'm not even sure of how many. I need to refer to this... (looks at papers). None of us thought it was worth it for them

to build separate schooling for the black kids. Now, when my committee went over to look at Carver, it was in terrible shape. There were big old cracks in the floor, and the classrooms were little bitty, and they didn't have much of a library, so it was over there on the Ridge. And, so, some of us thought it was absolutely useless, and of course, the people on the school board...well, the ones who believed in segregation, wanted to build a separate school for the blacks. And, really, we didn't have the money...even to do a good job with the Georgetown schools. So, it was a financial thing, I think...and...let's see...my wonderful minutes here...

CALLIE ENLOW: Oh, and you kept the minutes?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yes, these were submitted by me. And we had several ministers. You know, we had the first big meeting with a number of the black people, in the basement of First Methodist Church. It wasn't United Methodist then.

CALLIE ENLOW: Dr. SPELLMANN was telling me that. What was that first meeting like?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, the black people, of course, asked us why we wanted to do it, and we just said that we thought it was reasonable for everybody to go to the same school and that the community couldn't afford to build a separate school and the facilities would never be equal. You know, there just wasn't...wasn't possible. I'm just looking at some of these people here... (looking at papers). A lot of these school board members had been elected on a platform of keeping segregation. I don't remember if Doug Benold was on the school board at that time. He was never in favor of segregation and he was one of the people that gave us a lot of money to help bring this suit...you know we all did, and Norman and other people phoned a lot of people and asked for money. And a lot of the University members did contribute.

CALLIE ENLOW: Really? So, what were your fund-raising efforts like? How much time did you devote to...?

BETTY SPELLMANN: We didn't devote any in our meetings...you know the people just did it individually. And, you know I guess Norman went to see some people...and called a lot of people...and...he was so active, of course, at Southwestern...

CALLIE ENLOW: And do you remember, at that first meeting, was that when you decided what the primary goals should be, of Communities (sic) for Better Schools?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yeah, I think the primary goal was that we should have one school system...for everybody! You know, at the beginning, as you know, there had been a separate one, even for the Hispanics, and after they were integrated...but, yes...Rev. Richard Smith was the preacher at First Methodist Church then, and he was very much with us. And we had this Rev. James Van Vleck was the minister at the Presbyterian Church and we elected him chairman, but his church asked him to resign from that position and from the committee. So, of course, he did.

CALLIE ENLOW: Yes, it sounds like there was some pressure...

BETTY SPELLMANN: There was a lot of pressure and there were a lot of people in this community that thought we were just wild-hair! What can I say? You know, and even when...later when our daughters went to college, you know, there were some sororities that would never have pledged them...neither one of our girls was particularly interested in sororities, but you know, I was never asked to become a member of the Woman's Club in Georgetown, which was very prestigious, and that was...I'm sure this would be why.

CALLIE ENLOW: Yes, because even though you were so involved with PTA...

BETTY SPELLMANN: Some of our friends who moved to Georgetown five years later, you know, I remember the Campbells--he taught English--and she was invited to join the Women's Club, but it was too late. They were just as integration-minded as we would have been.

CALLIE ENLOW: Yes, and when did that tide sort of start to turn, for integration, once it happened?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, I don't know...our children never had any problem with it, and I remember there was a black student who was in school with our son, who was the smartest kid in the school system at that time. You know, he had a really, really big IQ and I don't know whatever happened to him, but...do I have his name here...well, it's not...

CALLIE ENLOW: Well, I'm sorry, I'm kind of jumping all over, but when did CBS decide to pursue legal action, to try to get integration?

BETTY SPELLMANN: I think pretty early. You know, and of course, we hired a lawyer and...let's see now, let me get this...yeah, these are all the people who were involved in the Committee for Better Schools--that's a LOT of people! You know, the Southwestern people...'course, the Southwestern people, their jobs were secure and people like Harvey Miller, who...the suit was brought in his daughter's name--Crystal Ann--he worked for Wesleyan Home, which belonged to the Methodist Church...and there was another one here, Mr. Brown, who was the cook at Southwestern, in the dormitory.

