TRANSCRIPT— WILIAM DUDLEY GREGORIE

Interviewer: MORGAN WILLER

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MORGAN WILLER: This is Morgan Willer with the Citadel Oral History Project. Today is March 13th, 2015. I'm here with Councilman Dudley Gregorie talking about his experiences at Burke High School in Charleston, South Carolina. So, entering Burke High School as a freshman, what were your preconceived ideas about the school?

DUDLEY GREGORIE: That it was probably the greatest school in the city, or the state, to attend. It was something that I was looking forward to most of my life; most of my family went to Burke. My mother graduated from Burke in 1939. So, it was a family tradition that we go to Burke High School, so I was expecting greatness.

MW: Did you have siblings at Burke High School?

DG: At the time, I had a brother and a sister at the school. They were a couple years ahead of me. So, I was a little brother at that time at Burke. But Burke was just a wonderful experience for me. I think that it prepared me for where I am today in terms of running for mayor a third time, I had my first elections at Burke High School when I ran in the eleventh grade for student body president. So, I kind of see all that as precursor for where I am today because it definitely let me know a little bit about what goes into an

election. It gave us an opportunity to develop our platforms and planks and go around to various classrooms and campaigns. And even more importantly that year was the time for Burke to have the State President Association and because I was elected that meant that I represented Burke as the President of the State Association of High School Presidents which gave me an opportunity to go to Colonial Williamsburg [Virginia] and attend the meeting of high school student body presidents from all over the world, and to discuss world issues. So again, it was just a precursor for me for where I am today.

MW: Can you tell me what that election process was like at Burke?

DG: A little different from running for mayor or running for council in that back in those days there was no social media, or anything like that, so we had to of course make all of our signs using stencil board and magic markers, and so we then had to place our signs all around the school. And then it gave us opportunities to give speeches before the entire student body, to have many debates on the issues, and my being in eleventh grade, and the other candidates being seniors, then I was sort off, a little behind at the time. But it was a great experience. One of the candidates was killed. So, it also placed me in a position to learn about death at a very early age. The candidate that was killed was a female, and her name was Sheela Wilkinson, I think it was, and she was really doing a great job as a campaigner, and for some reason I can remember very clearly when the news flashed that she had been shot, and shot in the back of her head in a car, so that kind of put a damper on the entire election process because we had funerals, and learning about death, and what happened to her and why. So, it was a very very telling experience for me. I can’t remember anyone else in the school at that time that had either died or

died so tragically. So all of that was an unbelievable learning experience for me, and not just for me but for everyone else in the school.

MW: Would you be willing to tell me what happened and why?

DG: We never really knew why. We just knew that she was in a car with some guys who were not necessarily the best people to be involved in. And somehow there were gunshots, and we're talking about back in 1966, '65, and she was killed. I cannot recall whether anyone was arrested or anything, all we remember is that she was dead. Being a very close-knit community she only lived a couple blocks from me, we played together, and she was a very very beautiful young lady. So it was very very tragic for her family and of course for her Burke High School family, that she'd been taken away so quickly at such a young age.

MW: And how did the Burke community cope with that?

DG: We had I would suspect counseling sessions through our guidance program with our guidance counselors to help us understand death, and of course our parents more so than anyone was there for us and helped us through the mourning period.

MW: What were your responsibilities as president with that State Association that you were talking about?

DG: The first I had to do was learn Robert's Rules of Order (laughs) because I had to conduct all of the meetings of the student body. I had to deal with issues, school issues, might be lunchroom; you know high school kinds of things. But in addition to President of the Student Body, I was also co-editor of the school newspaper at that time which was called the Parvenue. So it also gave me an opportunity to help and learn how to do and put a newspaper together. That newspaper is no longer in existence, but it gave

us an opportunity to write, to express our views, whether popular or unpopular. It gave us opportunities to talk about teachers that we might have thought were unfair, which oftentimes made us unpopular, but our paper was pretty liberal and the teacher who was over the paper tended to allow us to be open and honest and write accordingly. So for me having that kind of dual responsibility, again I think prepared me for where I am today.

MW: And do you have a favorite story you ever wrote?

