

TRANSCRIPT, Interview of Birdie Shanklin by Suzanne Stallings, January 26, 2009

This interview will become part of the Georgetown Oral History collection. This project focuses on people's memories of Marshall and Carver Schools and the issues and events of the 1950s and 1960s that led to desegregation. My name is Suzanne Stallings. This is 3:00 Monday, January 26, we are at 803 W. 9th. and Birdie, you are...

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: My name is Birdie Ella Shanklin.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And your birthdate is?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: My birthday...I was born November 20 and I don't tell the year, but I'm 39 and holding. I did graduate from high school in 1951 so that might let you figure out how old I am.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Birdie, did you grow up in Georgetown?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Yes, ma'm, I was born and raised here in Georgetown in the Berry Creek area, before it became rich and famous.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: So, that was kind of far out?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: I always said I was born in Berry Creek, Texas.

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

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Well, to begin when I was young, we lived on a farm and so we did some farming. And then we moved to town when I was five and my mom went into domestic and housework. My dad was a mechanic...(pause)

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And he worked on?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Automobiles. Auto mechanic. He worked for J.D. Thompson, at one time, I don't remember the year, and then he worked for Salty Lind for many years, working on cars.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Did you have relatives here in Georgetown?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: My mom and dad and ten kids. I had six brothers and there was four girls, a total of ten, and then I had aunts and uncles and cousins...

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

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Yes, we belonged to the Gay Hill Baptist Church on West 16th Street, which has now become Calvary Hill Baptist Church, located at 1802 South Bridge in Georgetown, and that's the family church after we moved to Georgetown. Before we moved to Georgetown -- we lived in the country - and went to the Berry Creek Baptist Church.

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

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Well, when I was four and five we went to school in the church at the Berry Creek Baptist Church and it was church on Sunday and school through the week. Then upon moving to

Georgetown in '41 or '42, we attended the high school – I say high school because we had all twelve grades, first through the high school grades in one school which was two stories. One story down and then a top story.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And what do you remember about how it was back then?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Well, I liked school a lot, didn't want to miss school for no reason whatsoever, so I began in the first grade here and I went straight through and I graduated in 1951. We had lots of fun. I enjoyed being with my friends and my relatives and we didn't have a lot of extra-curriculum...a lot of extra stuff that other schools had...cause we could tell the difference. But we was always happy and I was satisfied with where I was, you know, and when integration came along, of course, I had already married and had four kids then, so I worked closely with my brother, Harvey Miller, and the other parents and teachers and ministers here in Georgetown to get the schools integrated.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: I want to ask you about that later on.

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: OK...

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

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: From the eighth grade we had 33 in our class and we had what we called graduation from eighth to the ninth grade. I don't know, we just had the regular classes—readin', writin', and 'rithmetic, no typin'. I don't know, I guess just the usual small town, small school, where we knew everybody. Everybody knew everybody. All on friendly terms, even after integration.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Do you have fond memories of teachers or friends or activities or sports?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: I liked all my teachers. Do you want some names of them, or...? Well, when I was maybe...first grade...the first principal that I can remember is W.A. Westbrook and then Mr. Banks, W.R. Banks, he was my favorite, and he was principal when I graduated from high school. Then there's Miss Jackson, October Mary Berry Jackson, and Mrs. Bass, Mary Bass, Agnes Wilson, ah, let's see, there was a Miss Miller, no relation to me, and she was our home economics teacher and home economics was my favorite subject, my favorite class. I learned to sew and I liked sewing. I tried to learn to cook, and I didn't learn to cook, and I still don't like to cook! Even though I had six kids I had to cook for, and they didn't know the difference, whether it was good or bad, they just ate.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: So, you took sewing...

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: I loved sewing!

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And you took cooking, and that didn't take. (laughs) Was there other stuff you did in school, other activities?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Well, we did math. I remember my classmate and I, Nancy B., which later became my sister-in-law, Nancy B. Shanklin, and I married her brother later, and we would go to the UIL and she and I were number one in the Number Set. We would always bring back the trophy which they called the Number Set back then – it was math. And spelling, I was pretty good in spelling. All my classes...I made...I didn't fail any classes...I guess I did pretty good in all my classes. Ah...I didn't play any sports. I don't know if I want to tell the reason. I had such a hot temper that my mom said there's no need you playing sports and getting in trouble with somebody. So I just sort of rooted the other teams on, basketball, baseball. I did beat the little snare drum in our little band we had. But other than that I wasn't really a sports fan and I'm still not.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Let's see, let's go over this again. Did you graduate from high school in Georgetown and from which school?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: I graduated in 1951 from George Washington Carver High School. I did not go to college. There was ten of us kids and I was the third child, so I felt like Mom and Dad couldn't afford for me to go to college, so I started working and later got a job and when I was 19 I got married and started my family.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Going back to school. Do you have any not so good memories of school?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: No, I don't have any unhappy memories. I loved school and I would rather go to school than anything, so, I don't have any unfond memories of going to school.

