

TRANSCRIPT, Interview of Laurie Locke by Carol Parsonage, January 29, 2009

CAROL PARSONAGE: My name is Carol Parsonage. Today, Thursday, January 29, 2009, at 12:00 noon I am interviewing Mrs. Laurie Locke at the public library in Georgetown, Texas. This interview will become part of the Georgetown Public Library's oral history collection. This particular project focuses on people's memories of Marshall and Carver Schools and the issues and events of the 1950s and 1960s that led to desegregation.

Mrs. Locke, I really appreciate your talking with us today.

LAURIE LOCKE: I'm happy to do it.

CAROL PARSONAGE: I want to ask you first, when did you come to Georgetown?

LAURIE LOCKE: I was born here in February 1951.

CAROL PARSONAGE: OK, so you never moved anywhere else?

LAURIE LOCKE: Yes, I moved away to go to college in 1969, and then lived in Austin and Dallas for a few years, then moved back to Georgetown in 1979, after I had married and had two children. There was about a 10-year gap there.

CAROL PARSONAGE: OK, well in looking at the period when desegregation was an issue in the United States, if we started with 1954, which is *Brown v. the Board of Education*, and 1964, which is the Civil Rights Act, which really pushed desegregation, in that ten-year period, were you in the school system here in Georgetown then?

LAURIE LOCKE: I was. I started school when I was six, so 1957, and then in 1964 I guess I was in junior high school.

CAROL PARSONAGE: OK, can you tell me, then, when desegregation occurred, which here was in 1965, you would have been in junior high, is that right?

LAURIE LOCKE: '65-'66, I was a freshman in high school.

CAROL PARSONAGE: So, you were a freshman in high school. Well, the first thing I would like to do is take you back earlier than that and if you would, talk a little about your school experience prior to that. What was it like...what was the school system like for a white child in the segregated school system in Georgetown?

LAURIE LOCKE: In elementary school, when I went to school, my awareness of any of that was pretty minimal. At that time there were two schools. One was the elementary school with grades 1 – 6, and the high school, you know, Williams now, with grades 7 – 12. So, the elementary school was an open air school, everybody walked to school, nothing was locked, it

was very free and open and so that was very nice. And we had about three or four classes per grade. And there were Hispanic children that came to school with us but there weren't any black children. And the black population in Georgetown was never very large so my awareness of many of the black population was just from being at home, just because my father was a doctor and would go on house calls to their homes. And he would go spend the night in the homes sometimes if they were having a baby. So, that's – I would go with him on house calls sometimes. So that was mainly my awareness.

In junior high I became aware that we were building schools, that "separate but equal" came into play. They built the junior high where I went at the same time they built Carver School to try to avoid integrating.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Now, do you think you were unique in knowing that, or were most of your classmates aware of what was going on?

LAURIE LOCKE: Ummm. I don't think most of my classmates knew it. I knew it because my dad was either on the school board then or had been, but he was so involved in the civil rights movement that there was talk about it over the dinner table. So, I was aware that he didn't think that was a good idea. So I went to, I think it is called McCoy now, that's where I went to 8th grade. At that point I was aware that there were...

CAROL PARSONAGE: Things going on? That sort of thing?

LAURIE LOCKE: Yes.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Did you have...you said you saw the African-American community mostly through your father.

LAURIE LOCKE: Yes.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Were you aware of the schools? The black schools? And did you ever have any contact with the African-American students? On a student basis?

LAURIE LOCKE: No, not that I really can remember. We had a woman who worked for us, who cleaned our house, who was black, and I interacted with her, but as far as just people my age, no. And it's amazing to me now that I wasn't even aware of where the Carver School was. I knew sort of where it was—it was in what we call The Ridge, where the black people lived, but I never had occasion to go over there and I didn't drive, you know—wouldn't go without my parents there—so, no, very little awareness on a personal basis, you know, of the black community.

CAROL PARSONAGE: What about the condition of the school you attended? I mean, was it an old school?

LAURIE LOCKE: No, not particularly. The elementary school, as far as I can remember, was in good shape. The original Annie Purl School, I'm not sure when they tore it down, but it was in the early '60s, I think. I could be wrong about that. But I don't really have any memory of that, so they built this other school, so it was fairly new when I went there. In good shape.

CAROL PARSONAGE: What kind of things did you do outside of school? Were you a Girl Scout, or...

