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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
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Otis Anthony: —at 10 o'clock. And the address is 1402 Governor [Street]. Okay, can you just start by giving us something about the early history of the school?

Sister Earline Fish: Right. This is Sister Earline, the present principal and I have been here for four years, replacing the Sisters of Holy Names who were here since 1894. And when they had its beginning here they had purchased an old Methodist church on Morgan Street, to be used for education for black children. There were three sisters here and there were sixteen children registered at that time. On February 12th of that year—that was on February 2nd—on the 12th, ten days later, the school, the building, was put on fire. And it was in the paper that, "The citizens do not propose to submit to a Negro school in the midst of a white and residential section of the city and warn that in case of another institution of the same character is operated in this vicinity it too will certainly cause destruction of the convent and your other churches, remember this."

After that they looked around and they made other plans and it was here that on October 8, 1894 that they built the school. And by October the enrollment was 80 pupils. Since then, up until this day, we have tried to give quality education to the black community of Tampa. Most of the black Catholic community, here in Tampa, did go through St. Peter Claver School. For a period of years it went from grades 1 through grade 9. And in recent years, I would say since 1970, they began to add other things to the curriculum such as PE [physical education], music and art.

OA: Were there other schools nationwide similar to the one at St. Peter Claver in black communities? Was it kind of (inaudible)?

EF: Yes, there used to. Religious communities used to work for the black community all over the country. This was probably the only one in the Florida area. But there were other black schools, run mostly by the Josephine Fathers, the Blessed Sacrament Sisters and—and that was their main purpose, was to educate. It was kind of mission work at that

time.

In 1974, when I came here, the Sisters of the Holy Names had just given up the administration of the school. They were still interested in it, but they did not have enough sisters and they could not get someone to replace the administration, and having taught in black high school in Washington, D.C., and having my Master's [degree] in Black History, I thought that perhaps I could do the job. We tried to make it. Since then we've had a very stable faculty. We have built stability into the administration and the faculty. We have black teachers on the faculty. We try to make the black culture as important as the academics.

I think that one of the most beautiful things about the black people is their gift of faith, and that, had they not had the deep faith that they do have, they could not have existed through the struggle they had to make. Even though we are a black school we are greatly subsidized by the diocese of St. Petersburg. We only have about 20 Catholics in the school, but we teach religion, we have services the children attend. All the new parents, I let them know that we teach religion and there's never a problem with that. They're very interested in their children learning about God and learning the Christian way of living. Sometimes I think maybe the children don't even know if they're Catholic or not Catholic. They participate in all of our services and....

We have many famous people who have gone through St. Peter Claver and some of them are well-known in the community at large right now. Some of these people are—maybe Ms. Johnson could give us—

OA: (laughs)

EF: —some of that—

Sybil Barnes-Johnson: The (inaudible) family. Dr. (inaudible) and his family, his sisters and brothers. Nathaniel (inaudible). He's a young lawyer, just out of law school, he went to school here. My husband, Don Johnson.

EF: He was a pharmacist.

SJ: And Don is a pharmacist. No, really, just about everybody that's a professional that has lived in this community since childhood went through St. Peter Claver School. We have more people that left here and went to college because their education that they received here prepared them. And we have more of the professionals who left St. Peter Claver and went on to college.

OA: What is it, do you think, about the education that a black child receives at St. Peter Claver that really strengthens his skills, or her skills?

EF: Well—

OA: In the environment (inaudible).

EF: I think that one of the greatest things that we have is that we have small classes and that our educational program is an individualized one. For instance, right now we have 6th graders who are working on 7th and 8th grade level in math, in reading. In fact, Ms. Johnson is working with an accelerated group in reading. And I think that the black children need structure built into their lives and they need to work on a one-to-one basis and be able to progress as they're ready and not be worked with in a large group.

I also feel that one of the other beautiful characteristics of St. Peter Claver School is that we, after 6 years—and it's much to my sorrow we don't have a junior high here—but after 6 years, we feel the children leave here with an identity that, "Yes, I'm black, I'm proud of it, I am somebody" and they can go into the larger schools, whether they be Catholic or public, and hold their own. In fact, this year we have, what was it, three students at Sligh Junior High—and from another student, not even connected with our school—who said, "Gee, those kids from St. Peter Claver are really smart." And we have several who have gone to Boys and Girls Academy [Boys Academy and Academy of the Holy Names for girls] and we try to feed them into the school that we feel they will be most comfortable in. This year one of the high school girls from Academy of Holy Names met me in the hall last week and told me that she was voted the vice-president of her homeroom. And she was very proud of that. And just a freshman, that's a lot.

