NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

706

Interview with

TRUDY FOSTER

November 17, 1987

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Mary Lohr

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Trudy Foster
(Signature)

Date: 11-17-87

Oral History Collection

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Ms. Lohr: This is Mary Lohr interviewing Trudy Foster for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 17, 1987, in the Remax Real Estate Office near the mall. I'm interviewing Trudy Foster in order to obtain her recollections concerning the Denton Women's Christian Interracial Fellowship.

I'd like to get a little bit of your background. When and where were you born?

Ms. Foster: I was born on November 7, 1924, and I was born in Taxila, which is now in West Pakistan. At that time it was India. My parents were Presbyterian missionaries. My father was a medical missionary in Pakistan at that time.

Ms. Lohr: How long did you live over there?

Ms. Foster: I lived there until I was twelve.

Ms. Lohr: And then you came back to the United States?

Ms. Foster: Yes. My oldest sister was ready for college, and so the family chose to resign. My father took up a medical practice in Ohio. So my high school years, from seventh grade on, were in Ohio.

Lohr: I was going to ask you about your educational background. Did you attend segregated schools or integrated schools in the United States?

Foster: Well, it was the only school in town. It was in the North--in Ohio--and there were no other schools, so there just weren't any blacks. There were no blacks; there were no Mexicans. It was just the one ethnic group in town--small town.

Lohr: How did you come to be involved in race relations?

Foster: In race relations? In 1960 my husband got a Fulbright back to Pakistan, and we went back there for three years, from 1960 to 1963. During that time, the Christian Pakistanis were having a very tough time in a Muslim country. Of course, we identified ourselves with the Christian Pakistanis. My husband taught two years in a Christian college out there.

When we came back to the States in 1963, it was just in the midst of the race relations here, and I found such a parallel between the Christians in Pakistan and the blacks in the United States. But, of course, in Pakistan we identified with the Christians, and the Christian Pakistanis had all the characteristics--passiveness and indifference--that we attribute to the blacks, or that the general population attributed to the blacks at that time. It just was such a parallel, you know, and it was just almost uncontrollable that I couldn't do something about it.

So it was that next year, in 1964, the year I came back, that I was president of the Christian Women's Association. So when we had the World Day of Prayer, that was the day that we were supposed to identify with all the churches, and I involved black churches. So it was just a natural outgrowth of that, and then the congregation included some of these women that were working on integration at different levels. Other than that, I didn't know of anything. On the level that I could work, there wasn't anything that existed. There were things on the campus--for campus students and things like that--but I was married and had children and lived in a different echelon of the community.

So that's how I got into it and why I got into it. It was just sort of a natural outgrowth. I'm a crusader, I guess, by nature or by bringing up, because my parents were missionaries. I always felt like I needed to keep doing my little thing to keep society in balance, shall we say (chuckle).

Lohr: So you moved to Denton in 1964?

Foster: No, we came here in 1953, and it was from here that we went to Pakistan. My husband was a professor here at North Texas. Then he got the Fulbright to go to Pakistan, and we were gone for three years, from 1960 to 1963. Then we came back. Then it was 1964 that I got involved.

Lohr: What were your impressions of black Denton at that time?

Foster: Well, prior to that, in 1953, when I came to Denton, I was young--I was in my twenties--and I was not aware of a black area. I'd never been to southeast Denton. I knew that there were blacks, but I didn't even question where they were from or anything. I just thought that they lived someplace. In talking to groups at that time, I often gave the parallel of my friend, who was about four years old at that time, and all of a sudden he discovered the telephone poles. He was just amazed. He'd say, "Look! Look at all those telephone poles!" And it was sort of that way. The blacks were here, but we just never were really conscious of them. Then all of a sudden, with a little bit of stirring up and information that we were getting, we discovered, "Yes! There they are! And they're all clustered in a swampland in southeast Denton!" So it was sort of that type of thing.

Lohr: When did you first get that impression that they were over there in southeast Denton?

