

Transcript of interview with Paulette Taylor by Suzanne Stallings, January 30, 2009

My name is Suzanne Stallings. This is 2:00 on Friday afternoon, January 30, 2009. We're at 705 W. 8th Street, the home of Paulette Taylor. Paulette, will you tell us your full name?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Yes, it's Paulette N...Nickerson Taylor.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And, what of your birthday you want to tell us...?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, I don't mind at all. It's August 8, 1946.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Did you grow up in Georgetown?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: I did.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And where did your family live?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: My family...it's ironic that you ask because my family lived in this area, just a few blocks away where the park is. And that was prior to the urban renewal development, so my family lived...in fact I occasionally go by and look at the...one of the shrubs, crepe myrtles, that grew in my...every year they grew...and so, it's right there, a few blocks away.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: What did your parents do for a living?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Well, my parents were divorced. I grew up within a single parent home. My father, who went to the Army, my mother did domestic work. She was a ...most of the children during that era dropped out of school because of family situations and they had to help support the family...her mom and dad...by pulling cotton or whatever jobs were available. And they were divorced. They were young when I was born and after a year or so they went their separate ways. However, both of my parents were quite instrumental in my development.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Did you have relatives here in Georgetown?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. I had a village. In fact my aunt, Ethel Moore, who was the matriarch of the family, and very pushy, very pro-education, and she had no children of her own, so she...I had lots of aunts who had no children but were very motherly. And so, her sister, who lives directly across the street from me, and cousins, I have cousins as well, but a lot of my dad's side of the family...well, I had some elderly relatives, but I do have relatives here....

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Did you and your family belong to a church?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, yes. I grew up in the church...Friendly Will Missionary Baptist Church, which is on 14th Street...a hundred and three-year-old church building that resembles the old jail because I think they used the same kinds of stone to construct it, but I grew up in that church and have a history there as I grew up playing the piano, of course, and Sunday School and teaching Sunday School and youth director, and you name it, I've probably done it and am still quite active, as church secretary.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: What do you remember about school when you were in the elementary grades?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Well, in retrospect, now, I could talk about the good times because I've had this slogan that I've told everybody, that you don't miss what you've never had. And those were good times and we accomplished a lot and utilized what we were given, what God gave us, and we used that to further and better ourselves. But, in school, I try not to compare now with then because it's not quite as memorable. Well, it doesn't have really good reflections. What I remember is walking to school and not having the availability of a school bus. Muddy streets...getting there...but liking school...liking school and enjoying the atmosphere of school. And being surrounded in a school environment with teachers who cared holistically about a child...not just their academic progress, but they cared about you as a child and when you disobeyed, they knew your mother by her first name and would say, now if I have to call Dorthula, which was my mother's name, I will. Most of our teachers were single...well, some of them...I think when people remember teachers...Nora might have mentioned Miss Jackson, who commuted. She lived in Austin, she stayed here during the week, but she went home every weekend to be with her mother and to go to church. Very dedicated, very dedicated, very oriented. She...the term now is multi-tasking...and she was the principal's secretary, the English teacher, she did so many things there at the school...the program chairman for the graduation. Nearly all the signatures were her handwriting, her script handwriting. And so my diploma has her name on it. They were good times. But as we reflect now, and looking at those, there were some turbulent times when we wanted better and we could not understand why we didn't have more than one water fountain or there were no heaters...no heating system in the girls' restroom or the boys had to go outside to get to the restroom. Those kinds of things. But, when I look at what we did and how we activated parents, we seemingly were more family oriented. It truly, back then, took the village to raise a child.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: What do you remember about school from the 8th grade up?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, well...camaraderie. I have a picture of girls...my classmates...and how we were very involved with each other. And a lot of times we had the camaraderie...made it possible for girls to share...especially when those who didn't have the appropriate upbringing or their homes weren't conducive to the right environment for kids, we all kind of banded together. I also remember from 8th grade...I guess the motivation that those teachers that dedicated themselves to being influential in our lives...to make sure that we got the best of what we were offered...education...even though we lacked a lot of things—typing classes, and—we never missed what we didn't have! One table in the back of a classroom with a few sets of encyclopedias for a library. And yet, kids went on to get Ph.D.s. It just amazes me. Or, to become the director of music for Dallas ISD, or to write books. But all of the things I remember...football games...or not having facilities and someone acting in our behalf to make things possible. One school bus or using the facilities on the other side of town, or walking to get there. So, it was a mixture of good...I think I said at the interview that Marsha Farney did...that it was the good, the bad, and the ugly. Some things were not so good. But, again, we utilized with what we had and made the best of it in our school. Sometimes sharing textbooks. One class...two classes in a ...I can close my eyes right now and see a classroom where there were one grade on one side of the room and the other grade on the other side. Simply because we were limited as far as classrooms, so the teacher had to teach both the best she could. She had 5th graders on one side and 6th graders on the other. And yet we made it. There were such good times and it was such a wholesome time where...in the community...businesses...we had black businesses and we lost so much when they demolished our school. And demolished our