Going back to what Ms. Johnson said about the people we've had pass through here, we've also had Dr. Hewitt. And I believe that his daughter now, Allison, is the fourth generation in this school. And the Carringtons, Mr. Carrington—what is his first name? I'm not sure. But he is also the fourth generation.

OA: Is that Reverend Carrington?

EF: What's—

OA: That's Reverend Carrington?

SJ: Right.

EF: I think it is.

SJ: (inaudible)

OA: Yeah

EF: Yes. Umm hmm.

OA: Yeah. He worked with Urban League at that time?

EF: Umm hmm. Yes. Umm hmm.

SJ: He's related to the Cabrerias through marriage.

OA: Oh.

SJ: (inaudible) Cabrera.

EF: Right now we're still the oldest public or private all black school still functioning in Hillsborough.

OA: Now that's important.

EF: Yeah. And the first black scout troops begun in Hillsborough County were begun here by the pastor of the parish, a Father Kiel, K-I-E-L. And I don't know—

OA: You said K-I-E-L?

EF: K-I-E-L.

OA: E?

EF: E. I don't know them by name, but some of the first employees in white banks were graduates from St. Peter Claver. And the first black students to integrate white high schools in Hillsborough County also came from here. And Leonard George, you probably know him?

OA: (inaudible)

EF: Right, 1969, he became—well, in 1969, became the first black athlete to be given a football scholarship to the University of Florida and he went here.

OA: He went to Jesuit [High School] after he left here.

EF: Yes, right. Umm hmm. And many of our students do go to Tampa Catholic, Academy of Holy Names or Jesuit, the three Catholic high schools here in Tampa.

OA: You mentioned something real important a little while ago; you said you see the importance to giving structure to their lives. Could you elaborate on that a little bit, because I think that's real important.

EF: Well, I feel that many of the children in the black community are coming from either single mothers or working parents, and a lot of their time is spent in day care centers or Head Start programs or at home with grandmothers. Therefore, a lot of their time is spent in watching TV, playing in the street. Therefore, they don't have structure in their lives. And we can't learn without some kind of structure. In fact, there's not too much we can do without setting aside some structured part of our life. And so this is one of the main

things we try to do is give them structure and hopefully instill a love for learning in them.

OA: That's important.

EF: I think it's very important. We find that in our first grade. Although I would like to have a junior high here, the junior high students would be restricted as far as their PE goes and their extracurricular activities. But maybe a more important thing would be to have a kindergarten here so that we could get them structured in kindergarten, so that in first grade we could begin teaching immediately rather than spending maybe six to eight weeks building structure into their lives.

OA: If you can answer this one—what kind of skills or talents do you look for in your faculty members to be able to work in a school like this here and be effective and to be able to reinforce the (inaudible)?

EF: Well, I think it's very important, first, that they understand the black culture. And that after I look for ability in the teachers to be able to work with small groups, work on a one-to-one basis, be able to accept and understand the frustrations the children might come to school with because of overcrowded conditions in their homes, because of the environment they come from. We have to realize that the child who comes in and might be very aggressive or very withdrawn, very angry. We have to constantly say to ourselves, "They're not angry at me." And we have to find out where the anger stems from. So I guess I look for patience, kindness, understanding.

OA: Well, tell me this, do you think that you have the problem with suspension and discipline problem that public schools have in kids one through thirteen?

EF: No, we definitely don't. One, I don't believe in suspension and—what we do here is, if a child gives us constant problems, we call in the parents, but we do not suspend a child from school. We have in-school suspension. So a child is sent, with his work, to the office and I put the child into a supervised area where he continues to work so that he doesn't just go home and have no work to do. He has to do all the school work, but he has to do it alone. And none of us, not even a child, wants to work alone and be alone all day. And we ordinarily do not have to do this to a child more than once or twice a year.

I also—for less minor infractions I have this file box on the desk and if children are brought in because of fighting, or whatever the case might be, we talk about it, find out what really caused the problem and I put his name on a file card and write down what he did and he has to sign his name. And after three times then we call in the parents.

OA: Oh, okay. I see.

EF: So, this seems to work. I've had sixth grade boys come to me and say, "Sister, may I please get my name out of the file box?" Last year I had one of the boys say that to me and I said, "Well, come back just the day of our Christmas holidays," thinking he would forget. That was very much on his mind. When everybody else, after Christmas parties

and everything, they were on their way home, he came in and he said, "You told me to come back, may I please have my name taken out of the file box?" And so I told him for his Christmas present he could tear up his name. He never got his name in the box again. So—

OA: Do you have programs where you have a (inaudible) system of rewards and for academic achievement or—

EF: Right. We—this year we have—in order to let children see it more often, instead of having it just at the end of the year we have what is called stars of the month. And, if you noticed, it's on the bulletin board in the hall. And we try not to have that for academics, but for good manners or working around the building, or working the classrooms. And then we announce these names the first of every month at our flag assembly in the morning. And then their names are on the bulletin board all month long. At the end of the year we have the academic awards. We do have two of the black funeral parlors, Gordon and—Gordon Stone. Right?

