

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

Interview with Lucy Herring, August 2, 1977  
Second Session--Tape II Asheville, North Carolina  
Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri

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[Side 1]

Lucy Herring: And so I knew that the Stanford Junior High School Test wasn't the answer; so, of course, this was correspondence before I opened the summer school for the kids. I said I'd like to have the privilege of offering the Stanford Achievement Test, but advanced test with the range of--will get as high as grade fourteen college level. I feel that the kids would go through the Junior test, the ceiling of it. I am trying to recall the lady's name of the nice Noyes Foundation; we became very close friends, it seems. But she wrote me and said do you mind trying the Junior test? And I wrote and told her that I would try.

Well, I tried the expensive Junior test, and the kids knocked the ceiling out of it. It put a lid on there; they couldn't go through, so they just hit the ceiling. So I took the advanced test, and some of the kids scored higher than the college freshmen had climbed because we had the cream of the crop, There was one girl there, who on some testing that had been done in the system, had rated in the upper three percent of the nation! And it was a marvel experience! And you talk about mature kids, they were really mature. We had--we would not take more than fifty, and they came in, and they had nothing to pay; everything was taken care of. And I grew more with those children than I had grown with any group of people with whom I worked!

Silveri: How long did you stay at Livingstone College?

Herring: I resigned in--you see, you don't have to resign, I mean you don't have to retire from a college if you reach over sixty-five. That is if you're not dragging a leg or something like that; if you're mentally alert and that type of thing. I could have stayed on indefinitely; I mean for a much longer time.

But my son was going to Vietnam, and I decided that I wanted to go to Phoenix to stay with my daughter-in-law (his wife), and their two sons, who were teenagers. That was the time they were having these hot summers, you know. I said this is no time for my teenage boys to be in an apartment, coming home in the afternoon with no one in the apartment. They were in a complex, and there were no black people there but my son's family. Well, if they had been all black people, it would have been just the same. But I didn't want them coming home to an empty apartment, and so I said well, I'll resign in the summer.

The president had been failing in health for quite some time. When we had this summer school for the high school students, at the end of the summer school, we had open house, and the parents came from all sections of the State. We had this assembly program. Oh, it was a beautiful program: music, choral reading, dancing, ... [inaudible], tap dancing, and the different types of dances,

Lucy Herring: (continued) readings, (lovely choral reading groups), and then the president always welcomed these parents and talked to them. Many of the students, who came to the college in that program, came back to the college as students, you see.

So this summer when I was getting ready to go, I hadn't resigned at that time. It was in '68, and the president came down and said to me, "You are going to Phoenix to see your son off to Vietnam?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well now, who is going to finish out the program for you?" The program hadn't ended when I made this decision. I said, "Well, I have asked your wife, Ida, (Mrs. Duncan) to take over and finish the school for me." We had three other instructors there. He said, "Well, can you come back and close out the summer school?" I said, "Well, Dr. Duncan, I don't-- I think that will be very expensive to have to fly back from Phoenix just to have to close out a summer school!" He said, "I want you to welcome the people!" I said, "Well, you can welcome the people." He said, "Mrs. Herring, I want you to come back and close out the summer school." I said, "I will think about it, Dr. Duncan." He said, "There will be no expense on your part; the college will pay your plane fare back. I want you to come back and close out the summer school." And I said, "I'll think about it." He said, "No, you don't think about it."

And he **has** never addressed me without a courtesy title before, and he looked at me, and he said, "Lucy Herring, you will have to come back and close out the summer school!" His expression was--I don't know--I was concerned about his expression, and I said, "Why?" And he dropped his head, and he said, "I won't be here." And he turned and walked away, and I noticed a slump in his shoulders and he was frail; tall man who had been a big robust, two hundred and some odd pounder, had just dwindled away, and when I looked at his frame as he walked out the door, I said to myself, it seems to me that that was his way of saying good-bye. I don't know.