records and left us with only the memorable parts of what we had. Often people call me from...a guy called me from North Carolina and said, Paulette, I know you were my classmate and I wanted to take some classes...well, the Georgetown High School told him to call me! Like I had all of the cumulative records sitting in my garage or something! They were all destroyed. All of our records were destroyed. And when I started teaching in '71, the UIL trophies...that was another subject that came up...and I often sit and think about those trophies, those state trophies, how they were just...how all of a sudden they disappeared...UIL. Yes, yes. So there were good times...

SUZANNE STALLINGS: How did you feel about all of that?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, it was horrible because I saw them in a box and then when I mentioned it they went on the display...on a display case...then, all of a sudden...I said, well what's going to happen to them? Well, they were supposed to have been transferred to the Georgetown High School to be with the others, and somehow they disappeared in between. And I was so glad, I don't know why he was on the TV, Farney, who's the head of UIL...and Marsha, his daughter-in-law who did her dissertation on the schools...and he said to me, Paulette, we need to get the names of those people who were recipients of UIL so that we can duplicate...we've got it in the records...Marsha has done the work and we can get those trophies replaced. So, I don't want to be too lengthy in my explanations, because there's just so much...and I've often thought about journaling, before I forget it...putting it down in a journal. But we had some good times and there were some bad times, too. We tried not to reflect, but the good always outweighed the bad. The good always outweighed the bad. We tried not to complain as much.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: What did you and your family and friends do for fun here in Georgetown?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, fun! Fun! I have a very family oriented...my family is very...we've been doing something for 50 years. We have met at Christmas for 50 years plus. We started always at my grandparents' house, and then it became my aunt across the street's house, which we've just celebrated 50 years plus...even the people came from California. And we celebrate Christmas. My sister keeps up with every person's birthday...she takes a plain calendar and puts their birthdays down so that we celebrate all the children's birthdays, so that they, in turn, can pass the legacy. We celebrate historical events. I'm really up on black history...Juneteenth. But not just to have fun and games, and that's why I was so bitter about when the paper displays fun, fun, fun, or eating, eating, eating, it's more than that. I want the history told. Why the freedom that dwindle down to the South until June, even though the Emancipation was signed in January. Fun things, birthday, traveling. And we're trying now to get our families together. (Break in interview)

We were talking about things...

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Oh, for fun!

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Things for fun, and family gatherings. You were saying presently what we do, or what did we do then?