SJ: Stone, Gordon and Wilson.

EF: Stone, Gordon and Wilson give a fifty dollar award to not just the outstanding, but to two students who have really achieved the most and—it might be someone who came in here with very poor habits, poor attitude, but has just progressed and achieved. And that's how we give it.

OA: Are you subsidized any by the federal government?

EF: In Title I, reading program and Title IV for the library. Other than that the school is subsidized \$46,000 by the diocese, by the bishop, and then the rest comes in through tuition and through funds raised by the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association].

OA: Let's talk a little bit about the community. Have you had any problems running a school of this nature in the school district that you probably wouldn't have had if you'd have been in a suburban community? Has that been positive or negative? What have been the advantages and disadvantages to any degree (inaudible)?

EF: I would say that, because the school has been here so long, and the black community realizes the kind of education we give to the black community, they—the school is highly respected, and we do not have problems with vandalism. In my four years here we only had one time that the office was broken into. And that was merely for—not merely, but they took machines so you could tell that it was a need for money. There was no other destruction done.

I do believe that we should have our grounds—although our grounds are fenced in, if I come down here in the evening I do not chase away children who are playing here. I feel that they should be able to use the grounds. And, for this reason, I think that they respect us much more. I've had more vandalism in white schools than we have ever experienced

here. I find the parents are much better to work with than the average person in the suburban schools.

OA: Do you really think you have a better relationship to parents than what is normally happening in the public schools?

EF: Yes. I could call a parent off the job and he would come up here, any kind of work. We might not have a whole lot, although for our first PTA meeting we had 50 out of 92 families represented. The second PTA meeting where there was some misunderstanding about that being the night of the PTA, we had 40 parents present. Those who were present are very interested in school. They want to form a school board. They want to raise money. And they have already taken an active part in that.

Last Saturday we had—it was a miserable day out, it was raining all day and we had parents come up and have a bake sale and a movie. And in four hours—10 to 12—no, 10 to 2—we, maybe, extended to 3—we made \$118. And that was on a really bad day. And I find that the people who send their children here are, on the whole, making great sacrifices to pay the tuition and, therefore, they're interested in the education the children get, they want the children to be respectful, to be living Christian lives and I have more cooperation than I have had in other suburban schools, and I have been a principal for about 15 years. I couldn't speak higher of parent cooperation than what we find here.

OA: Okay. Your faculty, for example, are they mostly natives of Tampa or people who've moved here or what?

EF: I think we only have one—two—three natives of Tampa. We have five religious on the faculty. Two of the sisters are from Boston. And one sister is from Tampa, another sister is from California, and I am from Baltimore, Maryland. One laic teacher is from Indiana and our black laic teacher is from Tampa. I think she's a native. And then we have Ms. Johnson. (Telephone rings.) You're from Tampa originally, right? And—

OA: They're gonna get that out there?

EF: Yeah. So I would say we come from all over. The sisters who—the four sisters who are presently teaching on the faculty did not have any experience with the black community until they came here to St. Peter Claver.

SJ: Sister Martini—

EF: Oh, pardon me. Right. She had taught here—

SJ: Sister Martini taught here—

EF: —back in the '60s [1960s].

SJ: —in the late '60s.

EF: That's right.

OA: You, kind of, do an orientation. Do you do a kind of personal orientation with your staff members?

EF: Right.

OA: With parents and teachers?

EF: Right. Yes, because it's well known anywhere with the black community that when you go into a black school they're gonna try you. When you go into any classroom in any school, the kids are out to try you, but you feel it more in a black school because I think there is a certain amount of—we we have to win their trust. And I guess they've—many black people, although not the children themselves, but from the history—have been let down and deceived by the white community. And so I think that this innate—within a black person that they have to be able to trust the white person. And so I think if you get through your first year and you really love what you're doing and love the people you're working with, you're gonna make it. But you're gonna suffer the first year. And I always emphasize that. I don't mean—I try not to overemphasize it, but I do place emphasis on it. And, for that reason, I feel it's very important that I be there to reinforce and to support all teachers, but especially a new teacher in the black community.

OA: I keep hearing certain ingredients that you have worked into your entire system that I think are missing, or just lacking, if they're there, in the public school system. Can you think of any more of these kind of ingredients, things that you think that, you know, you've done, or the school has just done through its own initiative, that's not happening in the public school system, not just in Hillsborough County?