CALLIE ENLOW: And didn't Mr. Miller also work at L&M?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yes, yes, that IS where he worked, come to think...when you say that. I think you're absolutely right. And, let's see...Will Kelly McLain, who was a former district attorney here, he and his wife were very much with us...and of course, Gilbert Conoley, the superintendent...the COUNTY superintendent of schools, he and his wife were very much in favor of it.

CALLIE ENLOW: Ah, and they were all members of that organization?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, yeah. I don't know that they all came to it. You know, we met in various homes after we got started. I know we met here a lot and we met at other houses. We met in the Harris'. Now Ed Harris, who owned Troy Laundry, he went out of business because people would not patronize his laundry. And they moved away eventually. You know he lived where Dr. Peterson lives now, Dr. and Mrs. Peterson, in that house. Yeah, there was very strong feelings, as if these black people came off of the moon or something! (Both laugh)

CALLIE ENLOW: Well, I know that you have had a long history in Georgetown and you went to school in Georgetown--at Southwestern, right? And

BETTY SPELLMANN: I graduated from here in '49...

CALLIE ENLOW: And then you moved away and came back in 1960. So, did it surprise you that the community was so anti-integration?

BETTY SPELLMANN: I don't think we had thought about it until that time, although, of course we knew that Southwestern wasn't really integrated at the time we were students, so it wouldn't have come up until we got to be parents and were concerned with the finances of the school...and we had some good teachers in our schools, but they weren't all...and some of them were, I'm sure, very prejudiced against the black kids. You know, they...

CALLIE ENLOW: Well, I know that you are talking a lot about financial issues and that was sort of the heart of the state lawsuit, is that right?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yes. And you know, the taxes were not very high here...property taxes and people that lived in the outlying...you know, in the whole school district...and nobody wanted them to go up, you know...that's what some of these segregationists...you know, they were elected on that platform. So, I mean, nobody ever wants taxes to go up...

CALLIE ENLOW: And this would have raised the taxes?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, yes. And you look at the Georgetown schools now, all the wonderful things they've done...like this Community for Fine Arts and all these things...it's just a different place.

CALLIE ENLOW: So, was there ever a moral initiative behind why YOU were involved?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yeah, I think so. We thought it was definitely a question of morality, you know...it was immoral to be like that but we didn't...obviously we're not going to go around and talk like that because we had friends...lots of friends and acquaintances who didn't agree with us. But...

CALLIE ENLOW: Would you say that like, most of your friends and acquaintances didn't agree with you?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, the people through Southwestern...ah...they were pretty liberal-minded, I think all of them, really, and this young woman, Billie, whatever her last name was, whose husband taught in the Georgetown schools, she really agreed with me, I think, pretty much. And Carver was in terrible shape. They couldn't afford to build a decent school for the blacks. It had little bitty rooms...

CALLIE ENLOW: But eventually they did build a school...right? Ah...

BETTY SPELLMANN: Nope. No, our suit...that's what our suit did...we brought an injunction that they couldn't buy land and they couldn't start a building program until that was over. And we lost in...you know, here...and we went to district court...that's when I testified...

CALLIE ENLOW: Oh, you testified!

BETTY SPELLMANN: Oh, I testified, yes, oh yes. Because, you know, I was the secretary. And the judge couldn't have been nicer. He asked me just a few questions, and among other things he asked me why we got involved...and I said the same thing...but he said, did I think that we would have ever integrated without a court order...and I said, oh, no, it couldn't have happened.

CALLIE ENLOW: Right! And what kind of other things did that judge ask you?

BETTY SPELLMANN: That was about it...you know...he had a list of the members and all these people, but he didn't ask me a whole lot.

CALLIE ENLOW: And what about this argument that some of the GISD board members had about free transfer? What did you think about...

BETTY SPELLMANN: I don't think that really existed for black students. Where would they go? You know, they didn't have any money...their parents were, you know, at best, cooks and what not, you know...

