

## **O. L. Sherrill**

### **Side 1:**

The control on this recorder slipped to 'voice activated' - this makes for poor listening but little is lost - mainly my questions.

He was born in Statesville, NC, graduated from Morning Side High in 1950 and Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, NC, where he majored in Physical Education with a minor in History. In South Hill, VA, he again specialized in history and sports.

He was deferred in the Korean War, then reclassified and served 2 years in the Navy. His wife, a nurse, moved back to Black Mountain where she worked at Moores General Hospital, a subsidiary of Oteen.

[25] He taught Social Studies and coached at Mooresville, NC (east of Charlotte) for 4 years.

[28] In 1962, for 1 year, he taught at Hill Street Junior High. In 1963 he taught at Stephens-Lee High School, and when it closed he moved to South French Broad, then an all-black school. He was teacher and coach for 3 years and assistant principal for 2 years. In 1970 Lee Edwards and South French Broad were combined to form Asheville High School. He was principal of Randolph Elementary for 4 years and at Hall Fletcher Middle School (in the new building - see enclosure) for one year. He worked with Bill Stanley. Don Jones was superintendent. His son was in school at this time. His salary was increased. He was co-principal of Asheville High in 1977 (enclosed paper says 1980). Stanley opened a café, Larry Liggett became principal of Asheville High. Sherrill retired in 1989.

[69] He first came to Asheville as an adult in 1955. The city depended on tourism and everything was segregated. People were clannish and he feels they still are.

[85] He never had a problem as a black because he has always been self-confident. Many black leaders have come from outside Asheville.

[99] Southside was all black. With Model City programs, people were relocated, and while this was progress, the transition was difficult, and people were demoralized.

[107] When he was at Randolph School, the houses belonged to whites - same with the South French Broad section. Blacks moved in, and whites moved out. The blacks

were not able to keep up the houses. The ceilings were high and hard to heat. The Model Cities program gave money, but it was mainly for moving expenses.

[128] He taught school with Logan Delany. {After his wife died, Delany moved to Raleigh. I have been trying to set up a phone interview with him.}. Lonnie Burton is in charge of the Opportunity Corporation [I will contact him].

[139] Stumptown was an area (where Montford Center is now) where Pullman Porters and hotel workers lived. Willie Burton is a long-time resident; his wife died 3 years ago.

[169] [Minnie didn't want to talk about disruption in neighborhoods, so I interviewed Susie Smith] He told me that the real historians of this era were Harrison (I have tape) Herring (out of town but previously interviewed by Silveri) and Ready (who wrote booklet on blacks - Library owns - and I interviewed).

[187] The YMI (then the black YMCA) was a stronghold for blacks until integration. When the Y's were combined and moved to Woodfin (where Clyde Bank is today) it was too far away. Today's paper (enclosed) tells of problems.

[199] He served on the first YMI Cultural Center board.

[204] Haith, in offering to buy the building challenged the community - which seems to come alive when there is a crisis.

[214] The YMI and the Pack Place were to be combined via bridge. People do not feel safe on Eagle Street.

[224] Before integration Eagle Street was the focus of social life with cafes and restaurants. The YMI drug store was the center. The area became blighted, businesses deteriorated, and now it is the hang-out for drug-selling. Now people tend to stay at home. Few go to the theatre.

[257] The church is the center focus for blacks, but attendance is low.

[265] Fraternities and sororities come and go. The Zeta Phi Beta gives an annual debutante party but only a small segment of the community is represented. (see Harrison, Haith, Polite and Whitesides about the Deltas)

[285] He, a Mason, went to the St. Louis Shriner's convention and feels that the Asheville participation is low. There is no cross-section representation in this city.

[299] He was co-principal of the High School at the time of Vietnam. He has seen changes in attitude towards life. The law is not respected, and he had to cope with that at school. He said you had to "hang in and do what you had to do...If you don't bend, you will break."