EF: Right. I think probably the biggest thing is is that the teachers who are working, wherever the black school may be, public or private, they're not given a proper orientation and, therefore, someone who doesn't know the black community, the black culture, is afraid. And so, instead of correcting or disciplining, punishing a black child, afraid that they'll be accused of being a racist or whatever, they simply put the child in a corner. They never try to investigate, to see what happened to this child this morning. And what is the problem? And giving them that one to-one attention that they need. I think that's the biggest problem. I think that we have many concerned people working with the black community but they don't know how to go about it in the right way. And their fear—and the black people can sense this. Even a black child knows when a white person is afraid of them. And there's no reason for fear in the first place. And secondly, they crave (telephone rings) discipline and structure as well as anyone else does.

OA: I know in my own (inaudible)

EF: Right. And—you could take advantage of it. They say, you know, this guy's very afraid of me, so—but I've had children come here from the public school. And I

guess one of my favorite examples is, two years ago we had a first grader come and his mother said that he was in public school—he came in November—and he couldn't write, he couldn't read, even recognize even one word. He did not know his alphabet. And, yet, when I talked to him and tested him I knew he wasn't retarded or anything. So, I said we would give him a chance here and by the end of the year he turned out to be the best student in the first grade. And that child, while he was two months in public school system, had been put in the corner and just allowed to do what he could do or wanted to do. And so I just know from that—

I think another thing that we have here is when you have dedicated teachers—I've had teachers that—we have another boy that came in the fourth grade and he had already been put out of seven public schools. And so everybody just kind of looked at me and said, “What are you gonna do about this one?” And I felt we should take him and give him a chance. This young man will never be an A student but—and he gave us a terrible time because he didn't trust anybody—and that can be understood. He had to repeat the fourth grade. Then he went to the fifth grade and the sixth grade and by the time he left here he was—I don't mean that he didn't have any weaknesses, he still had a temper, but he had come a long, long way. This child would day after day come to school without lunches, would not have eaten. We would take food to the family and we tried to get the mother interested in working. She held a few different jobs while she was here.

I think that by our dedication to the children we run in—we have a great communication with parents and therefore we can give guidance to them, also, in the ways they discipline their child, in tryin to better themselves. Although we do have a tuition fee here, I've had people come to work and then, instead of their getting paid, their time here at school would be paid for the tuition of their child. I've had a maintenance man who started on that basis; he did painting for us and I would give him the money per hour of what a painter would get and deduct it from his tuition for his six children until finally this man showed such an interest in the school that he became our full-time maintenance man.

OA: Yeah, I see what you mean.

EF: We've also had parents work in the school as aides, and then have helped them to move into better jobs. So I think that's a big help. And that's something that doesn't happen in the public school system or in a larger school system.

OA: You're talking about a lot of good things. What are the things you'd like to see improved? What's the future, for you, in terms of this school? Some of the shortcomings and the things you'd like to see (inaudible)?

EF: Well, I guess I would like to see both a kindergarten and a junior high added. I think that's very important.

OA: Okay.

EF: I would like to see—I'm trying to think of all the things we have improved on. I

suppose this year we will see it—and one of the things I would like to see is, or like this to become is that, since we do have Ms. Johnson, who is in the black theater, to work with the children in drama and put on productions because this is—

OA: (inaudible)

EF: Right. She just gave us a little bit of it last year. We had two performances and it just—we had both boys and girls change, even academically. They could see where their talents were. And she brought these talents out. And it was just tremendous.

OA: I honestly think that you can teach a lot of things with drama.

EF: Umm hmm.

OA: You know?

EF: Right.

OA: You can take a particular behavior pattern and put it on stage and a kid can see himself.

EF: Right. And I think that—you know, if we could bring this bit of drama out to the larger community, both to the black and the white community, to show what we do have here. I think the school has to be—even though we're well-known among the black community, I think we have to be made better known. And I think it will be through a program such as what Ms. Johnson hopes to give us.

OA: This is probably my last question, really. I've kind of got an idea now what your philosophy is on education. What about testing? In specific, I'd like to know what do you think about functional literacy testing and its relevancy—if you care to comment on it.

EF: Yes. Right. All right.

OA: I'd like to get an educator's opinion on it.

