Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

JAMES W. NEAL

Interviewed by Dorothy Waters
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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

Dorothy Waters: Today's date is June 1st, 2002. This interview is with James Walter Neal and is being conducted at St. Mary's College by Dorothy Waters. Mr. Neal, would you tell us where you were born?

James Neal: I was born in St. Mary's County over in Leonardtown. In fact, I was born in the current St. Mary's–In fact, not the current St. Mary's Hospital but the older building, and it seems kind of ironic. I'm working there now. So, it seems to me I spent most of my–I spent most of my life right there at St. Mary's Hospital. I've been a worker, employed there in the neighborhood of 38 years. So, I guess I'm a Countian, not one of them up there: foreigners? Outsiders?

DW: Well, what year were you born?

JN: 1940, so I'm told. I'm not sure about that. I don't quite remember that far back. [chuckle]

DW: Were you a student or a teacher in St. Mary's County?

JN: A student. My wife is a teacher. She went to Banneker and after Banneker, went to college. What was it? Morgan State, I think they call it. And after graduation, she was employed by the County and taught at her former high school, Banneker.

DW: What schools did you go to in the county?

JN: Went to only the one and that was Banneker. And when I say Banneker, we're not talking about the building you see there now. I started with the older building. It was a two-room building, wooden. Wooden floors. Not central air or heat. Wood stove. And, excuse me, somewhere along the way, the–Banneker was rebuilt and a brick building. A modern school. Matter fact, Banneker, Carver and there was one other were the first three modern schools, black, in the county. And of the three, I think–In fact, all three of them are still in service.

DW: What grades did you attend at Banneker?

JN: One through 12. And again, we're talking about Banneker being a one-room building. Probably two rooms because a lot of them built with two rooms. And then, some of their elementary grades–1 through 6–were combined in a room. And after the 5th Grade, with the 6th Grade, you went to Maryland Spring School. Now, Maryland School was three, maybe four miles from Banneker, three miles north in the Loveville. And so, the 6th Grade went there. And again, it was another one-room school and the playground was really unique. The playground was nothing more than going out in the woods and having a good time.

The instructor, teacher–as we called it then–Mr. Butler would come out there and stand out the door and dinging his bell, "Lunch break." Recess, we called it. Recess was over, so you came back in.

The bathrooms, as you see now–No. We didn't have bathrooms. We had latrines. You know what a latrine is? I think it's a military term, but the latrine was one of the light things were you go out. And, I really think it has some advantages, too. Because when you go to the latrine and it's, ah, 30° outside, you're not gonna set there and read a book or smoke a cigarette. You're going do what you need to do, wash you hands. Of course, you didn't wash your hands then. You had to come back to the classroom to wash your hands. You're gonna do what you got to do and get the heck back in there.

Now, you go to the bathroom. You take your book. You take your magazine, your– whatever, your phone and you have a good time. Not then. [chuckle] So maybe, the latrine, you know, maybe it was a good idea. We need to go back to the latrine.

Anyway, I don't really want to go back to the latrine because it had a very unique smell, too. I'll never forget that smell. And, we're talking about today, the first of June. Yeah. And, it was quite pronounced in late June. And in the wintertime, you didn't notice it quite as much, yeah, but they had a real unique odor. If you've never been in one, you don't know what we're talking about.

DW: Now, what–You said that was recess. What did you--What kind of games did you play? Did you make games? Did you–Just what kind of–

JN: Yeah. We played games, yeah. We played games and I'll tell you about one of them. And, one of the games was up at Maryland Springs. The place I was telling you about, the playground was in the woods? We'd play Cowboys and Indians. And sometimes this Cowboy and Indian stuff got a little rough. I remember once I was the Indian. And of course, the other guys were a little bigger. Wasn't a little bigger. They was too damn big to be fooling with me anyway. I was the Indian. I got caught. So, what did they do? Just like they did on the TV. You hang 'em. You hang-man you, so they proceeded to hang me. Mr. Butler came out jingling his little bell and I'm tied up in the damn tree. Couldn't get away. The guys went in and left me. Eventually, somebody came back and retrieved me. But you know, the idea was: You had to fend for yourself. What kind of games did we play? We played those kind of games. It was kind of rough.