Foster: Well, that was when we came back here in 1963. You have to remember, see, that in 1960 we were gone, so all these things were taking place in this country between 1960 and 1963. So there was an awful lot of knowledge and information and so forth, and we were getting it there. There was an awful lot of awakening that was taking a place. Of course, we were hearing it in India and Pakistan. When we came back, we just sort of took on, really, what we were doing in Pakistan,

because we were very much involved in helping to educate and integrate the Christians in Pakistan. In fact, I helped start a school in Pakistan for the Christian youth to try to get them a head start so that when they were in the Pakistani school system they could compete. That was very similar to what I did when I came back here with the Denton Christian Preschool. It was just sort of a carry-over of what I was doing there. I came back and just kept doing it, but it was just a different element of society.

Lohr: Had the Denton Women's Interracial Fellowship already been meeting?

Foster: Yes, yes. I'm not sure when they started--whether they started in 1963 or exactly what their date was. We didn't even get back until...let's see...we got back here, I think, in August of 1963.

Lohr: Again, how did you come to be a member?

Foster: I was president of the Christian Women's Association, and on the World Day of Prayer, I had the wife of the minister in the black Methodist church take part in the service. It was at that service that some of the women that were members of the Interracial Fellowship came to me and asked me if I would like to come and visit their group. At that time they were being very careful that they didn't overbalance it. They didn't want too many blacks or too many whites. So they were being very careful about the whites that they wanted to

get involved in it because they were working harder at trying to get the blacks to become involved. As they got more blacks involved, then they got more whites involved.

Lohr: How many people were members at the time that you joined?

Foster: It was such an informal group, and we didn't really have official members as such. They always wanted to keep it kind of informal, like a social group. I would say probably there were in the neighborhood between six and ten.

Lohr: Is that a total number?

Foster: Yes, yes. It was very, very small. We met in a person's living room. I think the first meeting I attended there were maybe six people.

Lohr: What did you do at the meeting?

Foster: The first meeting that we had was just getting used to sitting down and drinking coffee with each other and talking and trying to develop conversation on a social level.

Lohr: Could you describe the atmosphere? Was it strained?

Foster: It was forced. You know, you get kind of impatient because you want things to happen faster. There was a little bit of a forced or artificial relationship, but I think it had to be that way because there was such a big gap between the culture and the environment that the members had been reared in. It wouldn't have been a natural joining of people, you know, because you really didn't have the same background. You had the educated whites and uneducated

blacks; and you had the well-traveled whites, and you had the isolated blacks. Then you had the whites who had the mentality or the interest in trying to help other people, and you had the blacks who were trying to help themselves, so to speak, to better themselves.

Of course, there was some reaction that blacks got from their counterparts--that these were blacks that were just "trying to be white," they called it. That's how they described us, and that was supposed to be an insult to say to a black, "Oh, you're just trying to be white."

Lohr: Did you have the impression that there was animosity maybe in their community because they attended the meetings?

Foster: Among some, yes, very much so. It was because of that, you know, that they felt like they were just trying to improve their own individual situations.

Lohr: Do you know anyone who dropped out because of that?

Foster: I don't know of any, myself.

Lohr: And what about the white side? Did they feel any pressure?

Foster: Oh, yes, but I think those from the white side were a bunch of crusaders, and that wouldn't bother them.

Lohr: What were the occupations of the women?

Foster: Most of them were maids.

Lohr: What about the white women?

Foster: I'd say most of them were faculty wives and were not employed at that time.

Lohr: Did you know of anyone who was asked to join the group who refused?

Foster: Well, I couldn't say specifically, but I'm sure that there were people that were asked and didn't join, maybe because they didn't have time. We're talking about people giving up time, and, of course, that was easier for white people to do than for blacks. If you have people that are working hard and have children to raise and this and that and the other stuff, you just don't have time. So there would be that reason for it.

Also, the blacks had to have a certain amount of vision themselves, that this was important to do for their whole race. Most of us lived for our families and our own selves and our own income or our own security, and we don't think so much of doing things to help the larger group, so to speak, and I think that that's the way it was with the blacks. Most of them were just trying to get enough food on the table for survival, and they just did not even have time to think about how important it was for them to try to take a step in developing relationships on a personal level. They just felt like that if you could just give them a job so they could eat, that's all they wanted, you know, a better job.

Lohr: Did the women's group become involved in any projects that would have helped the blacks?