EF: First of all, until just recently, and through my studies in black history, I have found that the standardized test that we give to children nationwide does not have built in it anything for a different ethnic group. And the University of California in the early '70s was working on an ethnic test, a standardized test to give. I have not—

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

EF: We find it very frustrating because we are, as I mentioned to you earlier, that our first thing is to build in structure in to the life of a child. So, I find that most of the progress at this school happens in 4th, 5th and 6th grade. By the time that a child is in the 4th, 5th and 6th grade level, he or she is oriented towards studying, has a desire to learn and,

therefore, this is where we see the best progress. On our standardized test we have a follow-up from year to year and the ordinary achievement is supposed to be about 50 points in grades 4 through 7. Like in math they might achieve 50 points as top in a suburban school. We have achieved as much as 90, 96, 70 points in those areas.

It's kind of difficult to—you know, sometimes the teachers, when they get the results back they're discouraged and frustrated about it. But, you know, I keep tellin' 'em look at what does happen in 4th, 5th and 6th grades. And I could pull out any child's record, or—goin' through and compare 'em to the last three years and it's more than 50 points. And I think that's where they get it all together. And they learn to—

OA: And build in those first years.

EF: Right. Build and—you know, I think it might be difficult. A child comes here to school and he learns a structure and he learns to study. He might go home to working parents or maybe to unsupervised living conditions. And it's kind of difficult for 'em. But I think by the time he's been here a while he finally gets to say, "I know what's going on, and if I'm gonna make it I have to do it myself." And so—

OA: I see.

EF: It isn't that the parents don't want to help him. It may be that sometimes they don't know how to help him. Or maybe they have their own problems that they just can't. But they still manage to get the child here and send them here. I think that the black parents now, or the black adults know what it means and know that they can't get anywhere unless they have an education. And this is what we try to put into the child. And I just am convinced that's where they believe it and know it and where they begin to shine.

OA: Well, I only have one thing to say, it's a shame you're not running some of the public schools. They're missing a lot.

EF: Well—and I do believe in "all black" schools. I think that—

OA: Okay.

EF: —our mistake was integrating.

OA: I can't argue with that.

EF: Yeah.

OA: Yeah. That's interesting. Do you have any more questions? Okay, Sybil, do you have anything else you'd like to—

EF: Well, how about you're being here, Sybil?

SJ: Well, yes. Dione [her daughter, Sybil Dione Rosado] was in school at Sacred Heart Academy, which is predominantly white, and I had felt even though I knew St. Peter Claver was here, I didn't particularly care for this neighborhood and I was afraid for my daughter to be here. And I thought that the people here were just a bunch of missionaries tryin' to, you know, help the poor black kids. And I didn't like that because I thought that that's the way it was. And like Sister said, I worked with them last year and I got to see what was actually happening here and I moved Dione here. And she has been very happy. She was very unhappy when I moved her because Sacred Heart has beautiful grounds, a nice lunchroom. She had been around white people all the time so she thought that was just fine, it didn't make any difference to her really. But I see such a change in her I know that even though we have to eventually get into the mainstream, we have to learn to get along with everybody. We can't possibly ever live with all Chinese people, or all the Japanese or all white or blue. But it's always best to get a good foundation in whatever you are.

OA: That's true.

SJ: Like if the people, white people, have the advantage of being the majority so they don't have to worry about learning to get along with each other, you know, and then going into a bigger world. But because black people are in the minority and they are, in a lot of ways, crippled by society, you know—it's best to start out at a early age in a situation where you're familiar, where you don't have to have a teacher who is mad at you because you're the only black child in the class and she can't figure out what kind of hair that is that's growin' out of your head. And she can't help—

You know, these people are here and they have nothing but black kids so there is no difference made. You know, there's no feeling that you could be a cheerleader but they won't let you be one because you're black. You know, there's nothing like that. You can still—healthy competition between people who are starting out, you know, on a equal basis, more or less, in the child's eye. Then, when they leave here, like Sister said, they go to places like Academy of the Holy Names, which has been, for years, very racist, and it has improved lately, so to speak. But there's still that element, always, that you'll find in white people of any, you know, place that the black kids come in and they're expected to maybe not do as well. So you still have that competition, you know, that I experienced when I went to Tampa Catholic. But I think the kids, once they've been here, have, like Sister was saying, a much stronger background and a much, you know, happier feeling about themselves than the kids that we're seeing in the public schools now that have been integrated and we see what's happening to our kids that wasn't happening to 'em before. And we know that it's just because the teachers and the people are not aware of what kinds of things that can be done to help them.

We wouldn't have any—half the professional people who went to college went to Florida A & M University, you know, or similar black colleges. Now, we have, in the later years, like you know, those that went to the white schools, like South Florida. I went there. You went there. You know that if you hadn't been as strong of a person you never would have made it. There are some people who have a lot to give that just can't operate in a big

situation where the whites are competing with them and they have been reading since they were four and five years old and maybe this child never read anything until he got to school.