And, we also played a little dodge ball and the idea of dodge–Are you familiar with dodge ball? Yeah. And, remind me. I'll get back to duck, duck, geese in a second. Dodge ball: The idea, I think, was to take the ball and, you know, hit somebody. Not the people I dealt with. The idea was to take the ball and see if you could kill them. And, some of those guys–and not only the guys, the girls–They could fling that ball so if it hit you upside the face, you could be finished for the day. But you know, they were rough.

It was none of these girlie games you see playing now.

And, we played a little volleyball. And of course, we played baseball, softball, whatever you want to call it, but you brought your own ball and your own bat, and you bought the bat. School wouldn't provide anything. So, entertainment's your recess, your recreation, your games. You bought them.

And of course, we played the duck, duck, goose thing. That was real stupid. You ever play that?

DW: [chuckle] I remember hearing about it, but I can't remember how it went.

JN: Duck, duck, goose. Yeah. Um! Yeah, but I don't even want to talk about it. And of course, I don't liked it that anybody being hung out in the woods either, but it happened. Yes, we played the same games that you guys play now, you played later, only it was a bit more aggressive. Yeah, I'm glad I played those games. Matter fact, I'm not a sports person right now. I don't like basketball, baseball. I don't like any of that stuff. Football–Oh, I hate it and I really think part of it because what went on in school. It gave me a bad taste in sports.

DW: I guess it would.

JN: My wife can look at the football, hockey, whatever, but I don't want anything to do with any of that garbage.

DW: Well, describe the resources you had in school. You've already told me that you went to Banneker and it was two rooms. What kind of resources did you have?

JN: Resources. I suppose we're talking about textbooks and paper material and that kind of thing. I don't know.

DW: A desk.

JN: Yeah, a desk. See, we had the typical, old, wooden desks that had the iron legs and it had a little slide and you slide your books in. And then, they came along later with the chair/desk-type thing together. Now, the chair had a slide under it. You put your books that you, you know, for your lesson, wherever you need to carry it with you. And over on

the right-hand side of it, it had a lid that would flip up or down. Now, you didn't need your lid. You'd flip it up out of the way. That's fine. You needed the lid, you'd flip it down, and this is where you wrote whatever you needed to write.

Now, the problem with that dern thing was they never–Somebody never considered that you have right-handed people and left-handed people. I was left-handed, so how am I supposed to write? We sit down with the thing like this, flipped up or down–I'm left-handed, so I'm hunching over here trying to write. The people with the–Right-handed people just sit there, you know, write in a normal fashion. It was not designed for the left-handed people. And then, I don't think much, as much thought was given to you and can recall 'em–What's the term for it now? Let's be correct. Not handicapped. What am I thinking? What's the term there? Disadvantaged. Disadvantaged, yeah. So, I'm left-handed. I'm at a disadvantage.

And you know, more thought and concern is given to those kind of things. You have the ramps for the people in the wheelchairs. The bathrooms are modified for them. Why couldn't that desk been modified for these left-handed people? Nobody gave a dern or didn't care. I won't say they didn't care, just really didn't think about it.

DW: Well, I've heard different people say that they were coerced to, to use their right hand even if they were left-handed. Did that happen to you?

JN: I've heard that, too, and I heard it more from the Catholic school than the public school. I don't recall any incidents in public school–during my time anyway, in any of my classes–where you were coerced to switching over from right to left, but I did hear of it happening with the Catholic school. And, there was some concern about how to hold a pencil. And, I still believe there's only one way to hold a pencil and that's like that. The way I do it. I see–I see all kind of grips on pens and pencils and with the grip [chuckle], the writing deteriorates. And of course, you just looked at my signature a minute ago, you said it can't get much worse than that, I guess. [chuckle]

But anyway, getting back to the resources: I think the resources we had were

adequate and I say I think they were adequate. Now, I can't compare what we had to what was in the white school. But you know, common sense would tell you, lead you to believe the resources there were much better, but I have nothing to base that on other than it was my feeling. I feel that resources we had were adequate.

DW: What was a typical school day like? What did you do?