DG: Yes, and I think it was entitled "Where do we go from here?" And I co-authored that with one of my classmates and I think her name was Pamela Hunt and it was just an editorial about after high school what were our expectations, what kinds of things did we want to do and accomplish in life, and it was a pretty good first piece that I had written. And the subject matter was great because it left us a lot of room to sort off expand on our dreams and aspirations.

MW: So you've already mentioned the Parvenue and student government, were you involved in any other organizations?

DG: Burke had at the time an array of social clubs and school clubs, and I can remember being in Student Teachers of America, you name it, there was a club. Theron probably mentioned to you the Marcades, which again, was a group of young men who was all about trying to learn how to be gentlemen, learn how to be entrepreneurs, learn budgeting, learning how-to put-on events, selling tickets, and a lot of rivalry because there were a number of social clubs around. But at a very young age as I look back on it we did things that I thought were remarkable (laughs), like renting County Hall, organizing security, tickets, contracting with the entertainment industry; we were doing all this stuff at fifteen, sixteen years old. So it gave us a can-do spirit, that whatever you

want to do you can. I mean we were kind off ignorant, we didn't know we weren't supposed to be doing that at fifteen, but fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, those are the kind of things that we were involved in at a very very early age, and those are some great memories. And those guys will always be my brothers, always my brothers. So, the Marcades was I think a great club, a great club.

MW: What were some of those events that you put on?

DG: Most of them were events to raise money. I can recall having, and I can't remember who or what particular band, but we would literally hire a band and we'd put on a big dance party. And sometimes there were hundreds and hundreds of people that would attend, and mostly we broke even (laughs), at least we didn't have any debts. But I thought that it was a good way for young men to really learn some life lessons, learn how to budget, learn how to leverage limited resources to create what we wanted to create. Not only did we do events like that, we had pep rallies before football games, we ate together, we were brothers forever, and those were happy days, very happy days. We were able to buy sweaters and get the sweaters with the monograms and our names, and all kinds of things to sort off separate us from the rest of the group. Very different than some of the things that are happening today. Gangs? I didn't even know what that was (laughs). Burke really was a great protector and I think that sometimes to the point where we were a little ignorant about reality sometimes (laughs). But, you know, the basketball games and the football games, track meets, and homecoming parades, you name it. That was a good time, good time in life.

MW: And Theron mentioned that you put on a Mardi Gras event, could you tell me more about that?

DG: That's the Mardi Gras, that's the event where we actually printed tickets, and hired bands, and all of that stuff.

(Recording pause)

MW: You're very popular. (laughs)

DG: Well running for mayor, very busy and trying to raise money.

MW: It's a full time job just doing the campaign.

DG: And calling old friends who you haven't spoken to in ten or fifteen years, and trying to ask them for money. Yeah, yeah it's a full time job. Oh yeah, the Mardi Gras was the— I don't know how to describe it —but, it was the culmination of everything that we had done in the year leading up to this grand big Mardi Gras party. Not just with our friends from Burke School but all the schools, ICS [Immaculate Conception School], C.A. Brown, all the high schools would come. And we would literally sell hundreds of tickets, hundreds of tickets. And it was always a very successful occasion. Sometimes some of us actually participated in some of the entertainment. We would go with the band on stage and sometimes we would sing some of the popular songs. We just had a great great time. I mean a liquor free, we didn't know anything about that in those days, not like a lot of the kids today. So it was just a great occasion, a great occasion.

MW: What were some of those popular songs that you were singing, do you remember?

DG: I think "What Becomes of a Broken Heart" [What Becomes of the Broken Hearted, Jimmy Ruffin, 1967?] was one, James Brown, a number of James Brown songs we sung, some Stevie Wonder stuff, all the popular artists at the time. We would try to

sing them but most of the folks could sing better than me. I always wanted to try and be the lead but when I came down to it I was the back-up singer (laughs).

MW: Why do you think this event was so popular among so many people?

DG: Because it was a time for different schools, different classes, to actually come together socially. Yes, we had basketball games, and homecoming parties, but all those events were clearly associated with the school. This event was something totally independent from the school. The only association was that we were a club, but the school had no liability at all. Our club assumed all liability, and it was just popular and became an annual thing. We weren't the first to do it, other clubs who did it graduated and went on, so we were just keeping up with the tradition.