So you have to start out—and it's not really a bad thing—and you look and you see a black school and you say why does the Catholic Church got a black school? Why doesn't it have—it's really a very valid place and it should be—like Sister was saying, we should have kindergarten, we should have, you know, on up—junior high. We should improve this building and make it bigger, you know, buy all of this land around here and just, you know—everything—all these wonderful things should happen because it's very sad that this community lost the black schools and—

OA: It is sad.

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: —everybody knows that. And it's not that it's not good to be integrated because that's not what I'm saying. It's just that they could have improved. They could have made 'em equal and if you wanted to go to Plant [High School] you could have. But no one should force you to have to go just because they need to integrate a certain amount, a number on a piece of paper to make it look good. So, for as long as the Pope [John Paul II] is Polish and the bishop is friendly we'll have this school. And I think that's very important.

OA: You mentioned that you were all for all black schools.

EF: Umm hmm.

OA: I'd like for you to talk about that a little bit because I don't meet very many people that is for all black schools and I don't understand it. (laughs)

EF: You don't understand me—

OA: I felt like, have felt like, a foreigner.

EF: Umm hmm.

OA: You know, I'm also for all black schools.

EF: Umm hmm.

OA: But I've felt like a foreigner holding that view sometimes.

EF: Right. Well, even among our own Catholic school system, you know, I've been to principal's meetings where principals have said this is wrong to have all black schools, but I feel that those administrators don't know what the black culture is like. And I feel that, just as Sybil said about integrating and goin' to these big public schools, where

when the teachers don't understand the black thinking—psychology, philosophy, background—that they're simply building up more anger within the black student or child because he isn't learning as well because they're not taking more time with him individually.

And I just feel that we've done a great injustice in even teaching American history and leaving out the whole portion of black history, black contributions. And in a black school, if it's a black school that's aiming for understanding the culture, giving the best education, and teaching them (the black people) what they have contributed to our country they're just gonna have it more together, they're gonna have a better identity. And, like a little while ago you asked me, "Well, what did I hope for?" I would hope to see someday that we would have—if we can't have a larger school here that we would merge with another Catholic school and if the whites leave, fine, then we'll have a larger all black school. And two schools I have in mind are Epiphany [of Our Lord] and—on Hanna [Avenue]—and Sacred Heart [Academy] on Florida [Avenue]. And they're surround by the black community but they don't consider themselves "black" schools. And that's a shame.

SJ: Epiphany's having a lot of racial problems, too, because the people of that parish are mad that so many blacks have moved into that area. You know, out there—North Euclid [Avenue] and umm—what's the name of it over by Knollwood Manor?

OA: Yeah.

EF: Is it Seminole?

OA: Yeah. (inaudible)

SJ: I don't know; it's on this side of 22nd Street. No black people lived there for years. You know, all black folks lived on this side of 22nd. There were none on the west side of 22nd and this parish, you know, is having problems because of that, that they have so many black kids out there.

EF: That school is only about 15 years old. Beautiful property. You ought to drive by it sometime. It's right across from a black cemetery.

SJ: Yeah. It's right in the middle of the community, but the whites don't want to give it up, of course, and they feel threatened, which is a fair feeling, you know. We—I can understand that. I'd probably be mad, too, a bunch of Vietnamese people moved in and took over my church or something, you know.

OA: Uh huh.

SJ: Took over the school—this kind of feeling. But that's what make for bad feelings, you know. But umm—

OA: I tell you, you've given me hope. (laughs) Really. I see—because one of my goals is

this, one of my hidden goals in the back of my mind—I'd like to have some kind of school or experimental school. If I had to start it in a church basement, at some point in my life I know I'm gonna do this, and they can give me the worst kids in the school system, in Hillsborough County school system, and send them there and it gives me an idea because people like myself—sure there are other people like me, but we're talking about starting in a church basement and starting from scratch when the community could be in support of what you're doing here and gettin' a junior high school.

EF: Right.

OA: That's a good foundation to build on.

EF: Umm hmm.

OA: Now if we could just get 'em through ninth or eighth grade in an all black school, even if they have to branch off from there they're pretty solid.

EF: Yes, I think so.

SJ: They're very much stronger.

OA: That gives me an idea. I'd never thought about it.

EF: And I've even mentioned this to our bishop. And these two schools—

OA: I think you can garnish the support of the community behind that.

EF: And, Epiphany, I wish you would just drive by there and look at that property. The school itself is only about 15 years old. They have all the property. And what I would like to see is our school move out there and merge with that school. And if we lose the white population, fine, it'll be the black school we wanted. And then take the St. Peter Claver Day Care Center, which is paying about \$10,000 a year rent, they're up here—what do you call that, the Tampa Park Plaza?