I promised him that I would come back. I went to Phoenix the next week, and I had been in Phoenix a week, and the young lady who had been my secretary called me, and she was weeping. And I said to her, "Now you know better than that; you don't have to tell me what has happened, I know what has happened. If Dr. Duncan could say anything to you, you know what he would say. He would tell you to shut up, wouldn't he?" And she said, "Yes, ma'm." I said, "Now that's one thing he couldn't stand, a whiny woman crying; now be happy! He said he wanted to die with his shoes on."

Everybody was concerned and so afraid that he would die in the office or on the campus. I'd see him coming under the arch coming to the campus to the administration building. He would walk ten or fifteen steps and pretend to be looking around, but he would be stopping to rest. One day I went to the registrar's office, and his sister was registrar, Julia Duncan. And she knew that I had a good bit of influence over the president because most people can

Lucy Herring: (continued) get your people to do things when the members in the family can't get them to do it. So, I went in that morning, and I looked at Julia and she was sad. She said, "Mrs. Herring?" And I said, "Yes." She called her brother Sam; she was the oldest child in the family. She said, "Would you go in there and tell Sam to go home?" I said, "Why don't you tell him?" She said, "You know he's not going to pay any attention to me. He doesn't pay any attention to anybody much, but he might listen to you." And I said, "Well, if that's the way you feel about it, I'll go in." When I went in the secretary said, "Dr. Duncan is not receiving any guests, any visitors this morning." I said, "I'm not a visitor, thank you." And I knocked on the door lightly, and he had his head on the desk. I said, "Mr. President?" I liked to call him that, and I think he liked for me to call him that. He looked, he raised his head, he said, "Yes, Mrs. Herring." He sat up and tried to brace himself and be brave. He said, "Sit down." I said, "I don't want to sit down! Listen, I have prayed for you, and I worried about you, and I'm going to tell you, I don't want to have to buy any flowers for you right now! Would you go home?" And I turned and walked out. And Julia told me the next day that he got out of that office, and he went home! I had to tell him that to shock him, but he went home.

And this is a backtracking kind of thing, but when I came back to close out the summer school, I didn't want to be there for the funeral. I purposely waited until the funeral was over. I came back to close out the summer school. I left Phoenix on a plane at midnight Phoenix time. I arrived in Asheville noon our time, Asheville time. I got a limousine and went to my home and got my car, and drove. I was driving to Salisbury. You know I hadn't slept too much on the plane, and I over-estimated my strength as an old-timer. You see, I still don't realize that I'm an old-timer! When you're young in your heart and your mind, you forget sometimes that you're not young!

So I drove that car, and I sang to keep awake, and I played the radio to keep awake, and I even did some choral readings to keep awake. And when I got within five miles of Salisbury, and I saw the tall buildings, I guess I must have relaxed. I said, "Well, thank the Good Master I don't have to worry; I've made it at least to the city limits!" But on either side of that big highway, there was a slight embankment, and it was grass-covered and the grass--and I didn't know the grass kind of comes up and goes down in a scoop and comes up, and I guess I must have fallen asleep at the wheel, and the wheel--I know this must have happened or I would have--the car would have been wrecked.

I must have slumped at the wheel, and the car must have gradually, gradually, gradually moved off the highway. When I did come to myself, I had gone down into this scoop-topped type of thing, and my car made a sudden stop with the nose up in the air! When I did awaken, I saw that I was off the highway, and I thought I was going to--I put my foot on that

Lucy Herring: (continued) accelerator, and I mashed it with excitement to the floor, and cut around and went across the highway to the left. Thank God there was no traffic coming, and went into the other side, and cut the wheel again, and went back into the same entrenchment, and then I gradually came to myself, and I followed it for a distance. And I finally came up on the level on the embankment on the side, and I stopped the car! I said, "Well, thank you Good Master!" I wasn't excited; it didn't frighten me. I didn't feel any fear, and it's strange, I sang this song, hummed it, "I'm Out Here on Your Word", and "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands", I sang that, and I hummed on in "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands"; rolled on into Salisbury, and then when I got home, I almost collapsed, you see, after I hit the house, and I went to bed.