Foster: Yes, we did. After we got through the first social thing, as a group we went to church together, and then we would go to a restaurant together. Let's see...what else? Well, that was the thing we were trying to break up, so that people could see blacks and whites and so forth doing social things together...and church.

Lohr: Was that difficult to do at that time?

Foster: Yes. Oh, yes, it was very difficult.

Lohr: In what way?

Foster: Well, they just thought we were nuts, you know. We did open housing then. We had little pledge cards. We had a map, and we'd put little pins on everytime we got somebody to pledge that they believed in open housing. You know, we had a little card for them to sign. I might have one in here. I took them to my Sunday school class, thinking that that would be a really good place to get people to sign. Well, they just used them for bookmarks in their Bibles, you know. They might still be in their Bibles.

Another thing that we did is that we had these little things that we put on bills when we went to the grocery store or anytime we bought something. When we paid a bill, like, at a restaurant, we glued one of these things onto the bill we paid.

Lohr: Would you read that?

Foster: Okay. "As your customer I welcome being served by any

qualified person, regardless of race, color, or creed." Really, the reason we did this was because we felt like the businesses really were in a very vulnerable position; I mean, they might serve a black person something and then lose all their white customers. So we felt like it was important to give all the businesses in town our support to show them that there were people that believed in equality.

Lohr: Did Denton integrate peacefully?

Foster: Oh, yes. I think they integrated very peacefully although very slowly. This is our Good Neighbor pledge (chuckle).

Lohr: Would you mind reading that?

Foster: Okay. It says: "I believe that every person has the moral and legal right to rent, buy, or build a home anywhere without restriction based on race, religion, or national origin. Equality of opportunity is basic to the American society and our religious beliefs. Therefore, I will welcome persons into my neighborhood without regard to race, religion, or national origin, and I will work with them to build, to improve, and to maintain a community which is good for all.

Lohr: And what year was that that you did that?

Foster: I'd have to look at the record, but I think that this was probably done in 1965.

Lohr: And how was the housing in Denton? Was it pretty segregated?

Foster: Oh, it was segregated! There was no doubt about it--no doubt

about it! It was segregated, and I think at that time the blacks felt much more comfortable living that way. Because blacks were born and raised for two or three generations in segregated surroundings, they were much more comfortable. There was no threat, and people like to live that way. You don't like to live next door to somebody where you feel uncomfortable. So it was very natural for that to go on, and it needed to have something from outside to give it a push. We had to have people coming in from outside that didn't know Denton to settle here and give it that push. Even today, the traditional black area is predominantly all black, and I feel that the only thing that is going to resolve that problem is time and the fact that it needs to go industrial. The transition will be industrial, and it will no longer be a nice residential area. But that has to go through a generation at least. The younger people that are growing up are encouraged, really, by their parents to live someplace else. So that's happening within the families as well as in the community.

Lohr: How effective was your campaign? How many people did you get?

Foster: To put those pins on? It's hard to say how effective because these kinds of things were not meant to try and get a goal or everybody to do it. These things were sort of to try to help awaken people and to help people move forward

and feel more comfortable in moving toward integration. It's just like when I brought the map with all the pins on it. Well, somebody else might have felt real indifferent about it, not even thinking about the pins or anything. It would help them mentally to think, you know, that if they move in here, that's not going to ruin my neighborhood. Of course, the economic fear is the first fear that people get. They feel, "That might be a nice black person, and I might like them real well, but, boy, if they move in here, the value of my house will go down. I can't handle that! And then they'll all move in, and then I'll have to move out."

It's always those kinds of fears that build up, and so what we were doing was to try to move things in the other direction to show that there really wasn't anything to be afraid about. This is the direction in which society is moving. It was just to help people, you know, move that way. So we weren't doing anything real dramatic; I mean, we weren't trying to knock people over with our goodness. For goodness sakes, we had enough bad things about us. Just the fact that we felt morally good for doing all of this, you know, that in itself wasn't anything to brag about.

Lohr: Denton was already integrated as far as theaters and restaurants when you got back?

Foster: No, that's why we had these little things. Well, the

theaters were another thing. That probably was the first thing that integrated because of the students, and that was dealt with from a student point of view. They would ramrod a bunch of black students into the theaters. So that part of it we weren't even involved in. It was in the eating establishment where we were active. The students didn't go to all the restaurants. They might go to some. But it was the eating and the going to church. It was an entirely different level of integrating that we were doing.