JN: Typical school day. At first thing, I had to get up and get ready in the morning. I remember going out and standing on the side of the road waiting for the bus. And, it seems so funny. I see a half a dozen buses go by and not one of them would stop. You know why? Because they were picking up white only. Of course you know that. Yeah. Anyway. So, we'd wait for the black bus to come along and of course, it wasn't black it was yellow. Had black writing, I think, but anyway, we would wait for the black bus and this was the one that we was, could ride on. We'd arrive at school between 8:30 and 9. You'd go in. And of course, you had your bagged lunch and you'd put your bagged lunch in the locker, before anybody would steal it. And of course, somebody would steal it half the time and I got wise to that, too...

...And I'm getting away from the question, but let me tell you one thing first. Had a guy that was routinely ripping off my lunch, and I got a little fed up with it. And, he was especially good at taking the dessert. You know, you take a apple or a banana or an orange or a slice of cake or something, he's gonna rip that off for sure. Anyway, I went in one evening–and I didn't tell my mother about this either–And I remember I going to try making a cake. Made this cake and didn't use chocolate. Used X-Lax. You remember? You know the little brown stuff you melt? Put it in with the icing, took it to school next day. Well anyway, to make a long story short: I didn't have any more trouble with my lunch disappearing. Had no more trouble at all.

Anyway, so now I get back to school. So, we get to school roughly around 8:30 or so and take care of your lunch and whatever you need to do. And of course, you'd reach in your pocket. You got your ball with you and your friend over there's got his

glove and somebody's got a bat. So, you don't have to be in class until about 9:00. So, you'd go out on the playground and get a game of ball going or if there's snow, they'd have a snowball fight. Whatever. That was another bad thing, too. Have the snowball fights. Go home soaking wet and then you got to catch it from Mom. Mom was a bad number.

Anyway, getting back to school, a typical day. And at 9, you'd get back in and you'd start the classes, and the classes run about 55 minutes. And at the end of 55 minutes, you switch and would go to another class. That's with the new Banneker. With the older Banneker, you had a time period from 9-9:55 for Reading and then you'd have the next 55 minutes for Math, 55 minutes for History or whatever and then you have your lunch break.

And lunch break–Lunch break was an hour and that was good. And, you'd come back in after lunch and start the same routine again. But you know, you're sitting in this school and it's either one of two things. You even got the wood stove sitting there smoking and burning you up on one end; the other end of the thing was cold. And, what do you do? You just had lunch. And of course, back typical for this. And, #1–Give me something to eat and warm me up and I'm sleepy. [chuckle] How the devil can you learn that way?! [laughter] That was a typical day. Then, we grabbed the bus. You'd go home.

And, you'd go home and you'd have some chores to do which never got done until the last minute. Of course, you'd have a good time first. And then, the parents got home for dinner, got ready–dinner. Then, it's time to do the homework. Well, gosh, that "Gunsmoke" is on tonight. That other Western is on. I'm going to look at that first. 1:00, you're sitting there trying to do the homework. You know, it was catch–One of these things where you never caught up, but I enjoyed–I enjoyed school, especially enjoyed the girls. The girls was good and maybe that's why I didn't get too far in school! [laughter] Yeah, so you spend–So, you spend a lot of your school time watching the girls and I don't think they reciprocated in kind, but we always had a good time watching.

And, I guess I still like to watch.

DW: What do you most remember about your school days? Looking back, are there any incidents–Well, you just talked about one with the cowboys and Indians–that stand out in your memory other than one?

JN: There are many things that stand out. I don't think I'm going to share too many of them! [laughter]

DW: That you care to mention?

JN: I remember a lady a saw here just a little while ago, and I won't mention her name. She was a monitor on the bus. You know what the monitor is on the bus is for? To be sure we keep order on the bus. Well, she was the worst witch I've seen in my life and I guess you're looking at me. I see the question on your face: Why do you say that? Because she wouldn't let us have a good time on the bus, and I swore I ever got big enough, I was going to–Well, you know what. I won't put it in words. And, that lady's fine. Nothing wrong with the lady, but the thing was, you know, she was in command and she made sure we did what we wanted to, not supposed to...