So, the next morning, I received the parents, told them about my experience, and then I went--it was then, after Dr. Duncan had died, that I had closed out the program that I decided definitely--I mean a definite decision that I would not come back because well, the timing was right to me.

And so the same young woman whom I recommended to succeed me when I left the Asheville City Schools, had been told that because of integration they would have only one supervisor. Well, you knew--you know, I'm sorry; I had my "she knew." But you know and I know if they're going to have only two--one supervisor, there were two and they're going to have only one--that that one would be white. And so he said to Mrs. Yarborough, who was the supervisor who succeeded me, "We're going to have but one supervisor, but I will see that you have a job." When she informed me by telephone that she was going to come back home because she could work in the schools there, she had been a supervisor, and had been a Jeanes Supervisor in the county there. She said, "I know I can get work at home; I'm not accepting whatever it is the Superintendent has for me. I'm not accepting it; I'm coming home." And I wrote her; I called her, I'm sorry, and I told her that I would recommend her to the president. I had recommended her to the president, to the dean, I'm sorry, to the dean of the college because I forgot the president was dead. I had recommended her to the Dean of the College as my successor, and she was very pleased, and so she came in and took over the program. I sent my resignation in; I gave a verbal resignation to the Dean. I said, "Now I'm giving it to you verbally, and when I get to Phoenix, I'll send it to you in written form so you'll have it for your files." And so Mrs. Lucille Yarborough came in and took over; I sent my resignation in to them there, and so I stayed in Phoenix a year.

Silveri: A year? Then you came back here and established your home in Asheville again?

Herring: Yes. My home was already established.

Silveri: You kept your house here?

Lucy Herring: I told you how I first bought the house that I paid three thousand dollars for, and I eventually sold it. I turned down the ten thousand because I didn't want to leave then. There was a janitor<sup>help</sup> and a maid in the city schools who wanted that house very badly, and I wanted them to have it. They had saved up a nice sum of money, and I'm very sentimental; I guess there is something wrong with my head anyway. I feel deeply about people.

Now, I could have advertised that house and received more than eight thousand dollars for it, and of course, I had spent more than that to remodel it, if not, almost that. But those two people wanted that house, and I said I will let you have it for eight thousand dollars, and you can pay me out--I let them take a --I took a second mortgage, and the Asheville Federal financed it for them. Attorney (Ruben) Dailey, who was doing the papers for us, said, "Now Mrs. Herring, what about the interest?" I said, "There won't be any interest; I'm not charging any!" He said, "We don't do business that way!" I said, "You don't do business that way, but I do. These people have worked hard, and they saved up (I have forgotten what the downpayment was) but if they have saved up this much money from the little salary (income) they are getting, I'm not charging them any interest!" And he looked at me so strangely; he said, "Do you mean that?" I said, "Indeed, this is no time to joke! Yes, I mean it!" And I didn't charge them interest at all.

And then I went--when I sold that house, I bought a house 85 Broad Street. It had been my older sister's house, and it was not paid for. And upon her death, my brother who was in charge of things, arranged so I could finish paying for it. I had been keeping the payments up because my sister was sick, and her income wasn't sufficient to keep the payments up on this house about three doors above me. Beautiful two-story home; one of the most beautiful still in Asheville today. Lovely view of Grove Park Inn in the mountains; she never lived in it. She rented it, but she got sick, and didn't have a chance to live in it.

So, I bought that house, finished--assumed the payments on it. When I finished the (payments), I was about to get settled down. I had made improvements there, and I had my Aunt Alice with me, who was quite up in years when the doctor told me I had to stop doing the steps. I had a lovely cyclone fence around the place, had the basement improved, had a new furnace put in. I said, well, I thought I was set for smooth sailing from that point on out. So, I sold that house, and I drew my plans for a retirement home.

First, my son said when he retired he wanted to come to Asheville to live. Well, with his family, (my) plan was a ranch-type, brick home, and there were, let's see one--I'll have to count--two, three, four, five.