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

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Well, there was not a lot to do...we did have what we called the Juneteenth celebrations during Juneteenth. We had our family reunions, we had our church...church activities. We never missed church. We always went to church and all the kids in the neighborhood, mostly all of them, went to church, and I enjoyed church also. We lived on West 10th Street and our church was on West 16th Street. We had to walk—we didn't have cars to drive—so we walked and we had fun going to church, enjoying church, and walking back home from church. My grandmother and my grandfather they lived up in the country—on the Gabriel they called it—and we would go out there and spend a lot of time, especially during the summer. We'd take turns, who was going to spend the weekend and so that was a lot of fun.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: What did you get to do there?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Oh, we would go swimming in the creek and go hunting with my grandfather. He loved to hunt, shooting rabbits. So we had fried rabbit once in a while—squirrel. I didn't like eating the armadillo, but I think I might have tasted some armadillo one time. But I feel blessed that I have had a good life. Not too many complaints.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Good! This question says, "How did your life change after school?" You told me that you...

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Yes, after I graduated I worked a couple of years and then I got married and started my family.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: What work did you do?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Oh, I did housework, just, you know, in private homes, cleaning, no cooking. And then I worked at the Wesleyan Nursing Home for eight years. And then I worked in the Courthouse two years and then I went to work at the Georgetown Hospital as a unit clerk and I worked there twenty-two years. Retired in 1995 from the hospital and I began as a volunteer, what we called back then "Pink Lady" but now it's Georgetown Hospital Auxiliary, and I've been a volunteer there each Friday morning from 9 to 1 since 1995 and I am still a volunteer.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Good for you!

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: And I enjoy it!

SUZANNE STALLINGS: That's great. Were you involved...I know that you were grown by then...what was your involvement in the effort to desegregate the Georgetown schools?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: At the time I had my two older boys and they were already in the all-black school. I don't remember exactly what grade they were in. And I had two daughters and Nona, she was six and she was in the first class—the first grade at Annie Purl—to integrate. She never went to black school. Vanessa was a year older, so she did go one year at Carver and then they integrated. My two older boys

they didn't have any problem fitting in with the other students because most of them, we grew up knowing most of the kids, the white kids and the Spanish and the blacks, they all, you know....So, I didn't have any problems letting my kids go to an integrated school.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Did you...what did you think should be done? How did you think they should have integrated and did it really work that way?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: I don't know much about the political point. But I know my brother, Harvey Miller, and Rev. Shanklin, and Douglas Benold, which is Dr. Benold, and some of the others worked on it, so Harvey was the oldest of the ten kids. He studied a lot, he read a lot, and we figured—my family, anyway—that what Harvey said was going to be right. So, we went along with what Harvey said.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: He was in the big middle of it!

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: He was the one that started it all. At the time he had three daughters.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: So, when all of this was going on, did all your family agree about what was happening?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Yes...yes. We all agreed...my dad and my momma. Because at the time I had two brothers and, I guess, maybe...well, all my brothers are older than my kids, so they were in the integration part, too, so I had, I would say, four brothers and three sisters...two sisters...

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Who went through that...

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Who went through...they had, I know, Bruce...he played football and he's the one that got hurt playing football. And, I don't know whether you want me to say this right now or not, but he got hurt... (Pauses, voice chokes) It always gets to me, this part...because he got hurt playing football and he got hit on purpose and he spent thirty-five years on the kidney machine because of an injury in football. Because some of the other schools didn't like the integration and they kind of worked in some cases not to accept them, even the local school here, they had problems in the sports. But once it got started, it settled down.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: And how is your brother?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: He passed.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: He did?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Yep. A couple years ago.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Bless his heart. How were...when desegregation came, how were you affected by it?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Ah, I wasn't affected because it...my four kids were, like I say, they were, pretty much accepted. Of course, all kids...maybe a few harsh words were said to them, and that's understandable, some things like that don't change, even today, but other than that, they had no problems and I had no problems. I just kinda...um, went along with what the courts had said must happen. And other than that I felt like it worked out real good. Real smooth and I'm glad it happened for my children because they had more advantage to learn more than I did. In my lifetime I was happy just to be in school and I had no desire to even go to college, like I said earlier. None of my children came home with any, you know, harsh memories of their schoolmates, 'cause it worked out pretty good. My oldest son, he said he had more trouble with the teachers because he (laughs) didn't like...I don't want to say that...(laughs) but, like I say, I had six kids, the two older ones did not graduate and they were in the integration part. One went to the 11th grade or maybe 12th, one quit in the 9th grade and went in the service and then the next four younger ones, three girls and one boy, they did graduate. And everything

was going pretty smooth by then and I was happy.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: Great! Do you have anything else to tell me about all this?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: Ummmm...not...

SUZANNE STALLINGS: No, okay. Do you have any questions?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: No.

SUZANNE STALLINGS: One more thing, Birdie. Can you think of anybody else we should talk to about all this?

BIRDIE SHANKLIN: I don't know who you...do you have Nora Rose? She's on the kidney machine and she may not feel good, you'll have to give her a call. I don't know of any...course, I don't know whether you want anybody my age, or somebody with younger kids...

SUZANNE STALLINGS: You know, it doesn't matter. We're just trying to get a feel for how things were. Okay, thank you so much.