MW: So you used the phrase "great protector" earlier to describe Burke's environment. Can you tell me what made that environment feel so safe, or who?

DG: The teachers. The teachers were phenomenal people, phenomenal people. And you know, all of us were not rich kids, middle-income kids. And the teachers were more like our parents away from home. Whatever we would need to know to keep us safe, they would share that with us. And that's all the way down to our relationships with girls, what you can, what you should do, they gave us life lessons, and we all listened to them. And protector because of the quality of the education they gave us, academically of course, but the life lessons they taught us. Academically our teachers had unbelievable expectations and I think we excelled accordingly. They would not take mediocrity at all, it was not tolerated. And the environment that they created for us, educationally, socially, I think is very rare today. And I think that's part of the reason why so many of my

classmates are successful people. I think it had to do with what our teachers did to add on to the parenting that we had at home.

MW: What were some of those life lessons that they shared with you?

DG: (laughs) I can remember, and this is one, I can remember dating a young lady that was much much younger than me, much younger than me. And my teacher at the time was Ms. Mack Williams, and she sat me down and taught me a life lesson (laughs), that I remember to this day. And I think the lesson that she was trying to teach me was you are older than she is, she is only in the ninth grade, do you know if something happened there are certain liabilities? Well no one had ever explained any of that to me before, but here was a teacher who went beyond the academic part and taught me a life lesson, and without that lesson anything could've happened, because I adhered to what she said because it made plenty plenty sense. Another life lesson was that sometimes silence is the best wisdom to not go (half-cocked?), and sometimes if you say nothing no one can judge what you know or not know. That's a great life lesson, a lesson I use today (laughs). And they taught us that early on. At first I got offended but as I thought about it and how important a lesson that was, even today I still use it. And so those are two that really stand out in my mind as great life lessons and lessons that I can use today.

MW: Did you have favorite teachers?

DG: All of my teachers were special. They had their own specialness, as for a favorite, not really, because they all had their own set of unique characteristics that made them stand out in their own way for me. One teacher, and that was Ms. Hazel, English teacher, she's still alive today, and I can remember her giving us an assignment and that was to write a story or a play with characters. And we had to use cursive writing and we

had to use a fountain pen. That was a challenge. I can recall staying up all night, trying to create this story, and rewriting and ink spilling on the paper, and the whole shebang. And my mom saying "Dud, don't you think it's time for you to go to bed?" But it wasn't because I needed to finish this. And once I completed it and I went to school the next day and passed my paper in, it was another life lesson. And that life lesson was, the more time you put in it, the better it will turn out. I got the highest score in the class. I had never ever, ever, ever in my English class gotten the highest score on an assignment. So that taught me, the more time you put in it, the better the results. And the fact that she was able as a teacher to recognize that it must have took a long time for this kid to do this (laughs), was extremely rewarding for me, extremely rewarding for me. And you know, I think of teachers as a blessing. Every time I speak correctly, every time I can read, or I can count, I celebrate them because it's that basic foundation that they placed in all of us that helped us excel today. On tomorrow I'm speaking at a celebration of teachers. It's called "The Legends," and I've been just thinking about what I say to these teachers who are in their eighties and their nineties, who taught me. And I finally came up with a theme and that theme is "I celebrate you." I celebrate you because of the foundation you gave me. I celebrate you every time I can read a book, I celebrate you. And that they will all live forever because what they've instilled in me, I take and I share with others. So their teachings will be here until the end of time, so I celebrate. And that's going to be my theme in my speech tomorrow, "I celebrate you as a legend." For instance, the picture on the wall, Septima Clark who was a teacher, a civil rights leader. One of the first things I did when I came on council was I found out that there was a road called the Crosstown, and that was not the right name. The name was supposed to be the Septima Clark

Parkway. Well the first thing I introduced when I came on council was to change the Crosstown to the Septima Clark Parkway. It took awhile, people still referred to it as the Crosstown, and anytime they do I correct them because hopefully with in the next five, ten years, no one will call it the Crosstown anymore. That it will a true salute to a legend, Septima Clark, who was an unbelievable woman, and unbelievable civil rights person. A teacher who fought for equal wages, and I can go on and on. And I use her as an example because those are the kinds of teachers that we had in those days. So, you know I continue to salute them and celebrate them every time I speak, or read, or add (laughs).