[329] The ROTC at the High School is unique. These students are not rebelling but there is a decrease in their numbers. The students marvel at the members of the group even if they are not a part of the marine group. Most members are black (but this causes no problems according to Bob Dougherty - see his tape).

[369] He was on the first board of PACT (Peers Addressing Conflict Together), and at the time of budget cuts fought to have the mediators retained. He recruited Glenda McDowell, and following a workshop, was challenged by two young men. They objected to his telling their parents about their behavior. He signed a contract with them that if they assumed responsibility he would not contact their parents - it worked.

[398] There is a Juvenile Evaluation Center in Swannanoa where young people live in cottages with house parents. Their transgressions range from petty theft to murder.

## **Side 2:**

[2/2] The judge decides how long the inmates will be held. Some are disciplined for the first time in their lives. A point system for good work helps them reduce sentences.

[2/17] A "students of excellence" program was set up out of the governor's office. While still residents, those chosen are taken by limousine (in suits for perhaps the first time) to put on a program - Toast Master, etc. He has been on the board less than a year and has found it most informative.

[2/38] He is also on the board of the Department of Social Services. Regarding the Eliada Home (my question), he said the place was for all girls now and that they attend public school.

[2/72] When plants close or families are dislocated (i.e. Persian war) and need assistance, the county has a network to help them. Many elect not to go to shelters. One mother and daughter prefer to live in their station wagon because they prefer the privacy.

[2/76] When the mental hospitals were closed, a lot of people were let out - the purpose was humanitarian and saving of Federal funds.

[2/91] One hundred and twenty million dollars are spent by the Federal, State, and Local agencies for the mentally ill. The state of California is considering paying patients to take their medication.

[2/105] People are afraid of going to shelters because of the increase in T.B.

[2/120] Heroin is on the upswing and crack is available on the streets. Even the little man is able to cash in. He wishes he could be optimistic. Fences are all over and have specific clients. Good, upstanding citizens buy the stuff on the street.

[2/159] He has always wanted to believe that every person had a chance to be whatever he wanted to be. He believes that you can change as long as you can think you can. If you plant a seed, you never know how long it will take to flower.

[2/180] Integration should have started in the churches - not in the courts. The people in charge didn't think through how this sudden coming together of blacks and whites in high school would affect the kids. Blacks moved from their school on South French Broad, a new school they had identified with, to a white school, where the whites felt at home. The blacks lost their school colors, mascot - their identity. The whites were already in residence... "Guess who's coming to dinner." Neither blacks nor whites understood each other's culture. The first riot took place the first year they were consolidated - the blacks rebelled about being taken away from their school and not welcomed - they took out their frustration on the vocational building, throwing furniture out windows. The police were called, and there was no school for several weeks.

[2/245] The next confrontation took place in 1972 or 73. The Principal was so disappointed, he became an introvert - he felt he had failed.

[2/268] Although the city manager said they were, these riots were not like those in other cities. Many blacks felt they had never asked for this, and they were disappointed. "Political machinery moved people like puppets." This was a period of the Vietnam War, and there was upheaval all over the country.

[2/285] We have come a long way but have a long way to go. People are still not talking to each other. They might go to work together but then go their own way. They go to separate churches.

[2/296] Social workers, who came from the urban middle class are more aware but they, like the minorities and teachers - black and white - are often bigots.

[2/308] He said, "If I learn what needs to be done, I have to do something about it, but if I don't know, it will never bother me... A lot of people don't know. They elect not to know."

[2/323] "We condemn the use of drugs and alcohol, but it is amazing what people are trying to escape from."

[2/327] He said he is an optimist. We need to improve communications, be sincere in dealing with blacks and whites. We need to develop trust. We need to believe in ourselves.

[2/334] A generation of blacks is already lost. The young men incarcerated will never fit in that gap.

The school and church must work together.

Parents are leaving it up to the school and TV to raise children. Many students are raised by grandmothers. Babies are trying to raise babies. The family structure is falling apart.