LAURIE LOCKE: I was a Brownie and a Girl Scout. The Girl Scout Hut was just behind the school—the Annie Purl School—we'd just walk over there. And we lived, oh, five or six blocks from the school. We always walked to school; we walked home for lunch. But I did Brownies and Girl Scouts, I took piano lessons, went to the Country Club, you know, in the summertime, and went swimming, took swimming lessons, played with my friends. Pretty simple, we just went out and rode our bikes and did what we wanted to do.

CAROL PARSONAGE: In all that, very little connection with the African-American community?

LAURIE LOCKE: Very little. Again, the population was very small, but there wasn't, in my world, there just wasn't a lot of crossover.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Now we get to 1965 and you're entering high school and the school is going to be integrated. Recognizing that there still might not have been many blacks, how did you notice that change?

LAURIE LOCKE: Well, I knew that a struggle was going on, again just from being at home and hearing my parents talk about it. And there were committee meetings, committees including Southwestern faculty, so I was aware of the conflicts that were going on in that way. But, as far as school was concerned, um, you know, when they started integrating there were a few black students in my class. Um, I don't remember that being a big deal.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Did the school say anything to you? Did they call all the white students together and say anything?

LAURIE LOCKE: No, not to my knowledge, I don't remember that happening. I just sort of remembered that one day they were there.

CAROL PARSONAGE: And what about your parents? Did they make an effort to let you know what was happening?

LAURIE LOCKE: Well, they didn't sit me down and say, you know, you're going to start having black kids in your class. I think they just assumed that we would treat them like anybody else and we would certainly get involved in the whole process. So it wasn't a big surprise to us. And it wasn't a big deal.

It was different—there were kids we didn't know and that was pretty rare in Georgetown -- for anybody new to move to town. So that part was different. I just don't remember it...from the way I perceived it...for me, personally, it was not a big issue. I do remember that one family moved to Georgetown from New York State who was black, I guess my junior year. And that made an impression on me because he was *different* than the other black students that had grown up in Georgetown. He seemed much more...ah...particularly dressed differently—seemed much more like the white kids in some ways. And the black kids mostly kept to themselves, you know, they stuck together, that makes sense, at first. I guess my only other real big experience was with powderpuff football – in my senior year. Not everybody did it, but I did, and that was an interesting experience for me because the black girls on our team were so much more aggressive than we were – ah—they seemed more aggressive and athletic and they were in there to WIN. I didn't think at the time that perhaps they were trying to prove something, but I can imagine that they would feel that way. But they were...you know...it got rough out there! We were used to everything just being kind of sweet, you know, we were out there having fun and all of a sudden they were out there to play *football!*

CAROL PARSONAGE: Speaking of football, or sports in general, we're seeming to hear that sports had a lot to do in helping integration.

LAURIE LOCKE: Absolutely.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Did that happen pretty quickly? Were there African American students that were good at sports, right away, that you saw?

LAURIE LOCKE: Yes, I guess it was pretty much right away because, you know, they didn't start integrating until I was a freshman and sophomore. I don't really remember paying much attention to it until I was a junior. I didn't have the feeling it was a gradual thing. I could be wrong. But, absolutely, by the time I was a senior in high school. There weren't many, just because there weren't many black people at all in town, but I can remember some of the people who were the most adamantly opposed to integrating, you know, softening a little bit just because we started to win football games. So that did help. But I think that did happen fairly quickly. I know that there was some talk that it was hard to get the black kids to come out for the team sometimes. They didn't feel...um...accepted, or anything like that. That's been a problem.

CAROL PARSONAGE: And what about things like the band? That was something I'd wanted to ask you. Were you involved in any of those things? Band,...or?

LAURIE LOCKE: I was involved in everything that the high school offered except Future Farmers and they wouldn't let me be part of that (laughs). I don't think there was a club in school that I wasn't in. I was the drum major in the band, so, yes, I was definitely involved in the band.

CAROL PARSONAGE: So, did you see the black children getting involved in any of those things? Any of the clubs with you, or in the band, or...?

LAURIE LOCKE: Let me think. I'm trying to think of pictures in the yearbook. Not much. In the band, I think there were one or two girls, in my class...um...that were in the band, but I'm not absolutely positive. It was not a big...wasn't a big presence. And then the other clubs, I don't think so. Not much.

CAROL PARSONAGE: So, they were coming to school but they were maybe not getting involved outside of school.

LAURIE LOCKE: Right, yes.

CAROL PARSONAGE: And your circle of friends, in the time that you were in high school, did that begin to include African Americans?

LAURIE LOCKE: No, not at all.

CAROL PARSONAGE: OK, pretty separate?