MW: Why do you think the Crosstown wasn't properly named?

DG: I have no idea. There is a sort of memorial to her at the corner of President Street, and I guess that's Spring [St.]. It looks like a gravestone, and when you read it, it says Septima Clark Parkway. And I'm just not sure but I was talking to Jim French, who is the owner of the Chronicle Paper, and we were just talking one day, and he says, "Dudley you know, there's really no such place as the Crosstown," and so I googled Crosstown and nothing came up, googled Clark. You got the Clark Expressway, the Mark Clark, and then I think Google showed me something like Clark Parkway. And that was enough for me to say, "hey apparently there's been an oversight, we need to make this right, we need to take down every sign that says Crosstown and guys, you need to put up the Septima Clark Parkway." They put up the Septima Clark Parkway signs, they kind off left a Crosstown sign sitting in the bushes, and I said "no, no, no, no, that one has to go too." So anytime in council meetings, because we have a major drainage project going on now, and anytime it's referred to the Crosstown, there's no such place folks, it's the Septima Clark Parkway. Even the mayor now acknowledges it, "Oh nope! It's not the

Crosstown, it's the Septima Clark Parkway." And I think it's very very important that these kinds of symbols in commemoration of someone that has contributed to our lives, it's important to me that becomes a household name, so that instead of Crosstown they say Septima Clark, Septima Clark Parkway. That then gives our children the opportunity to understand what this great woman was about, what this great teacher was about.

MW: Were you aware of her when you were in high school?

DG: Yes, I'm sure in our studies we did have African American heroes and contributors, I don't know whether or not she had gotten to a point where she was in those history books. But yes she was discussed.

MW: So, what were your interactions like with other students at the school?

DG: It was pretty good. I was I guess very talkative, extremely talkative, I think they even voted me most talkative or something like that. Very good rapport with all my classmates, we had a good time together.

MW: Did you spend time together outside of school?

DG: All the time outside of schools. Schools are so different today. In those days schools were community based, people were not bussed in. And all of our parents knew each other. I was in high school with people like Theron and others where we were cub scouts together, we were boy scouts together, and after school we played football together. We played basketball on the lots together, tennis together, yeah it was endless. We all knew each other, grew up in the same neighborhoods. Our parents knew each other, our parents grew up together. So I would say it was almost twenty-four seven.

MW: What was the role of that community for Burke?

DG: I like to think of it as the other parent. I lived on a street called Court Street, it's been most recently changed to Maranda Holmes Street. And I like to think of our parents as porch mothers. As we played dodge ball in the streets, hopscotch, whatever, they were all on the porches watching, OK? Like any hen would protect the chick, but all the hens protected all the chicks whether or not they were their chicks. So it was that kind of synergy in our neighborhoods, at least the neighborhood that I grew up in. Porch mothers. Dad may be at work, but those porch mothers were out. We had strict rules. We had to be in before the nightlights came on. We would gather at the corner sometime, of Court [St.] and Race [St., and we'd sit where former council member Brenda Scott now lives, and all we would do is philosophize. Talk about things that most kids didn't talk about. Most of the folks on our street, you know even though we were poor, most of the kids went off to college. Some of them have PhDs,' some of them are lawyers. So I do think that it truly paid off and that it does take the whole community to raise a child. Because if we did anything wrong, by the time we got to the house our parents knew. And our parents knew that whatever parent called also took care of it before we got there. So we got a double whammy (laughs). Punishment, you can't go out, you know the usual kinds of things. But I think our community was very close knit, a little different than communities are today. All neighbors knew everybody, and if something went wrong it was relayed back to the house (claps hands) pronto, in seconds.

MW: Why do you think they were so strict?

DG: Because they wanted us to be successful women and men. We would be, in some cases, first generation to go to college to get an education. Many of our parents did menial jobs, day workers, housekeepers, you name it. So they wanted to make sure that

as opportunities open, that when that door opened, we'd be prepared to go through. They didn't have those opportunities. They had no choices but to do what many of them did to keep us going. And once those doors opened they were the ones who were cooking, and cleaning, and washing to pay our tuition so that we could go to college. So I think that they had the kind of vision for us that perhaps we didn't realize as a child, but they wanted to make sure that when opportunities were there we were prepared to go through.