CALLIE ENLOW: So they couldn't really afford to get over to the white schools, even if they were allowed to go?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, they could come to these, in Georgetown, we had school buses that bussed the kids if they were too far away...so that wouldn't have been a problem. Our kids could walk to school because this little elementary school down here is where they went.

CALLIE ENLOW: So, since you experienced actual integration when your kids...with your kids, and being involved with the PTA...can you tell me what, maybe, like the first year after the Civil Rights Act was passed, what that was like.

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, we weren't here until 1960...and you know, I don't remember anybody even talked about it...you always knew there were people that didn't agree with you and it just didn't come up.

CALLIE ENLOW: Well, I mean, did you feel like Georgetown was on a really good path to get integrated.

BETTY SPELLMANN: It wasn't...it wouldn't have been possible, no. I mean, and especially the people outside of town, that were in the school district, were even more adamant, I think. But a lot of people in town, that owned businesses, they wouldn't have liked it. And just like the fact that Ed Harris' laundry went out of business...nobody would patronize...I mean a lot of people wouldn't patronize it.

CALLIE ENLOW: And then, well, once...Georgetown had to integrate...what was that first semester...what was that...

BETTY SPELLMANN: I don't remember problems...our kids never complained...and we have a picture that shows an Easter egg hunt over here, just a few years into it, I think when, probably when Amy would have been in school, and there were several white children there...and that was Dexter Satterfield that was so bright! It's an old family name here among the black people.

CALLIE ENLOW: So, some of the people who were prejudiced while all this was going on, you weren't patronizing businesses and things like that...there weren't any problems once integration actually started?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Ah, not all of them had children. Of course, the Wolfs did. They lived right next door to us and I'm not even sure all of the Wolf children would have agreed with their dad.

CALLIE ENLOW: Wow, what was it like living next door to the Wolfs while all of this was going on?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, we didn't really...I mean, I got along well with Betty Wolf from next door. She was friendly. And Jay was...we never really saw him much.

CALLIE ENLOW: So, it wasn't a problem that you guys were on opposite sides...

BETTY SPELLMANN: And even, you know when we were on that committee, some of them were very patronizing. Like, Bill Lott and Jay Wolf, in particular, looked down his nose at Bob Brown, our physics professor from Southwestern. They said, well, I'm worth a lot more money than you are because I own all this land and I've done all this....Well, he had bought up a lot of land when it was cheap, and he was real smart, he was very smart...and as I told you what Bob Brown did, that he had invented sonar, and he eventually made a lot of money out of that. They owned a big house over on Austin Avenue...yeah, that beautiful house there.

CALLIE ENLOW: Well, back to CBS. I understood when I was talking to Norman that there was a lot of ministers that were involved.

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yeah, I think there really were. And there again, for them, it was a moral issue.

CALLIE ENLOW: And do you remem...

BETTY SPELLMANN: You know the Catholic minister, for instance, Father Pawlicki, he was really, really neat. I was just looking at these...a lot of these people, of course, were Southwestern faculty, you know, like George Nelson, who became our president after the first president had to resign, when he was asked to by his church...

CALLIE ENLOW: Oh, the president of the CBS?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Um hmm.

CALLIE ENLOW: And were a lot of those members, were they from Georgetown? Originally?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, a lot of them worked here--like John Cardwell--he worked for the newspaper and he had gone to Southwestern and been a journalism major, and we had known him at Methodist Camp in Kerrville long ago. Our neighbor across the street, Jacqueline Kreger, was a nurse...I'm not sure how long she had lived here or how long...but she was on the Committee for Better Schools.

CALLIE ENLOW: Was there anything unusual in those days...I mean..the membership there's...there's a lot of women involved...

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, there were a lot of men...if you look at that list...but there were a lot of wives and certainly, Mrs. Girvin was very much behind it, and Sherilee Switzer was on the board....