And, I'll tell you one other thing. This stands out. In fact, I'm going to tell you about two things. I'm not a fighting person. I don't believe in fighting, but I had two incidents in school involved with fighting with another individual, and the one guy–Of course, we had Homerooms then, and this was–School was over for the day and it was around 3:15 and you're waiting for them to ring your number for–My number was 13, I think. Hear the bell ring 13 times: bing, bing, bing. We had 13 of them. Bus #13. You got to get up, load up. Well anyway, waiting for the bus schedule to load, and I had this one dude that was giving me a lot of grief. And, I was–I was the type that kind of stood back, didn't want to get involved, didn't want to be fighting. And, more timid. So, this guy was taking advantage of me.

And at the same time, this was near the end of the school season, some time in late May and I was going out for the Honor Society. I forget what they called it. It was

some kind of Honor Society. You had your grades. Right? Your grades were up and you're a good student. You're not in trouble, you know, you're not one of these trouble makers. Well anyway, this guy got in my case so bad. I was in the library and I got up and literally picked him up by his shirt collar, took him to the door and threw him out. And of course, the instructor, the teacher, "Oh my God! What happened? What's going on? You don't do things like that!" And you know, she threatened with removing me from the Honor Society, you know, wasn't going to go through with it and I told her what–I said, "If you want to remove me, remove me, but that guy was not going to intimidate me any longer." And, we got to be the best of friends after that.

And, let me tell you something: That guy you probably know because that was Shelton's son. Sally Shelton?

DW: Yeah.

JN: You know, Sterling Neal. Yeah, related to you and I've been thinking about it when I told it! [laughter] But, it just came to me. You said you're related.

And, the next incident was another fight on the school bus. You know, we–and I say we: That was my brother, sister and myself–were the last ones getting on the school bus and we lived on Route 5 just two, three miles south of Leonardtown, so we'd be the last ones on getting to Loveville, Banneker. And of course by the time we got on, the bus was loaded, so that mean, you know, that you have to stand. Okay. So, you stand in the aisle way of the bus and you face one way or the other. So if you face this way, what's on the other side? Yeah, that's right and the guy told me to get it out of his face. Well, what am I supposed to do with it? Put it in my pocket? Anyway, he got up to get it out of his face. And when he put his hands on me, I throttled his throat and pushed him right back across the seat, and that's the closest I've ever been to killing anybody because I was going to kill him that morning. And, the lady I was talking about a minute ago–the monitor on the bus–that was before her time. But anyway, the guy driving the bus–Bowman, stopped and pulled me off of the fellow and threatened to put me off the bus.

And, I was so wired up then. [chuckle] "You think you can put me off the bus, go ahead!" [laughter]...'cause I go out of control, totally out of control. Anyway, those two– Those two incidents I do remember.

And, there was many good things, too. I suppose it's really the bad things, the unusual things that you really think about, you really remember. The good things kind of get lost in the wayside.

And of course, we always did the nasty little tricks all the kids did. You know, put the teacher–putting the thumbtack in the chair. We had one guy. He was great for doing that.

And, I also remember that–Again, we're talking about Banneker. And even after new Banneker was built, the–Well, the industrial arts type thing as you call it now. We called it Ag Shack–was a separate building, oh, half a block or so away. Instructor there– Doc, Doc Smith–and he wasn't a doctor. We called him Doc. I don't know why. But anyway, he was Doc Smith. Had a tractor there. Farm hold _____, something or 'nother, and he always had special students, you know, he would let get on that tractor and go out and work in the garden and do that kind of stuff. I had to stay in and do the book stuff. I never liked that. I always wanted to be out there on that tractor. "No, boy. You can't get on that tractor," as if I didn't know what a tractor was. I never forgave him for that. But anyway, I remember that, too. I wanted to be on the tractor, but he would never let me get on the tractor. I always had to stay inside and do the book work.

DW: So, you never did get on the tractor?

JN: Never. Never got on that tractor, and maybe that's why I love tractors so much now. Tractors and trucks. [laughter] You know, these things–You talk about influence and I think–I think it does happen. These things happen. You are influenced by it. You're biased, you know. I could never get on a tractor there. I could never prove to him that, "Hey, I know how to work with a tractor, what to do with a tractor." So now, I go–I'm tractor crazy. I love tractors. I love trucks. I love to be out in the field farming. You

know, scratching around in the dirt. I don't want the book stuff. I want to be out in the dirt. And, the same thing happened with–We were talking a minute ago about the sports. The sports was too rough. And anytime you're beating me up and telling me you're having a good time, well, I'm frightened half to death. I'm not having a good time, and so I think it had some influence. Maybe that's why I don't like the sports now. You have to blame it on something! [laughter]

DW: Did you have any favorite teachers? Favorite teachers? Least favorite teachers?