MW: What did your parents do?

DG: My father was a merchant seaman, a world traveler. He was Jewish, converted. As children we were taught Hebrew. We practiced two religions, mom being a Methodist, so we celebrated Jewish holidays plus the Christian holidays. Confusing yes. Confusing as hell (laughs). But because my father was a traveler and he all wanted us to convert to Judaism, my mother's Methodism prevailed. My mother was a housekeeper. My mother raised many many many children other than her own. She cleaned houses on the Battery. She raised the children of the folks on the Battery. Many of them looked at her as mom. So my mother not only had to be responsible for rearing her own children, she had an unbelievable role in the rearing of many of the children other than her own for the people who employed her, cooking, cleaning, picking up kids from school, taking them out for walks, the whole shebang. So my mother was a pretty hard worker. She would actually sometimes just iron shirts just to help keep food on the table. My mother, well she still is, she's ninety-four, she's very strong willed, always wanted to be a doctor, but the opportunities never arose for her. So I think her mantra was always for us to go as high as we could go. And she always taught us that "once you hate, you lose." And that was something that I thought was profound because as a child you didn't think about it

that way. She said “No Dud, people will wrong you, but the minute you start to hate, they win, you lose.” And again that’s one of those lessons, life lessons, learned from my mom that has helped me through out my life. My father was not there most of the time because of his jobs, so that left it all on my mom to raise four children, two boys, two girls.

MW: She sounds like an incredible woman to do that.

DG: She is an unbelievable woman, still to this day.

MW: So to reverse that original question, what was the role of Burke for the community?

DG: Burke was like a community center, not just Burke, but even our elementary schools. They were the community centers of our neighborhood. I can remember teas and all the fine china and silverware, I mean just really done well. And as a child of course we would go and the PTA was very strong, but it was community centered. It was the place where events were held. The operetta, the plays, those schools always had something for us to do. We had no time to be bad kids because of all the extracurricular kinds of activities they afforded us to participate in. We were always busy; we always had something to do. There might have been a play; you had to study your part. There was always something to do and it was mostly associated with the school.

MW: What were some of the most popular events?

DG: Well homecoming of course. Debutante balls of course. But I remember more events growing up as a child going to Rhett, like things they don’t even do today, like May Day. And May Day was when there was this huge celebration, you crowned a king and a queen, and you wrapped a maypole. You’re probably not even familiar with this.

MW: Actually my high school had this. It was a tradition starting from the 1950s that we did (laughs).

DG: You got it, okay okay. And it was just unbelievable, you know, plaiting the pole, unplaiting the pole. And all kinds of activities. The parks played an important role too. I can remember Ms. Maranda Holmes who was a neighbor who ran the park. There would always be events on the park. The circus at the time was held on Harmon Field. Most people don't know that. That was an enclosed wall area. So you had the circus, you had the fair, it was very different than today. It was an exciting time, and maybe because we didn't know any better. I'm glad we didn't, maybe we wouldn't have had as much fun. I had a remarkable childhood and growing up in Charleston, and being affiliated with Burke High School and Rhett and Simonton. Those teachers kept us busy, real busy. Yes we had a problem sometimes after school with folks wanting to take your money, and this, that, and the other. But we got through all of that, we got through all of that.

MW: So what did homecoming look like, as far as events?

DG: Homecoming was parades, floats, I don't think we had a king at that time, crowing of the queen of the school and everything that led up to that. Because again all of that was done by students. Getting permits from the police department, organizing the parade, putting in all the participants and where you line up, and all that kind of stuff. Big event. And then the crowning of the queen, and then the football game. Just lots of stuff to do. We were busy children, okay? We were very busy (laughs).

MW: And you mentioned debutante balls?