LAURIE LOCKE: I don't remember it being in my consciousness necessarily because they were black, but just because their parents weren't friends with our parents, because they didn't socialize, I mean, we didn't come into contact with them at all. And in class, you know, we were classmates and friendly, but no, it was pretty separate. There was no violence, there was no...that I remember...not much teasing, it was cordial, but that was just what I saw.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Well, I'm going to move it forwards because you've then been a parent of students in the Georgetown School District. Can you tell if there's been a change for them? Did you see in your children any evidence of that?

LAURIE LOCKE: Yes, certainly I see a lot different. Because they went to school, of course, from kindergarten on up with blacks, so it wouldn't have been the same for them. I'm trying to think about good friends. I'm sure they had friends in school, not best friends that they brought home. Ebony Rose comes to mind, she was the age of my daughter and she worked for me at Laurie's, which was my tearoom. And she and Cate were friends. Again, not close friends, not...

CAROL PARSONAGE: What kind of timeframe was that, that your daughter had these friends?

LAURIE LOCKE: That would be...she was born in '77, so...the '80s and early '90s.

CAROL PARSONAGE: I'd like to talk a little bit about what you heard at home because your parents were so involved in the process. What is your perspective of your father and mother's view of this situation.

LAURIE LOCKE: Well, my complete understanding was that it was a positive thing, that it was a necessary thing, that it was an injustice to keep the schools segregated and that it should

stop and that was informed by religion. And my dad, in particular, was involved in that more than my mother and he was involved with integrating the Williamson County Medical Society and the schools and had been doing that for a long time. But he had a lot of opposition from people in town, so I got, really, a little more caught up in it in some ways than *he* did, just because they were opposing him personally, and so as a child, or as a teenager, I really felt deeply that this was a horrible thing that people needed to stop. So, yes, we weren't really involved in the conversation a whole lot, but, at the dinner table, it was a topic of the day.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Did you take any of that discussion out into your friendships? Did you discuss it with your friends?

LAURIE LOCKE: I'm sure I did. I don't have specific memories but I do know that of my close friends, I would guess, I had a few close friends whose parents worked for Southwestern, like Tom Swift, a few whose fathers were professors. But, the majority of my friends, that was not the case. The majority of my friends came from homes that really opposed integration. My few friends that were more aligned with Southwestern, of course, were on the other side.

CAROL PARSONAGE: And, yes, you still had those friends when integration occurred. And their reaction was...?

LAURIE LOCKE: Um...Around me, I think they kept probably more of their inflammatory ideas to themselves instead of expressing them around me. Um...I'm sure they did it sometimes, and I got cross at them. But I was aware that they...well, I have one vivid memory...of a classmate, who the day that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, we were at a high school baseball game, and someone had a portable radio, and they had the news on for some reason, and they said, guess what...this has happened. And a friend of mine, and I won't call her name, immediately jumped up and screeched with delight and screamed, "The only good nigger is a dead nigger." You know. And that was in the late '60s. So some of my friends, that was their family's viewpoint. We managed to all stay friends and it didn't ever get to be a real...

CAROL PARSONAGE: It didn't boil over in the integration of the schools? As far as...

LAURIE LOCKE: It was really handled quite well. I know there were some fights, in the gym, or, you know, that sort of thing, but nothing, nothing really upsetting. The only upsetting time I remember was with some Hispanic kids who'd gotten mad, there was a fight in the gym that carried over into the halls of the high school, and I got caught in the middle of that.

CAROL PARSONAGE: But by that time the Hispanics had been in this school...

LAURIE LOCKE: Oh, forever

CAROL PARSONAGE: A long time...

LAURIE LOCKE: Oh yes. That was just a different sort of racial prejudice that existed and still exists for some people, but that one is the only one that really stands out to me.

CAROL PARSONAGE: I really have asked the questions I wanted to ask and you've given me a good view of a white child in a segregated school and then feeling integration and how it affected you. Is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to tell me?

LAURIE LOCKE: Um...When I think of the whole time period, mainly I just think of the frustration and the... (pause) frustration, I guess, is the best word, that I felt at how hard it was to get the school board to follow the federal mandate and all of the roadblocks that they threw up, that they sort of *made up* as reasons why they couldn't integrate. The reason was that they didn't want to integrate. So I mainly just think how angry I was that my dad was having to go through all that. But, from my personal point of view, it just really did not, it didn't have a big effect on me. I just sort of rolled with it and I'm sure that the kids in the class who had to come from Carver would have a different viewpoint. It was smooth as far as I was concerned.

CAROL PARSONAGE: Thank you!

L: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.