JN: I suppose–In fact, I'm sure I had a favorite, but I don't remember those as well as the ones that were my unfavorite. I had–I think some of the worst ones I ever had in my life was Mrs. Waters, Mrs. Somerville, Mrs. Thompson. And, I suppose they were worse because they were strict. They made you do it. You do it or you're gonna suffer the consequences. And I was afraid of the consequences and I did it, but I didn't like it. And I–After school, I got older, I said, "Hey, these are the good ones. These are the ones that really brought me along, did what they were supposed to be doing."

And then, we talk about my favorites. Yeah, I had some favorites. There was John Robinson. He was a good-time guy. You know he could play and have a good time. Didn't have to do any work. There was Miss Moore. She was the music teacher. And, my wife is teaching and she talk about classroom–I don't know what her term was–classroom control. You know, you got to keep classes under control. Miss Moore had no control at all. We went in there and we had a racking good time. Oh, it was one of the best classes I ever had! And, I never learned. 'Course, I couldn't sing anyway and I had nothing to do. Yeah, I thought the world of Miss Moore. She was great.

Then, we had a Miss Brody. She was a Math teacher and she was good, too, because you didn't have to do any Math. You know, the Math books had the problem in the front of the book and then you turn to the back of the book. They say what page the answer was on. And, she'd give you the problems. Go to the back of the book to get the answer. Fine. Everything's cool. I loved her, too. She was great.

Miss Sampson. She would give you the problem, but it wouldn't be the problem in the book. She'd change the numbers. She thought she was slick. She changed the numbers in the problem and then you go to the back of the book and get the answer. And of course, it was the wrong answer 'cause the numbers' been changed. Oh, she was slick! [chuckle] Then after one or two times, you learned you can't get the answers that way! [laughter] Yes, anyway.

My favorite teachers during school turned out later to be not my favorite teacher. The ones that let me play and have a good time. Now, they didn't help me too much at all. It was the ones that I did not like in school that had the influence, the positive influence. And, I suppose that's with all kids. You know, when you're young, you don't see it. You like the ones that let you have a good time and slack off and do what you want to. The ones that make you work, you don't like. That was my case, and the ones that I remember were the ones that I didn't like.

And, that Mrs. Young: God! I don't think she ever–I don't think she ever hit anybody, but it was the threat she was going to do it. And, she would sit there at her desk, and I don't know whether she picked her ear or her teeth. She was always picking something with something and her ruler in the other hand, and she was as mean as she could be. That woman was nice. The reason I say she was mean, she kept you on your toes.

DW: What class did she teach?

JN: She was teaching us in 5th or 6th Grade. I'm not sure. But then, you know, the teachers taught everything. Yeah, it wasn't any of that you go here for Math; you go there for English; you go somewhere else–None of that. One person did it all.

Then, I recall another incident. There was a textbook, and I don't know what the textbook was, but I was reading the text–and you know, school thing, and I found a mistake in it. And you know, I'm proud of myself. This is a school, you know, a text, a published thing and here little me, find a mistake? Well, I'm gonna tell Miss Young

about it. I showed it to Miss Young. "Um hm. That's good. I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to go and write a letter and send it to this publisher and tell him, hey, you found a mistake in this book." Well damn, that was more than I bargained for. I..I just wanted to recognize that this, Hey, this guy found something. He should get a A for this class.

Well, I started to write the letter and I think I spent three weeks trying to write that letter to her approval. And, I would write it and I'd send it to her, and she would find some–She was using it as a lesson. And, "A business letter starts this way." I, well, damn, I didn't want to go through all that garbage. I just found the thing. Just forget it! I'm done! [laughter] Yeah, I remember that, too, and I don't know whether, if I ever got the damn letter finished or not. School might have closed! I just prayed she didn't remember the next year! [laughter] Yeah, it was nice.