Lohr: What kind of reception did you get at eating places and church?

Foster: Eating places tolerated us because they thought it was kind of amusing. Due to the fact that we came in as a group and that people were aware of all the integration that was happening, they tolerated us. I think they felt that the quieter they were...we were never thrown out.

So far as church, we always told them what we were going to do in order not to offend them or anything. We'd let the minister know, and maybe he could even use that in his sermon. The church people always greeted us very warmly, and they thought it was a very gracious thing for them to welcome us and to greet us formally. That in itself is a superficial thing, but that has to come before people join a church. Some of them might have been kind of amused by it or say, "There's that group again! Those crazy

women!"

Lohr: What about integrating Denton schools? Were you here for that?

Foster: No, see, they had gotten integrated, and that's how this thing got started. The church group had children in the school. They were studying in their circle, I think, about how they could contribute to integration. One of the things that they were told in their circle that they could contribute was to get involved in the schools and to help the black students by tutoring. So they got into a tutoring program, and that's how the Interracial Fellowship actually got its start, was through the tutoring program.

Lohr: Were you in the tutoring program?

Foster: No, see, that was in 1963. Then because of the tutoring program, some of the women thought it would be nice to get to know the parents of the black kids that they were tutoring. I'm not sure whether they tutored a whole year before they got to that point. I'm not sure when that tutoring program started.

Lohr: What about voter registration? Did the women's group take part in that?

Foster: Well, yes, we did. To tell you the truth, you might get more information on voter registration from somebody else. Euline Brock might have a better memory of exactly when and how that area got started. I was more involved in the

education of the small kids because that's what I'd done in India.

Then after finding them and seeing them on the streets, I got involved in the street program. We put out this...this is a street survey of southeast Denton conducted by the Denton Women's Interracial Fellowship in 1968, and we presented this survey to the city council. From this survey we got into a street paving program. We found out what we needed to do to do that, and we went up and down the streets--one black and one white woman--getting signatures of all the owners of the property. Then we went back and petitioned the city to have a program for paving the streets. So that's kind of what I got into. This next thing, by the way, is in the North Texas Library. One of the librarians at North Texas came and asked me if I had a copy of it to put in the library. So it's documented there.

The political end of things and getting into politics and voting and all was more on Euline's level of thinking. The level I was at was sort of more basic--meeting immediate needs like food programs, clothes programs, educating the preschoolers, and getting streets paved so that they could get to work and that type of thing. So it took all kinds of programs and involvement in activities.

Lohr: You mentioned the Christian preschool. Could you tell

something about that?

Foster: Well, (chuckle) it just really wasn't an outreach of the Interracial Fellowship as such. It was something that I personally, from my background and from my church, felt like we needed to do in some way. I really started that as a project of the Presbyterian Church that I was a member of; and then they had me go to presbytery, and presbytery recommended that if we were asking them for support, we needed to go into the total community and see if we could get wide-range interest. So I used the Interracial Fellowship and I used the churches that women were members of to get them involved in supporting the school and showing the need, you know, and selecting the families that should go to the school. So it became a very natural tool to show the needs to presbytery, who gave the church its initial support along with anonymous donations and other churches. We got a large sum as initial support to get started, and then we took it from there. The volunteers came from the black as well as the white, and one of the teachers who is still teaching after all these years in the preschool was black and a member of the Interracial Fellowship.

Lohr: What was her name?

Foster: Lovie Price was her name, and she still teaches. She teaches the younger group--the four-year-olds. A wonderful gal. She really hasn't had any formal education, but she's

gone to the workshops. She's self-taught, and she is very skilled now. I mean, she's taught there for ten years, maybe twelve years. I think we're going on thirteen.

Lohr: Where was this group?

Foster: I think for the first two years it was in the Catholic Church, and then it was located in Trinity Presbyterian Church. That's where it is now.

Lohr: And you mentioned a jobs program?

Foster: Yes. We had a jobs program. We just tried to get the different people who employed people, the different companies, to be more interested in hiring blacks, and most of our job programs were on a one-to-one basis. When we saw somebody that was in need of a job, we tried to help them through the channels that needed to be gone through to get them employed.