SJ: Up here by Urban League.

OA: Uh huh.

EF: And let them move in here, in this building, which has no debt at all. And then open some of the rooms for adult enjoyment whether it be just a reading room for the elderly, hobbies, that kind of thing.

SJ: And that hall upstairs, you know, years ago, they used to have bands and stuff there. It was the only place you could go to a dance, a decent place. This was back when our grandparents' and parents' time—

OA: No kidding.

SJ: —that they had dances. It was like a neighborhood hall.

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: As far as weddings and dance—you know, they would have a dance every week or something like that.

EF: Who was that man who used to—

OA: I'd like to just—can we go upstairs and go around about—

SJ: (inaudible) in '69 [1969] they used to have a dance in here.

EF: Really?

SJ: Yeah, but I'm saying this is, like, the '40s [1940s], you know, and late '30s [1930s]. This was the only place. And it was a brand new building then, you know, it was nice and clean.

OA: I can remember when I went to school, I went to the summer school, and we used to have a—what did they used to call it—the summer, the program they used to have here—some kind of program.

EF: Summer program?

OA: In the summer you could come up—yeah.

EF: Umm hmm.

OA: And then I didn't go to the school or anything, but I came here for the summer program..

EF: Umm hmm. We still run summer programs, too.

OA: Oh, okay.

EF: Who was the actor—the dancer who went here?

SJ: Oh, Bojangles? Umm—

EF: Not Bojangles. Step 'n...

SJ: Step 'n Fetch it?

OA: Steppin' Fletcher?

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: He was a dancer.

EF: He went here. The... A (inaudible).

SJ: He went here, too. Step 'n Fetch it [Stepin Fetchit or Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry] went here.

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: And Desi Arnaz, too. You know?

OA: Umm hmm.

SJ: He's Cuban extract—

OA: Uh huh.

SJ: —and when he came—his family used to live—see, when we say these people went here it sounds impossible. But if you think back to the history of Tampa—

OA: This is where they emigrated.

SJ: This is where they were. Desi Arnaz and his people were just another Cuban family around the block, you know?

OA: Umm hmm.

SJ: And this was the only place to go to school if you were in this area. You know, it was a good school and it was the school. Our Lady of Perpetual Help was not there, which is the school that was built—the convent and the school and everything over there in Ybor City, the Latin parish that's—what is considered the Latin parish now was not there at the time this school was here. And this church—I know you probably don't remember but the church used to be right here. Now we have the new church that's up on Nebraska [Avenue] next to Mount Moriah [Baptist Church] or somethin', almost at the train station—across the street.

OA: I remember it used to be over there.

EF: Do you?

SJ: Yeah, we used to have church over there. And then we—when Father Moore was here we got a new church up on Nebraska. But this was the heart of the comm—this was

the heart of Tampa. Well, this still is right in the middle of downtown, you see that. But, the peculiar thing about it was, there was a time in this town—and it's gonna sound even funnier—when Latin people lived in this community next to blacks and they were treated as "blacks".

OA: Yeah.

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: Okay—

OA: It's in our history.

SJ: Yeah. It was almost like if you were Cuban you were just a little better than bein' a "nigger," you know, just one step beyond, you know.

OA: Umm hmm.

SJ: And if your hair was curled and you were brown you could pretend to be Cuban and then you would be a little better off. So you have all of that peculiar little history that happened right here in Ybor City.

OA: Umm humm. Matter of fact, the only Cubans that were accepted was the ones who were factory owners—

SJ: Yeah.

OA: —and their children.

SJ: Umm hmm.

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: And you'd have all the, you know, the cigar factory area and all over there now people are still livin' side by side, black and Cuban, still, over there, because the Cuban people do come in ebony hues. Real, truly—

OA: Umm hmm.

SJ: —ones from Cuba—

OA: That's right.

SJ: —can be as black as you and I, and have hair like you, you know. So, the reason, you know, that they kind of just mingled in. And they were all a part of this school, too. But see, all that kind of gets lost in the—until you kind of think back on it—that all these

houses around here used to be nice lookin', decent houses. You know? Like, the ones that are old and now are fallin' down, like, when I was a child my grandmother lived on K Street and there was a house at that corner, the corner of K and whatever this is—Governor—that was a, you know, nice. You remember that, it was a good lookin' house. You know. And what has happened is that they've just gone all down. The people, the landlords or whoever that are ownin' these buildings here haven't taken care of 'em, but people lived here and it was a very respectable place to be and now it just has such a bad connotation—

OA: Yeah.