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Oh, what did you do then?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Because of the lack of money...but we always found a way because we

had family members who cooked, and baked, and we always could do things around food. And joyous times because I played the piano, so I always had to play some old hymns and joyous kinds of things. And the kids, of course, are into sports. But we always enjoyed each other. We always found a way to have fun parties. We used to have house parties. You know, back in the day...kids don't like to do that anymore...but we had house parties. As far as my classmates and my peers, you know, Coke parties, fun and barbeque in the back yard. I was trying to think, what else did we do? Juneteenth was such a big thing because at the time we had a park, before the City took our park and leased it to the schools for a dollar. Yes, it was our park from the '50s.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Where was it?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Where Carver School sits? Where I taught? There was a well there and it was just...and there's always something that happens that makes you think...OK, there you go, stripping me of my history again. But again...Oh, and we had the little places where we could go and dance. The proprietors, you know, they made hamburgers...and we...jukeboxes...in the neighborhood. But we always found a way...hayrides, we enjoyed those seasonal kinds of things. But we always somehow was able to...among ourselves, without bothering, without trying to get a permit or trying to go through the City, or the other side of town, we always tried to do what we could with the churches, do what we could, on our own. And it worked. Because I think we grew up good kids, with less problems than those we see now. We were OK.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: How did your life change after school? This has a bunch...did you get married, did you have children, did you get a job, continue your education...?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: My life after college? After high school?

SUZANNE STALLINGS: After high school.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: After high school. I didn't think I'd go to college. At the time we only went to business school. You know they had the Nixon-Clayton Business College secretarial school where you can go nine months. Well, I didn't have money, but that was what my goal was, to go. I wanted to be a secretary, because everyone always said, well, you've got nice penmanship and you'd be a good secretary. But money wasn't there, but the ambition was. And I aspired to achieve. And so, again, that village came together...it takes a village...aunts who didn't have children came together and they said, you're going to school. Oh, no! Oh, yes! Here's my aunt...they were military, I never shall forget, it was an Army trunk, army green trunk, okay? I've got sheets. She has an ironing board. And this compilation of things just appeared, you know. Here's the sheets, here's the...your room and board will go month by month...it's \$36.75, or whatever...and Mom was working at the school in the cafeteria at the time and my aunts, you know, they worked for prominent people here. The Sherrills were prominent real estate people, and in fact, that's a gift from Mrs. Sherrill, my housewarming gift...

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Oh, it's gorgeous!

PAULETTE TAYLOR: From Mrs. Sherrill, Owen W. Sherrill...I think they have...they're big A&M people...Sherrill Room down at A&M...Anyway, but...I didn't mean to deviate from that, but...so I said, I'm going to college? Well, I thought, where? And at the time it wasn't UT. UT wasn't going to let me come. So it was the state-supported schools that were cheaper. Prairie View A & M, which is down near Houston...I had to ride the bus, \$5.75, I never shall forget. No car. Cried, I cried at dinner 'cause I always wondered what Mom was cooking for dinner at home. But I went

to college semester by semester. So, assuming I was going to take a secretarial science class for two years...two years became three, and before I knew it I was a business education major. And I thought, three years became four and I was able to graduate with a degree in business.

At the time my high school sweetheart, over there...I'm a widow now for 29...my high school sweetheart was getting out of the Navy. He'd gone to college for a year but his parents couldn't afford it and so he went to the Navy. But he was getting out of the Navy. And so, we had been writing each other...and we got married and I was blessed with two children. That's the youngest, the thirty-two year old, who was four...that's how we looked...four and eleven when his dad died. My husband had a stroke. Then I thought, oh, my gosh! Well, at the time my husband had a stroke...I'm really doing this in a choppy way...it's not in a nice, really nice order, sequence because when I got married...after I got married...I was a business major and my husband was doing a trucking business because you know, he couldn't get a job doing what he was doing in the Navy, no one would hire him. I was working for Head Start. A former mayor, Rawleigh Elliott, had hired me during the summer and I faced some of the most terrible discrimination I've ever faced. Another girl and I, a long-time family here, Mirandas...she was going to El Paso, we were college students. This was prior to that...ah, I'm just mixin' this up. We had worked...and I got...but I'm saying that to preface what I'm about to say...we had worked to educate people about Head Start, the Head Start program, because none of the parents knew anything about it. So we went to every little town in the county. And I never shall forget, in Granger, they refused to let me eat. They said I could stand at the back door, but they let the other girl in. And Mr. Elliott was about to come unglued. And rejection all through the county, but I got through that. That led me to work with problem families and I started steering away from education because I applied for Georgetown High School. They weren't going to hire me as a business education teacher. I wanted to teach shorthand...when I went to Prairie View I had no typing classes. We had one typewriter, in the principal's office. And yet I aspired to be a secretary. So, you know, the first day I was doing this, and all the Dallas and Houston kids were...I made up my mind. So when they were having fun, I sat in that typing room, teaching myself to type. I taught myself well to the point I became a TA, teacher assistant, in one of the classes, two classes. I became a TA of typing in college. Well, after I got out of college and I didn't get a chance to teach what I wanted to teach, and what I was ready to teach. I got a call from Superintendent Jack Frost and he said, we don't have a position for you in that, but we do...(pause in conversation).