And, I remember the Superintendent of Schools. You know, we were talking again, we're saying, segregation and black schools, white schools. The Superintendent of Schools--white–was Lenny M. Dent and Mr. Waters for the Superintendent for the black schools, and he spent a lot of time in the classroom. He was interested in the kids and he kind of real enthusiastic and would try to get you, you know, get you worked up, too, to go along with him. And, the thing I remember about Mr. Waters was he'd propose a problem and then, "Okay. Let's get our thinking caps on now. Let's get our thinking caps, guys." I never was able to find my damn thinking cap! I suppose everybody has one, but I couldn't find one. And to this day, I still haven't found that thinking cap, but I will never forget him for that. Yeah. "Let's get our thinking caps on." I guess he kept his on, but I didn't. Mr. Waters also–Thinking caps. Should I say this? Want to turn that off? Never mind. I don't care. [chuckle]

I know Mr. Waters had–Do you know what a stocking cap is? Wait a minute. I'm not talking about one of these commercial things. I'm talking about when I was a teenager and it wasn't yesterday and you put on–What was that stuff? Conclamene or

something another–to stick the hair down and then you take Mother's silk socking. Put it in a knot, pull it down. Stocking cap. Yeah. Mr. Waters had one of those. I often wondered if that was his thinking cap! So, I started using one of those. I would put the grease on. "Well, maybe this is a thinking cap." Didn't seem to think any better. I don't think it worked! [laughter] Yeah. Mr. Waters had a thinking cap. He had a stocking cap. I saw the stocking cap, but I never saw the thinking cap.

Anyway, let's get back to whatever we're talking about.

DW: Did you–Did your teachers ever talk about outstanding African Americans, Civil Rights Movement or other things that may not have been included in your school books?

JN: Okay. Now, you're say–Hold on. Now, let's back up. You said, Did they talk about Civil Rights Movement?

DW: Civil Rights or any black issues that could have come up at the time you were in school. Segregation, you know, Brown vs. the Board of Education.

JN: None of that. None of that ever came up. And then, let's back up a minute. Now remember, we're talking about I graduated back in '59. When we're talking about the Civil Rights Movement.

DW: 60's.

JN: Yeah, so, you know, this is free now. No, nothing like that ever came up and you say, Did we talk about outstanding blacks? Yes, we talked about outstanding blacks and they was 1-2, 2-2, maybe 3, unless there was one. And this, we're talking about Black History Week. And, Black History Week: What did you hear about? Who did you hear about?

DW: George Washington–

JN: Carver. Carver. Absolutely. Carver. I think there was mention once of Drew. No, Drew with the--

DW: Blood?

JN: Blood transfusion, and I'm trying to think if there was any other. Only one I can think of is Drew, and even the school was named after Benjamin Banneker. Benjamin Banneker

was never mentioned. What did–What did he do? Was the _____ later of Washington, DC? Yeah. And Clots? Yeah. Never mentioned. No, so none of that came up, and I suppose then it wasn't a real issue. Nobody was real concerned about it. It was maintain the status quo and at that point in time, I was maintaining the status quo not because–I suppose it was more because I had never given it any thought. It was, you know, what I'd grown up and it was the norm, acceptable.

The change came with college. Went up to Morgan and I started to–Hey. It's not supposed to be like this. It's supposed to be different. So, we got involved in the sit-in's. The sit-in's–Of course, that might be a foreign term to you. Do you know about the sit-in's?

DW: Sit in's?

JN: Yeah. Got involved in that. You know, used to sit in the restaurant tied up so–Anyway, No, during school that never came–That never came up. It wasn't an issue.

DW: Okay. Well, those are all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything that I didn't bring up that you wanted to mention about your school days?

JN: Maybe a couple of things. I don't know. Again, I guess, kind of ramblin' a little bit. Talk about the schools and latrines. You know, the things outside. The janitor service–You didn't have any kind of a janitor service. You had a wood stove, and you're not old enough to know anything about that. You probably heard about it from your parents.

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]

JN: Yeah. I remember the school and we've already talked about the latrines. Another aspect of it that I remember is the janitor service. There was no janitors. The floor–It was a wooden floor. You know, just the boards. And, to clean those floors, we used

sawdust and the sawdust had been soaked in some kind of a chemical. And actually, I really think it was nothing but an oil-based petroleum product to spray. You know, spray that across the floor and just sweep it up. And, the sawdust–being a petroleum-based product, would hold down the dust and at the same time, give your floor a nice, shiny look. And, it had one other advantage or maybe disadvantage. I don't know which way you care to look at it. It was real slippery, so you were careful when you walked.