CALLIE ENLOW: And what do you think their interest was...how did they get involved?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, it was pretty much like ours...a matter of moral thing...and of course, a financial thing for the committee. We didn't think it was right for the Negro children to not have their own school...I mean, to have to have...go to a separate school. And Mrs. Cardwell, Fran Cardwell, who still lives here, at that time she was...she had gone to Southwestern...she certainly was with us. They were all of the same kind of feeling...I think the McClains certainly were...Will Kelly and Rosalind McClain. And I'd forgotten that Gus Steenken was even on our group, you know, that owns Gus's Drug Store and that family owns it. His wife, I think, was one of our officers. Yeah, most of the couples agreed. You know, I don't think of anybody offhand....And a lot of these people were our neighbors.

CALLIE ENLOW: What was like the age range for people who were involved in that group?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, I'd say...now, see, we would have been 30 when we moved here and a lot of people were in their 30s and a lot of them in their 40s. And some older, like the Conoleys.

CALLIE ENLOW: Were there any young people at Southwestern...I mean, obviously there was a lot...

BETTY SPELLMANN: They had nothing to do with it, you know, they didn't pay taxes...they really didn't know about it. And, you know, they didn't own any property. They were not that involved in the community. I think students are more involved today in the community, you know, doing things....

CALLIE ENLOW: Yes, it's somewhat surprising...

BETTY SPELLMANN: They make a big effort to do things for the community....

CALLIE ENLOW: So the first lawsuit, the state lawsuit, you lost that, is that true?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Yes, we lost that.

CALLIE ENLOW: And what was the feeling like when you realized you lost the...

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well we just figured we'd keep trying...you know...our lawyer encouraged us to continue to keep trying. He certainly didn't charge a whole lot...compared...even then lawyers charged more than he did to us...but...

CALLIE ENLOW: And what was that lawyer's name?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Oh, I've got it here somewhere...

CALLIE ENLOW: Do you remember anything about him? What kind of....

BETTY SPELLMANN: I don't remember anything about him at all personally, although we certainly had no problems, you know...we were happy with him...we thought he had done the right thing. And he was happy to do it, you know, it was a good cause. He was from Austin.

CALLIE ENLOW: So how long afterward did it take the school board to be comfortable with integration?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, they didn't really have a choice...And I don't know. I never attended a school board meeting...really, never. Some of them would always have been opposed, and others, like Doug Benold, would always have been in favor. So, that's sort of the way it is. Price Ashton was the lawyer's name!

CALLIE ENLOW: And what was the feeling like on the PTA? While you were on the PTA when all of this integration is going on?

BETTY SPELLMANN: I never heard any complaints or anything when we had meetings or whatnot, you know. I think people pretty much just accepted it. I mean some didn't, but they didn't say anything.

CALLIE ENLOW: Do you think that anything negative ever happened because of integration?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, I told you about Ed Harris' laundry...and my not being invited to join the Women's Club, which I...I joined the Music Club and I joined another reading club...in which I was very active, considering I had all these...I had four little children.

CALLIE ENLOW: You know, in terms of...did you see any repercussions against the black kids who were going to school?

BETTY SPELLMANN: I don't think so. You know our children never felt like anybody had any. Of course, the minute the black athletes sort of came on the scene when the high school was integrated...or the junior high...they made a huge difference in sports for Georgetown. Everybody liked that! You know, going to football games was a big thing for everybody...all the parents.

CALLIE ENLOW: So did that help, sort of like, socialize...

BETTY SPELLMANN: I think, yeah, people just didn't talk about it a lot. You know, if you didn't agree with them, they weren't going to come and...I never had anybody say anything directly to me.

CALLIE ENLOW: Well, was thi...you know, when integration was going on, was that like the primary focus of your lives?

BETTY SPELLMANN: Well, yeah, sure! We saved money so that we could...we thought it was only right that everybody, black kids, should go to the same school the white kids did, you know. It wasn't fair to them or their families...But our kids never had any problems with it, you know. And they had black friends, but mostly at school. And none of them lived in our neighborhood.