I was called to teach special ed. I had no special ed credentials.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: (giggles)

PAULETTE TAYLOR: That's what you taught?? I had no special ed credentials. Well, at the time they said, you can go to the University of Texas. They're offering a program whereby you can teach on an emergency...you can start teaching as long as you have six hours of special ed, you know, intro or exceptional children. I never shall forget it. I drove to Austin and enrolled in six-hour classes and started teaching special ed with six hours. So then I continued to accumulate my hours until I was certified...so I got my certification at Texas, which allowed me to teach and that led on to teaching. I taught...and so, I don't know how much you want me to say about that? But, you know, I continued to teach and then went on and got a Master's degree at St. Ed's. I was driving to Southwest Texas in the graduate program, but that was too much. But that's kind of the gist of it. And then I got married and had two beautiful children who are now 32 and 40. The 40-year-old has two children, the 32-year-old has none, he just has cats, and was able to...he went to Southwest Texas and got a degree as well. The 40-year-old liked trucks and, I think, he went to trucking school. In fact, made more money than I did as a

teacher. But I didn't know at what point you wanted me to stop to talk about living my life as a teacher, or were you ready for that part?

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Absolutely.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: It made me stronger...made me stronger in faith...when I became a widow so young, at 33. My husband had a stroke at 35. Mrs. Sherrill, Owen Sherrill, was able to work with us, and boy, she took a lot of flack about this because she helped us get a house on Booty's Road, before the lake came in. And people said, why would you let them move out there...beautiful house...they even spray-painted on my house KKK. And at the time, some prominent people, in fact my dear friend Stephen Shaefer the ophthalmologist, Steven lived out there...and the Morses, Skip Morse and his wife, and the McMasters, they came and said, you must not move. And came with a box with cleaning things...you must STAY. You must stay. Well, I stayed until my husband had a stroke and right after he had the stroke I sold the house. And I needed healing. I needed regrouping. And people said, well, don't build...there were...these two little lots were here. And I built the house back in my neighborhood because I felt like, I don't want to just be receiving, I want to be where I can give. I've never regretted it.

I've just never remarried. My mother used to say, "She doesn't have time! She wouldn't have time for a husband!" I am quite busy and I like being busy. I like being instrumental in doing things and seeing things, and traveling and going, being a part of people's lives. There were bitter times. I was alone when he died, but it made me stronger. I was by myself and my...bless her heart, I don't know if you've lived here long enough to know Jo Ann Ford

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Yeah, oh, yes.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: What a dear friend! My dear friend, my dear friend. It would take a whole interview to talk about my dear friend because she was our principal at the time and...and the thing I never shall forget, because you know, yes, I was grieving, but she picked up the phone and she said, "Paulette," I said yes, "when are you coming back to work? These kids are waiting for you." So I pulled up myself and I've been running ever since. My life has been interesting. It's...I'm a giver...I like to think of myself...and now I'm enjoying the grandchildren and exploration and going to the Nutcracker and just involving them in this whole world of enthusiasm and newness. And other children...because I tutor. The exposure...and involving senior citizens who still want to be active. Like the lady who drives from Estrella on Williams Drive to help me tutor on 17th Street, or the lady who drives from Sun City to come...81-year-old...to help me read. That invigorates me, keeps me going. And the kid who wants to learn and the high school student who comes over and realizes that I need more on my resume than academic grades. I need community service. There's just so many things I want to do and I said, Lord, you know, I don't know when my number will come up. I don't know...I'm 62...but there's so much that I want to do. So many places I want to see. I want to take my grandchildren to Washington and I want to explore...and go to Alaska...if you will allow it, I sure will be thankful! I just enjoy life. I enjoy life but yet when I wake up in the morning, you know, I'm thankful, but I never forget to say, thy will be done. Thy will be done. Let his will be done.