Lohr: How did you find these people? Through the group?

Foster: Through the group. The women knew the ones that couldn't get a job or had been laid off; or they'd say, "Everybody is getting a raise except my husband," you know. There again, see, a lot of the blacks that were in the Interracial Fellowship--a lot of them--were in there for self-interest. They had an entirely different reason for being there than the white people. The reason for their being in there certainly was not for self-interest.

Lohr: Tell me about urban renewal.

Foster: Well, the street program was an outcome of urban renewal; I mean, we tried to get the urban renewal, but we couldn't get it. It folded; it didn't pass. And we fought for that, thinking it would be the best and cheapest way for the city to get those streets paved. But there was the fear of God that was put in there. There was the newspaper that was put out by Jerry Stout, and he was a big "stirrer-upper" of the people for fear...you know, he got them to thinking that they were going to all be relocated--that kind of thing--and that urban renewal was just going to sweep them out and move them to someplace else.

So as much as we tried, the black community was divided. The ones we influenced voted for urban renewal. The white community certainly was divided, but the people that we influenced were for urban renewal. But the ones Jerry Stout influenced were not, and we'll never know how many "in-betweens" there were because there was still a lot of that...where you kind of felt like you were hearing what you wanted to hear from a black but not necessarily what he was going to do when he went to vote.

Lohr: And it was roundly defeated, wasn't it?

Foster: Oh, yes, very much so. But it was from the depths of that that we stirred this up because, see, those people that were trying to get the blacks to vote against it made...even the mayor at that time--"Zeke" Martin was his name--said,

"The city can do it. We don't need the government to come in here. We can do it." So he wasn't expecting, I don't think, the next week to have somebody to remind him that the city could do it. And we wanted to know exactly what was needed for the city to do it, so he was forced to tell us what was needed. The argument that he used, I mean, what he said was, "We got to get all streets in southeast Denton to abide by our regulations." This meant two-thirds of all the property owners that owned at least one-half of the property on that street or one-half of the property owners that owned two-thirds of the property. You had to get that many people to sign. Well, if you had a white landlord--one white landlord that owned half the street--there was no way that you could get that street paved unless you could get that white landlord to sign.

Lohr: How did you overcome that?

Foster: Well, we just did. We got all but one street paved. Bushey Street was the only street that we were not able to get. So we went to the city and told them that we would like them to just ignore Bushey Street and not consider it part of the project. We said we would exempt Bushey Street, and that's what they did.

Lohr: How long did this take from the time you started to the time the streets were paved?

Foster: I'd have to check with the city to see when they were paved.

This campaign was started in 1968, and it seems to me the paving of the streets was in 1969, 1970, something like that. It was very, very close.

Lohr: Were there many white landlords who owned property?

Foster: Yes. This is all statistical [refers to graph]. I got all the statistics. I went to a friend of mine who was a physicist in the Physics Department. My husband was in the Physics Department at the time. I said, "I've got all these statistics. What am I going to do? How can I sell it to people? If you show numbers to people, they don't see it!" He says, "Make pie graphs." So I used pie graphs. It says: Number of Property Owners....Key to the Small Circles: For Paving; Against Paving; Not Interviewed. And here it shows that 61 percent are homeowners, and 26.9 percent are Negro landlords, and 13 percent are white landlords. Then of the homeowners--you know the homeowners are all going to be black--we've got 72 percent that were for paving, and we've got 48 percent of the white landlords against paving. That was the proportion of those for and against. This section concerns street frontage owned by property. Now this is the number of people, and then this is the amount of street frontage. You can see that the landlords owned more than half of the street frontage. Homeowners owned 46.9 percent, and the white landlords owned a little bit more than half of the street frontage. See this part (chuckle)? It's

"Against"...the homeowners "For"...and then among the landlords, we got that much [refers to graph], which isn't all that great. Let's see...what was the solid white? "Not Interviewed." Okay. Of the Negro landlords, 55 percent were not interviewed because we couldn't find them. They were gone. Most of them lived in California someplace. We wrote but we never did find them. So, anyway (chuckle).