And the play equipment. Again, there was no play equipment provided by the school. You provided your own. That kind of thing came up much later.

And, I mentioned, I think, when we were doing the video session a few minutes ago, as the segregation thing started to be talked about, started to come into play, there was concern, concerns from the black community that is often overlooked–Maybe people are not even aware of it. But if we're going to combine these schools, the likelihood of you needing less staff, less teachin' staff, somebody's gonna be out of a job and who's it gonna be? Is it gonna be that young white teacher over there or this old black one? I don't recall. I don't know many that were–blacks or white–that were forced out because of the integration, but there was some concern from the black community that not only was the black side of the community reluctant for this integration thing, but the white side–of course, you know, they were against it.

And, I think it was a great–I think it was great because then I could be assured that I was gettin' the same quality education that my white brethren across the street was gettin' because I could go out–I grew up on the farm. Course, it was segregated, but we played with the white kids every day. You know, you come home from school and you mix up and play. The next morning, you get up and go your separate way to school.

But, it was something else I wanted to mention, but my mind–Oh. Segregation was comin' into play just about the time that I was comin' out and I seem to recall we had one student–a Joan Rhodes–was one of the first blacks in the county to go to one of the integrated schools. You know about that? Conrad Rhodes. And, I think it turned out

to be an experience a little different from what they'd anticipated and the bottom line was, I think, they packed up and went to New York or something. But yeah, Joan Rhodes was pulled out of our segregated school. She was in my class. She go to–There was a big story in the paper about it, if I recall correctly. But, it wasn't a–But, it wasn't an experience that they were looking for.

And, I suppose that's about all I want to say. You know, I'll get out of here and I'll think of other things that–I'm not gonna repeat myself again now. [laughter]

DW: Well, what was it like–since we've already flipped over the tape anyway–I'll just ask you about: Did you–You say you went to Morgan?

JN: Um hm [yes].

DW: Did you graduate form Morgan?

JN: I went there two years.

DW: Went there two years? Okay. Now, what was that experience like as far as–You said that was basically when you started learnin' about the Civil Rights Movement and those type of issues and you went on sit-in's. Was it just in the city or in the State of Maryland that you went? Did you go out of state to do anything?

JN: I didn't go out of state, just strictly within the, the walkin' campus area because I, you know, in college, funds are limited and the college, per se, was not–The college was not actively involved. It was these little groups that were tryin' to get this thing movin'. And so the college was not actively involved, so it wasn't puttin' any funds in. So you was usin' your own funds if you wanted to do anything. And so, there was no means or method to travel around the state. And not only that, if you're trying to get an education, you know, you can't be too involved. But at the same time, you know, I don't this to pass me by. I don't want to say, "I saw nothing. I did nothing." I'm involved. I'm active, too.

DW: So, you learned–I think I'm really just repeating myself, but you learned more about black issues because you were out of the County–

JN: Absolutely.

DW: Which was sort of a small–

JN: Because the County–

DW: Rural area.

JN: Yeah, because the County was a nice, neat, little packet. Everybody's gonna maintain the status quo. They've got Bob Madinsky–and I use that name just 'cuz it came up–and those–Drew Jones is black. Bob Madinsky. Oh yeah, Drew Jones. He's a good man. He came. He's part of that family over there. He's a good man. You know, it's one of these things. Just like we were talkin' earlier. I think before we even started this. You in the County 30, 40, 50 years. Your family's here. You know, you go back two or three generations. Everybody is aware who you are, where you came from. This one can be trusted; this one cannot. And so, the status quo is maintained. Everybody is happy.

It's when you get out of the community, you start to look around. "Hey. This is different. I don't have to go in the back door. Why, when I go back home, I'm gonna have to go in the back door? Why can't I sit down at the restaurant and have a cup of coffee? I mean, Mr. Charlie's sitting here havin' a cup. Why can't I have a cup, too? And you know, you don't start to think until you get out of the community, get out of the situation. You're introduced to somethin' different, and that's what happened with the colleges. You know, you see another aspect. You see another side. This is what–"This is not what we do back at home. Well, if I can do it here, I go home I want to do it, too. Not only do I want to do it, I want my kids to be able to do it. I want my parents to be able to do it." And so, that's where the change come.