And I love music. I like lots of music. I like gospel music, it meditates my soul. I like jazz that soothes my movements, and so sometimes in my pajamas at 11:00 I might be at my piano, playing a hymn (Suzanne laughs). I enjoy life. And I love to dance. I still like to dance. I dance with myself. I dance...I always liked to dance when I was younger. Taught my kids to dance and now I'm teaching my grandchildren to dance and to learn to live. What does that say something about...cherish and all that, no that's another one...I've got sayings all along the wall about

dance...when no one's looking...you've probably seen it. But every once in a while I think about being lonely but never alone. Lonely but never alone. And I do a lot of inspirational reading to build my spirit and do daily reading...I'm getting teary-eyed...daily bread that enriches my soul. (long pause)

I think about dear friends, like Nora. Nora's a little older than me. We went to school together. She was such a bright...bright and wonderful nurse whose active life was interrupted. (long pause) And I keep saying, Lord, help me to fulfill my purpose. What am I here for? I'm here to continue to educate. The math is getting harder and this new math in school...My knees start hurting from trying to exercise. You know, all of these things...one day at a time. I try to make a difference in lives, one day at a time. So I enjoy life, I continue to be open for learning, irregardless of the accolades...I still want to learn, want so badly, so badly I wanted to enroll in the Senior University because they had a course on how to memoir-writing...memoir-writing...how to write, how to express yourself in your writing. But I really, really desire some basic conversational Spanish. To be able to converse with a grandma who has felt they can't communicate with the school. A lot of the special need kids, whose parents feel like sometimes the school's judgmental, you know, don't look at me how I look on the outside...and they tend to (pause)

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Oh, I'm sorry!

PAULETTE TAYLOR: No, if there's something specific that you want...specifically that you want me to talk about.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Well, what...because this is important...they wanted you to talk about how you were involved in the effort to desegregate the Georgetown schools.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Oh, certainly, certainly,

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And what did you think should be done?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: My efforts were very limited, simply because at that point I was a senior in high school. There was very little I could do. It was going to take adults to actually make a difference. I wanted to be able to get to that high school to get that typing class, because, again, I wanted to be a secretary. And I thought, if I just knew some basics in typing...well, let's see, who was it? Harvey Miller, Nora's brother, Harvey Miller and some adults had gotten together to file a lawsuit, because we were not allowed entrance. There were children, young children, at most of all the schools, and I think they organized it in a very non-violent way, to go, approach the schools, and maybe they were told a chronology of things to do...to approach the schools and see whether you'd be allowed...well, upon entrance...upon approaching, I never shall forget...and I learned to love him because he was my supervisor later...school's named after him, Pop Williams, Mr. Williams said, no, I'm afraid you can't go to school here. We'll take your names down, but you all need to go on back down to Carver. And so we were not allowed to go. And then that became the lawsuit that Harvey Miller filed in...specially for his daughters, but he included us and got the consent of our parents, of course. And that was the only thing, I mean, I was involved in it, by name only, but not as far as marching, protesting, anything of that sort. We were just told to attempt to go and when we were not allowed, then, you know, it became, whoa, all over the newspapers throughout the area of the state, about Georgetown. And that was '64.