Lohr: Can you think of any other projects that the group was involved in?

Foster: City beautification. That was a program that was started by President Johnson's wife. She wanted to beautify the country. There were different elements involved in this. You know, when some people thought of city beautification, they thought you'd buy all these plants, and you plant them around. Then there was another element that said, "Now wait a minute! If we want to beautify the city, then we've got to get rid of all the trash and the junk and the shacks that aren't standard," and that directed us to southeast Denton. So we had a survey of that for beautification, and we went and took pictures.

I did a terrible thing at that time. I took pictures ...you know, all these are public records, and I discovered that a lot of my dear white landlords were elders in the Presbyterian Church, and so I found their properties and took pictures of their properties when we were having the

beautification program. This was a big thing because the whole town was behind beautifying Denton. So I made a great, big poster with black and white pictures of these houses in southeast Denton, and I had on the poster, "These are the houses owned by elders in our church." That's all I said.

Lohr: Did that help?

Foster: Well, things happened, you know. That was just one of the things that I did. You get carried away with some things, you know, when you get all this information and when you wonder how to disseminate it. I was young, and I probably wouldn't have done it if I had been older. I would have thought of a more tactful way. But that just seemed to be a fun thing to do at that time (laughter).

Lohr: But it did get cleaned up?

Foster: Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

Lohr: What about the group in the 1970s? Did it just sort of come to an end?

Foster: We had our twentieth reunion...I think for our tenth reunion we really had a big event. The guy that wrote Black Like Me was here before he died. He came to that event. It might be Euline, who was involved with getting him here. I'm not sure. But then it tended to peter out. It got to be that we had a big party at Christmastime and one party in the summer. We started then giving memorials for people who had

died--books to the library. So people were dying. A lot of us felt like the contribution that we had made toward integration was no longer valid; I mean, it had been done.

It wasn't intended to be an ongoing group. It had a purpose, and we felt like we had achieved our purpose. And the thing that we could do from now on was just to do things with each other. You know, we already had a comfortable relationship with each other. But we felt like that the next step needed to be done by younger people coming up, that they would have more of an understanding where the needs were. We were having a hard time just being social together; and then there were the jobs and the paved streets, the children's education, and just traumatic things like this. Well, now you had blacks that went to the movies; they went out to eat. They did all the things that were very natural and comfortable to them; none of those were awkward. They did have problems, but they weren't things that we could identify with because we were getting older and we just weren't involved with it. Do you see what I'm saying?

Lohr: Was there a feminist element in the group at that time?

Foster: Near the end there was one girl that was trying to turn it into the feminist group, and she was talking about black women, you know, as a primary issue. Most of us saw the women's issue as a women's issue; it wasn't black or white.

I would say that all of the whites in the Interracial Fellowship would identify with the feminist movement to some degree, you know. But inthe black culture at that time, the women were dominant in their culture, so there wasn't that same type of crusade. They all worked, and they all were the primary breadwinner in the family. It was a matriarchal society. So the issue of women was different. There was one girl that was trying to make it together, but I never felt like that she got anywhere in our group. I never really felt like that our group really identified with that issue. In that issue the white women would be fighting for themselves. In the Interracial Fellowship, the white women were serving; you know, they were trying to fight for the blacks. So it was an entirely different type of person that would get involved, I think, in it.

Lohr: Looking back, what are your feelings of the accomplishments of the group?

Foster: What it was then or what it is now?

Lohr: Both.

Foster: Well, my feelings were that I'm glad we did it. I think it was one of the reasons why Denton could integrate comfortably. When political things were decided...when you were asking about whether the school was integrated, well, of course, the high school was integrated first, and then the elementary school was. At that time, the elementary

schools were not integrated, just the high school. Of course, integrating the elementary was a much more fearful thing for black women because their children were young, and here they were, being bused or taken away. And it was scarier. So because we had the Interracial Fellowship where there was a channel of communication, they felt more comfortable going through that period of integration.

Lohr: What purpose do you think the group served?

Foster: Well, that's one of the purposes, and, of course, all these things that I've mentioned. You know, that's what we've done. I think that it was a positive, healthy tool to help this painful process of integration that still has a long way to go.

Lohr: Were any lasting friendships made between black and white women?