DG: Yeah. The debutante ball was a ball where young ladies were selected by a committee to be a debutante. All young ladies weren't selected. Supposedly the crème de

la crème. And a lot of times the debutantes, most of them were teacher's daughters, professional people's daughters, and they would also have to select an escort. It was probably the first time we had on tails and tux, the women in long gowns, and waltzing, and all the kinds of things that go with that kind of event. So that was a biggie during junior and senior years, and I enjoyed it. And I was selected to escort a young lady, had a great time. Then there were the proms, that they still do today, and all the decorating associated with that. We were busy (laughs), we were busy. We didn't have social media at all. We were just busy kids, busy.

MW: How was learning to waltz for that ball?

DG: Well, we did have dance as a part of the curriculum, and not only did we learn the waltz, we learned cha cha, we learned, what is the?

MW: Salsa?

DG: We learned a little salsa. But we also learned the, what's the one that the cowboys do? [Makes arm movements as though doing the jig] You know what I'm talking about.

MW: Line dancing?

DG: No, we did a lot of line dancing, a lot of line dancing. Square dancing! We had lessons in all those things. We had drama classes, we had speech classes, Burke prepared us. I mean we had speech classes, and drama classes, and etiquette classes, you name it. When we got out of Burke, we were prepared to go into society and things weren't foreign to us, because at least we were exposed.

MW: You mentioned earlier in your interview that you were "ignorant of reality," to what reality were you referring to there?

DG: There were things going on around us. There were gangs, East Side, West Side, the other side of the track. There were parts of the city we would not go in. We would not go in the East Side because we would be identified as West Side. And sometimes that would cause friction, fights sometimes. But again, when I say ignorant of reality I think we were so shielded from so much. And ignorance is bliss, we were quite blissful. Because we didn't know about a lot of the negative things of the world. We didn't know, I mean our parents protected us from "coloreds only," the discrimination that was occurring in their lives, they shielded us from that and that's what I meant by "ignorant of reality." Because they didn't want us to know about it, they didn't want us to feel it. They taught us about it, but to actually experience it, they kept us from those places. That's not to say that sometimes walking home in a group that the white guys would not take raw eggs and throw it at us. We got some of that; we got a lot of that. Or sometimes hazing and called out of your name. We felt that, but we never let any of that cut our stride. It's not that we didn't know that it existed, but at the magnitude it existed we didn't know. I can remember getting on a city bus and we went to the back of the bus. Well one day, white man came and asked my mother to move out of the seat and to move to the back of the bus. And I said, "Mom, you taught us that a man gives a lady a seat, why are you giving this man your seat, mom? You told us that you should be chivalrous to women, he's not." And my mother said, "Son, don't worry about it. Someday you'll own the bus company and you'll be able to do whatever you want to do." That was shielding, okay, me from becoming belligerent, calling attention to us. So that was another life lesson, I mean the way she put it, "Don't worry about it son, someday you'll own this company." And those are things that just stick out in your mind. But I'll

be the first to say that racism didn't exist [to me as a child], but racism was pretty rampant back then. But again, our parents shielded us from it all. One memorable occasion was I can remember my brother and I, with my father who was a world traveler, started talking to us about South Africa. And I thought "what are you talking about?" And he was telling us about how people are treated in South Africa, how it's similar to what's going on here, but just a bit worse, and how over time that he thinks that this country will change. So even in short pants, five, six, seven years old, I had a father who had been exposed worldly and could tell us about other parts of the world where that wasn't even an issue, and eventually in our time, that we would see a totally different country. And he's right, you know, I worked in civil rights for many many years, and I do know that discrimination still exists, it's just done with a smile now. It's very different. Discrimination against women, sexual orientation, color, you name it. It still exists in our world today. But again, those life lessons growing up taught me to be a bit tolerant, but it also taught me to work in civil rights and write civil rights policy, and I never would have thought that I would write civil rights policy on a national level that would just not affect me, but would affect the lives of many many people in this country. So those lessons lead me to working in civil rights, going to places like East Texas alone and trying to integrate public housing authorities, to integrate other housing projects or communities. And I mean, I did it. A lot of people don't know that. I wrote a lot of civil rights policies, I was able to do investigations and find discrimination, and in the recent past when I was the director of HUD [Housing and Urban Development], and not only was I responsible for fair housing and civil rights, I was responsible for all of HUD's programs. But because of my civil rights background, I was able to make history in terms of having the Secretary of

HUD, which is a cabinet level position, initiated a discriminatory complaint against a real estate company, who we literally was able to capture on camera discrimination occurring. And once that happened, it brought in an ex-governor, it brought in Congressman [Jim] Clyburn, it brought in Mayor [Bob] Coble. It escalated to a month long series of television interviews, and education people on fair housing and their rights. So again, I don't think any of that would have ever happened to me without those life lessons I learned at Burke, through my community, and through my family.