Well, I went on to graduate...that was my year of graduation. So, by September I was in college and, you know, some of the others would say, that's when they put their heads together and

said we've got to do something. And that's why they built what was Westside...they didn't even give it a name. They built the school that housed...was to house 175 kids, 1st through 12th grade, one building. And so they just built...and I often told the story as I walked down the hallways, because now I can see where they added on to the school...they built the school quickly to make them forget, to appease with them, to make them forget about integration, because now you got a new school. Well, then, the Civil Rights Act was coming through and then, of course, they had to integrate. That was about the gist of my participation because the...I was really involved with...in college...trying to get my education and that was it. Because then they had to...and I think the kids because they were not necessarily forced to integrate...like Nora's brother...and I don't know if she told you the story...they had to go in '65 and they could feel the coldness and were not received...and then all of a sudden they saw, we've got these kids...with these great athletes...they story was told about how he was kicked...I don't know if she told you about that...intentionally...and then he wound up on dialysis because of injury to his kidney. But that was the gist of my involvement...as far as...I never protested, I never spoke out, because I was a senior and I just didn't have much involvement.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Just to get back to that for a second. Did you...what you knew about it...did your friends and family members agree about what should happen, or was there...

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Well, I think the word around was mixed. They were afraid to part with this family-oriented school. Who really, even though the children weren't getting the proper education that they should have gotten, they were afraid to part with this family-oriented environment. And we lost...we gained something but we lost something with integration. We lost the parental contact because, you know, parents were afraid to go and see how their kids were doing. This was the LAW and back then you were just quiet. You obeyed the law and you didn't question the law. And so our kids went, and the kids had to harbor all of that. So there were some parents, that, you know, I heard, we don't want this...I heard people speak out when I came home on weekends, about it. But there were mixed emotions. And yet, parents wanted their children to do well. But it was tough. It was hard, it was hard.

And another episode was...and my dear friend, Kathy Hord, who's the vice principal there at Carver, now, we taught...known each other for twenty-five years. I said to her...at the time McCoy School and Carver were built about the same time, I think...the City is really ready to sell that to the City or something...to the school district...and I said, you know, when they built this school they just called it West Side. And we were Carver. We were George Washington Carver. And she said, why don't we do something about it? I said, what? She said, let's go to the Board and ask them to give us back our name. 1991. I think...she and I spoke...well, I know I did most of the speaking, but she and I spoke concerning asking the Board to give West Side back its original name when they moved. It was George Washington Carver and we want our name. I never shall forget the statement that I heard from an administrator. He said, I don't care if it's named Podunk U. I NEVER shall forget that...I don't care...but there was one that said, let's do it. That's the right thing to do. And so, the school was given its name. And that's how we got back to George Washington Carver.

And from that we were instrumental...in fact I was just talking to a lady...they're going to commemorate some things concerning Carver. They wrote to the museum, the George Washington Carver Museum, and they gave them a wealth of information about George Washington Carver and I think they've lost it, but I think they have a nice portrait up there, of him. And we had a little ceremony that commemorated...right in the parking lot...the name of the school...and I spoke. Those were memorable times, just such memorable times, memorable, memorable. They really were. In all 31 years...I taught at Carver all of my teaching years and of

course now, that picture...that portrait back there of me, that sign, you know, they've got a sign there where they've named the outdoor white fenced-in area there for me. Yeah, and, so Carver's my school, it's my passion.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Do you have any questions for me?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: No, oh I was going to ask you, how were you chosen to do this?

SUZANNE STALLINGS: The library sent out an announcement about what they were going to do and asked if anybody would be interested in participating in this?

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Was this through the Friends of the Library? I mean, who did they send it to?

SUZANNE STALLINGS: I'm not sure who all they sent it to. But it could be that. This had been an interest of mine in Houston.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: I see, in Houston. Ah, I loved Houston.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: I got to do it again.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: Houston, yes, yes, Houston. Well that was our rival school, Texas Southern University was one of our rival schools. Gosh, I remember those days.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Thank you so much for doing this.

PAULETTE TAYLOR: You are just more than welcome.