Foster: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Oh, my, yes!

Lohr: What about families? Do families still keep in touch?

Foster: Yes. Right now I'm on the Human Resource Committee, and one of the daughters of a woman on the Interracial Fellowship is the black coordinator for the city. She calls me up and tells me when the meetings are and all. So there's a degree of warmth. She knows what I did and what her mother did, and she feels comfortable with me. Those are all steps in her working with the white community.

Lohr: Do you know why the group decided on the name? It's kind of

a long name.

Foster: Denton's Women's Interracial Fellowship.

Lohr: Well, the word "Christian" was in there, and then it was taken out, was it not?

Foster: Yes, it was taken out at the time that we thought we were going to go on forever, and we thought we might get some Muslims in there (chuckle). Or Jews, you know.

Lohr: Did you?

Foster: No. The argument there was, you know, that when we were talking about interracial fellowship, we were talking about all races; we were not just taking about the black race or the Mexican-American race. We were talking about races that were not Christian, and if they happened to be in Denton and were having an uncomfortable time and wanted to join a group that was interested in integration, we should be a tool for them, too. But it didn't turn out to be that way. It strictly was black. We tried Mexican-American, but the Mexican-American element was so small at that time that it didn't...that wasn't what was needed.

Lohr: Did they just refuse to join or didn't show any interest?

Foster: I guess it was just that we were so...well, we were just so involved with blacks. The whole country was involved with blacks. The Mexican-Americans that we have in Denton was, as I said, not a big group, and they had an easier time integrating into the white group.

Lohr: Was the group more for white women or black women, do you think?

Foster: For?

Lohr: Yes.

Foster: Oh, it was more for black women; I mean, that's the group we were helping.

I just recalled another reason why the Mexican-Americans didn't fit in. At that time there was a strong problem between the blacks and the Mexican-Americans. It was almost like involving an entirely different problem, so you don't get anything done. The blacks in there were not excited about getting Mexican-Americans in at that time.

Lohr: How were their problems different?

Foster: I think it was because they were both poor, and so they interacted more. The psychology that the Mexican-American had was that he was poor and the black was poor; but the attitude of the Mexican-American was that he was Mexican-American, and so he was better than that black guy. And the children started having that kind of feeling, because they were on the same economic level. They had to defend their identities and make themselves feel more important by establishing those kinds of guidelines within their family culture.

Lohr: You mentioned that the high school was the first to be integrated. In our research, it said that they would go to

high school, but it also indicated that anybody who wanted to go to a grade school could go.

Foster: Well, that never worked.

Lohr: Why not? What was the deal with that?

Foster: Well, how would you like it if you had the only white child in an all-black school, and the only indication you had was that if you want to send your child there, you can? I mean, you almost were using your child, exposing your child, to solve your problem of integration. It was a farce. You can't integrate that way. It was a farce. I think that if a black woman sent her child to a white school where all the children would not welcome him, where there would be hostility, it would get really bad. I wouldn't think very highly of that black woman. I feel like she needs to work out her problems on her level, not make her child. That's what the indication was, and that was not going to solve it. We had to establish that all of our children were going to be integrated.

Lohr: So it sounded good in the newspaper, that anyone who wanted to transfer could. But in theory it didn't work out at all.

Foster: Oh, no. No, not at all.

Lohr: How did it finally come about that the grade schools were integrated?

Foster: Oh, I think we were given a decree that our education technique wasn't working, and so the school board had to think about

what they were going to do. There were several different options that they threw out, and one of them was to make the black school into sort of a middle school, like, maybe for one year (sixth grade). They had a school over there. They got the sixth grade, and instead of all the children being bused to all the other schools, the sixth graders would be all bused to the black school. That balanced out their busing thing. That was one of the proposals. And I'm not sure exactly. My memory isn't too good on exactly what transpired, but I think that the first thing they did was that they closed the black school completely. They just closed it down, which made everybody be bused to that sixth grade and seventh grade deal did not work.

Then they fixed it up, you know, and redid it again. Their idea was that it needed to be closed down to get it renovated or something, and then they were going to open it up again. But when they opened it up, they did not open it up as an elementary school; they opened it up into a school for special education--retarded children and that type of thing.

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