MW: Were you involved in activism of any kind while you were in high school?

DG: What kid in the sixties didn't? Are you kidding? (laughs)

MW: I had to ask (laughs).

DG: Well high school, you said high school.

MW: Or college.

DG: High school, no. I was a little young to participate in the sit-ins. My sister who was a couple years older, yes. But mom would not allow me to go to Washington, and be a part of the March on Washington, and hear the "I Have a Dream" speech—my sister did—or participate in any of the sit-ins, or even, be a person to help integrate the schools, just wouldn't allow me to do that because of my age. College, yes. Washington D.C., yes. I would always march in the African Liberation Parade and that was a big parade to liberate, symbolically, the people of South Africa who were being discriminated against. I marched when people were killed at South Carolina State and we marched on the capital, which was probably one of the most scariest experiences of my life, because as we marched up the Capitol steps, they opened the doors of the Capitol steps, and literally there was an automatic machine gun in our faces.

MW: That's horrifying.

DG: Unbelievably. And we all ran and scattered. It might have been just to scare us, but they had just shot four students at South Carolina State, and we were just demonstrating against those state troopers who had killed family members, they were students. So yes, I was pretty active in undergrad and in grad school during those days, and when Malcolm X was killed, when Kennedy was killed, when Martin Luther King was killed, I was at college, Benedict College. And things go so bad until they literally had to close out school down and have our parents come and get us. Those were some scary times. The burning of cities. It was a tough time.

MW: Did you sister tell you about her experiences?

DG: Not really. My sister Ellen, she was excited when she came back from the march, and of course she told us about this great speech, and this man who gave the speech, and the multitude of people who were there, yes she did. She did.

MW: And you said your mother would not allow you to help with integration. Was it just because of your age?

DG: I think it was a part of it, but the folks who integrated the schools here, I think there were some prerequisites. And some of those prerequisites had to do with academic—so that they would not go there and—I was a good B+ student, didn't test well at all, and I don't know if that was my mother's reason but it might have been the reason for the school not pushing me in that direction. But my life would've been so different if I had done that. I probably wouldn't be sitting and talking to you today because I think we are what we are because of the consequences of our experiences, so I don't think I would be here today, I'd be somewhere else today.

MW: And what were the attitudes of Burke students towards integration?

DG: Frightened. We saw what happened in Little Rock, Arkansas. We had televisions and newspapers, and frightening, very frightening, frightening. And understanding that our fellow students like Millicent Brown, and others, they were the true pioneers because they bit the bullet, and made the sacrifice. So we were frightened for them, very frightened for them when they entered those schools, schools where we know were founded on the confederacy. I mean even now as I prepare myself to be, one day, mayor of this city, I am still frightened because I am a descendent of the slaves. We built this city. There's no telling, what that could do, when it does happen. And I speak of it as happening, because I'm a true believer that when divine order and universal timing comes together, there's nothing that can stop it. And that's my feeling in regard to this mayoral race, it's not about me, personally I'd like to be in the Caribbean somewhere, but if I'm the vessel, so be it. I just have to do all that I can to make it happen. Frightening, not really afraid, cautious, extremely cautious, because there's just no telling what can happen because we still have zealots out there. But I just move forward.

MW: And finally, if you could summarize the one or two most important things that your years at Burke taught you, what would they be?

DG: To never take no for an answer, and to move forward until you get the yes, because somewhere there is a yes. To always be prepared, because with preparedness it will enhance your opportunity to achieve.

MW: Well those are all the questions I have for you. So is there anything else you'd like to add?

DG: I'd like to say that this project, though oral, and I think oral is a good way to do it too, is going to be a great contribution to the archives of our school. And I am very appreciative of the opportunity. Appreciate.

MW: Well I appreciate you talking to me.

DG: (laughs) Thank you.

End of Recording

MLL 2/10/22