DW: So then, you–after that experience–then your views broadened.

JN: Um hm [yes].

DW: So, did you join organizations after that?

JN: Just NAACP because what happened after that, the two years at Morgan and then got interested in Military. Went with the Military. And of course, in the Military, you see

the same doggone garbage, but it's much more difficult to fight it in the Military because–Well, you know about the Military. But of course, that changed, too. I'm talkin' about the Military–of the segregation. I think the segregation–In fact, I don't think it was a fact as you went further south, southwest. Yeah. And, I saw a lot of that in the Military. Once again, all of that's changed now. I don't ever want to go back to that.

We're not gonna get into the business of the military thing, but, yeah, the idea was you know, you get out of the situation. You get away from home, what you've been–what you were born with, born and raised all your life, that's all you know. Then, you get away and you're introduced to these foreign ideas. This is acceptable. This is what the normal people do. Then, you start to think, and that's bad when you start to think because then you want change. And, we saw the change.

My kids–My kids didn't have to go through it this. They have no idea, no concept at all what it was like, and that's why I think it's good you people are doin' somethin' like this and get it out. Maybe they can appreciate, then, what they have. Because for them, it's standard now. They went to integrated school and there was none of this–"Oh, he's white. I've got to be careful not to say too much and, you know, don't offend him." Equal. And, it's normal for them. Give them time. Give them something to reflect back on. "God, was it like that 30, 40 years ago?" And me telling them is not gonna mean anything. Maybe you document it and get it out, maybe they'll–Somewhere down the road, they'll look at it and say, "I had no idea it was like that."

DW: Do you think that it's gone as far as it can go? Do you think that?

JN: Oh no, no, no. No, because you've got too many, too many on both sides–black and white–sufferin' from tunnel vision. And, you know what tunnel vision is? There's too many of them. And until you get that generation segmented out, it's always gonna be there. And personally, I don't think they're ever gonna get it out. I think it'll always be there. You just hope that there's less and less of it. They have less influence. They–And position of significance where they can't push their feelings on others.

And, that is something else. We talk about the segregation. You know, before we said went to college; you get your eye open. You get your eyes open or whatever. Now suppose you stay in the community. How do you fight it then? I mean, I'm in the community. I've got to depend on Mr. Charlie for the job. I want to go to the store to get something to eat. Where do I go? Do we have any black stores? Do we have any black stores? No. I mean, you know, they–The resource just wasn't there. You fight it and it's kind of like cutting you nose of spite your face. What do you gain? So, you've got to realize, you know, get your priorities in order. Which is more important?

DW: So basically, you had to do what you had to do? You had to take what you had to take.

JN: Right. Right. But now, with the college student, you don't have anything invested. You don't have a house anywhere. You don't have any land that somebody might be able to snatch because you owed some money. I've got nothing. I have nothing to lose, so I can fight. And, that's what we were doing. We had nothing to lose. What you gonna–Nothing from nothing? Yeah. And so, if you fight and gained a inch here and the next day you gain another inch, then you move somewhere else and do the same thing, and people start to wake up.

DW: What did people think about–Did you bring these ideas back to the county when you went to college?

JN: Oh yeah.

DW: What did–What was the general consensus from people?

JN: What was the general consensus? [laughter] You really want to know? It didn't go anywhere because you come back, where you gonna be staying? You come back to the County from college, where you staying? You staying right home, with Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad been living here 60, 70 years. No, you're not changing this. You're not gonna screw my name up. Where do you come–Where do you get these radical ideas from? So then, you got to wait until you get away from Mom and Dad and then start. And by that time, you're starting to get invested in the community so you are not quite as

radical then. Yeah, you want change and you try to do it in a nice way, but it's no more of this–I won't say threatening, but it's not as aggressive. You do it, but it's different, in a different aspect, different manner.

Anyway, I guess I've said enough. [laughter] I didn't intend to talk that long.

DW: Well, we'll wrap this up and I want to thank you, Mr. Neal.

JN: I enjoyed it

DW: You've been very informative. This has been really a good interview, and I thank you for your time.

JN: Thank you to you. [End of interview]

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]