SJ: —because of Central Park [Village] and all of the stuff that happens there. But, like Sister said, they respect this place. The drunks and everybody else walk straight when they get by a school.

OA: Well, you know, that's what—

SJ: They really do.

OA: That's what happened at the new place with us that time.

SJ: The new place, too, yeah.

OA: They say the kids are so bad.

SJ: Umm hmm.

OA: We didn't have any money. What we did was just went—simply put on the walls pictures we cut out of *Ebony*.

EF: Umm hmm.

SJ: Umm hmm.

OA: And the kids wouldn't let anybody touch those pictures.

EF: Umm. Umm.

OA: And on the inside they didn't tear up anything.

EF: And ever our own children, if you notice, we don't have any destruction within our school. You know, they respect the paint, like, look at all the drawings that are out on the bulletin board. They never pull at 'em or tear 'em or anything.

OA: Umm hmm.

EF: Our bathrooms, you know, we never have any problems in there.

SJ: And when I was at Sacred Heart, man, they used to, you know—I'm just sayin', you know, because I—

OA: That's (inaudible).

SJ: —a personal experience with me—

OA: —talkin' about environment.

SJ: Yeah, personal experiences. When I got back here, you know, I had been away. And I wanted to put Dione in a "good school."

OA: Yeah.

SJ: You know.

OA: I went through the same thing with Shawna.

SJ: Yeah. And I first considered Academy and I—you know, the reason she didn't go there immediately was because [at] Sacred Heart you didn't have to wait. I would have had to wait at the Academy until they got ready to test and I didn't want to wait that long so I just put her in there. And I felt fine, I was on their school board and all involved in their parent activities and stuff and it suddenly dawned on me one day how stupid I was feeling. Because no matter what I did it was all being compromised. You know, well, isn't she a different "colored" lady. Doesn't she come to school? How can she not work? Everybody "colored" is supposed to work. You know, and I was not workin' and I had free time just like they did and I could come to the little meetin's when they hoped they could meet alone in the morning times.

OA: (laughs)

SJ: No. They would have, you know, like, coffees and brunches and stuff that none of the other black—there're a few black people out there, maybe about 10 or 15, I don't know, families. But they couldn't come because they were workin'. So, I wasn't workin'. So I'd be sittin' right up there. I'd volunteer for this and volunteer for that. And they just.—you know—but it was so stupid for me to be doin' that when there was so much I could do here. And it just—you know, I think that a lot of people would, if they had the right idea about what we're doin' here, they would be here.

OA: If they knew.

EF: Umm hmm. Right.

SJ: It's kind of like this where we had to go for so long. We couldn't go to the other

"white" Catholic schools. And then when they allowed us to integrate all the kids flooded Jesuit and Tampa Catholic and Academy. You know? And a lot was good about opening up the schools. And it's still, like I say, the choice should be there but there still should remain this kind of place, you know, for people who would like to be here, who feel that it's necessary and who still can do it. Because you're gonna always have these bourgeois type people who are gonna want to be where Miss Ann and Mr. Jones and Mr. Charlie are. You know, I mean, because they feel that's the way to be and that's what makes you better, the closer you are to "white," you know, and the more you can be around them, the more affluent, that's why you move to Town and Country where you can buy a nice place, you know, in your own community, you know, and pay \$80,000 for something that's gonna fall down because it's next door to Miss Ann. So all of that is inbred, that we kind of have to outbreed it, you know, and get it away because we don't want our kids to grow up like that.

EF: I think that is part of black psychology though, that some people who have made it and moved out of the ghetto or projects or whatever, there are a period of years there where they don't—where they won't admit that, yes, I went to Peter Claver or I lived down there. And then it gets to them just like it got to Sybil, you know. Here's where I should be. Here's where I can help my people. And I would say most of those people come back and (telephone rings) try to give a helping hand.

OA: (inaudible)

EF: No. It's just, like, we have two lots right behind this school here and we tried to lease it so that when you lease you only pay a couple dollars a year but the landlord doesn't have to pay any taxes on that land. And this man is a Jewish slumlord and he was made to tear down the two houses that were there. And he wants to charge a—the bishop even said, "Well, look into buying it." You know, because it would be ideal for phys. ed. and that kind of thing. Twenty thousand dollars for those two lots. And he would not lease it because he's still angry that he was made to tear down what he called—that they lived in.

OA: What he called homes.

EF: Umm. They were shacks, you know.

OA: Umm hmm. Okay, I have no more questions. This has been nice. This has been really nice. Thank you very much. And we might mention on the end that Sybil Johnson was also a part of the interview. Okay? Thank you.

EF: Okay, fine. And now anytime that you're ready—

OA: Okay, you don't have a Xerox machi—

end of interview