

TRANSCRIPT, Interview of Carl Doering by Chris Dyer on January 23, 2009

This is Chris Dyer, director of The Museum in Georgetown and today I will be interviewing Mr. Carl Doering on behalf of the Georgetown Public Library's oral history project. The goal of this project is to collect recorded oral histories of members of the Georgetown community who were involved in the community during the desegregation of public schools. These oral histories will be included in the library's permanent collection.

Today's date is Friday, January 23, 2009. I am interviewing Mr. Doering at his home in Georgetown at 705 Country Club Road. The time is currently 11:05. And thanks for sittin' down with me today and I guess we'll just...just introduce yourself, and could you spell your name?

CARL DOERING: I am Carl Doering, D O E R I N G.

CHRIS DYER: OK, and do you go by any nicknames or anything like that, or...

CARL DOERING: All my life, when I was growing up, I was Brother Doering.

CHRIS DYER: Brother Doering.

CARL DOERING: I had an older brother and he'd call me "Brother," and so everybody in town knew me as Brother Doering.

CHRIS DYER: That's great! And what is your date of birth?

CARL DOERING: August 14, 1924.

CHRIS DYER: OK, well, I guess...

CARL DOERING: And I spell Carl with a "C"

CHRIS DYER: A "C", C A R L, and I'm C H R I S D Y E R, a good Irish name. OK, we'll get started with the questions here. Ah...How long have you lived in Williamson County?

CARL DOERING: I've lived in Georgetown all my life. In fact I was born about five blocks from the Courthouse.

CHRIS DYER: Oh, that's pretty neat! Right in Georgetown, so you're a Georgetown native!

CARL DOERING: Right in Georgetown! And I have been here now for eight-four plus years.

CHRIS DYER: Eighty-four years. Wow. OK, well, what neighborhood, or in what area did you live during the 40s, 50s and 60s in Georgetown? I'm not real familiar with the different neighborhoods that were in Georgetown.

CARL DOERING: Well, of course, I was born five blocks from the Courthouse, and that was southwest, which was about halfway between Austin Avenue and West Railroad. We had two railroads in town.

CHRIS DYER: Right, right. And was it an ethnically diverse neighborhood, or, you know, what was the kind of makeup of the neighborhood?

CARL DOERING: West Railroad actually separated the whites and the blacks.

CHRIS DYER: OK, well, that's interesting. Ah, let's see, ah, just, like I mentioned earlier, this is just to kinda get us set up for a whole, well, I hope you'll let me do a series of interviews with you. Describe your educational background.

CARL DOERING: I went to a private elementary school at Walburg, Zion Lutheran....

CHRIS DYER: OK, you went to Zion...

CARL DOERING: And then I went to Concordia and then I went to Arlington State University.

CHRIS DYER: And what was your...what did you major in? What was your focus in Concordia and further on?

CARL DOERING: Well, my parents wanted me to be a parochial school teacher or a pastor, but I didn't have good enough memory to suit 'em, so I changed that later on.

CHRIS DYER: What did...?

CARL DOERING: To agriculture...

CHRIS DYER: Agriculture. This is really interesting information--I'm taking a couple of notes here--information for future interviews. So, how did you...you went through school and I guess you came back. How did you...how were you involved in the community? Did you start out in...? I know you were politically involved, but how you were involved? Through the church? Could you describe that a little bit, and how you...

CARL DOERING: Well, I was involved in many ways. I grew up in Georgetown and Georgetown back then was rather small. It was in the 4-5,000 population back when I was a child. And I was involved with the blacks all my life. In fact, I remember a black lady rocking me. Her name was Sally Jefferson. And I called her Aunt Sally and she requested when she died that she be buried in a white dress and my mother gave her a white dress when she died and she was buried in a white dress. And then my father had a cotton gin, right next to the railroad track, and there was a black lady by the name of Gertrude City that had a little grocery store across the track. And I remember taking my nickels over there and buying candy. And I remember I either forgot my nickel or I lost my nickel, but anyway, Gertrude gave me a piece of candy anyway.

CHRIS DYER: I'm familiar with some of the Citys, you know Albert, you know that's out east....That's interesting so you were living in that neighborhood, you were really close...you were right next to the black community. And you mentioned...just how were you involved in the church in the community? Were you involved in the church? In City Council? Or anything like that?

CARL DOERING: Well...ah...going back to Joe City, which was Gertrude's husband, he was one of my best friends all my life. He...ah...his home was right next to my dad's cotton gin, and he made his living with a truck and a tractor, with a saw on it. He would cut wood and then sell it during the winter. And then sometimes would take his truck all the way to New Mexico and bring back baled alfalfa hay. And, in fact, Joe had me be his executor of his estate when he died. And he had a home and two rent houses and he deeded all of his property to his church. So I didn't have a whole lot to do. And then I belonged to the Optimist Club. I started Little League Baseball in Georgetown and I had the title of Commissioner of Baseball in Georgetown. I was on the Housing Authority for several years and vice chairman for two years. And we have a wonderful Housing Authority in Georgetown. It's been there a long time. And then I

was on the City Council for eight years and I was mayor for two years. And then I was chairman of the building committee at Christ Lutheran Church when we built an entirely new church, Sunday school, and gym on Luther Drive, which is off Leander Road.

CHRIS DYER: So you're very...you were definitely very involved in the community and I assume that you were involved before integration of Georgetown schools even became a possibility or an issue...You were involved with the community before that. I know that you were on...I was familiar with your City Council turn, but a lot of people might not realize that. When...can you put that in context? What were you...how were you involved during the time of integration? What were you? City Council? Were you Mayor? What were you doing at that time?

CARL DOERING: During integration?

CHRIS DYER: Yes, sir.

CARL DOERING: Ah, it was in the late '50s, and course, my tractor business was right next to the track, right next to the cotton gin. So I had...ah...I heard a lot of talk every day down there, from the blacks, in the '50s before I was elected to the School Board. People would stop by all the time and let me know...ah...I remember a delegation, probably in 1957, from the Carver School, who went before the School Board and they were wanting a new school. But that school board took no action. And then I recall a year later they did the same thing. They went and there was two or three other members on the board and they went before the board, but that board took no action. Ah...then in 1960...ah...I recall the school board appointed an advisory committee to study the building needs in Georgetown. Ah...and they discussed new schools...ah...but they didn't take any action. Ah...then in 1962 it was a really difficult time for me. There was a big controversy in Georgetown in 1962, the first part of 1962, about the superintendent and the tax collection. And I was talked into running for the school board. Ah...I was thirty-eight years old at the time and I had kept up with everything that was going on at the schools. There were eight men on the ballot because it was a controversial deal about the superintendent and the tax collection. Ah...I received the most votes and Dr. Gaddy followed me in the number of votes, and J.D. Thomas came in third. And we three were then elected to the School Board. So I served then on the School Board as...for six years, 1962 to '68. I was chairman for five years out of those six years. And we had lots of problems then. Ah...we had internal faculty problems and I recall we had lots and lots of problems with the Spanish children not being able to speak English, or being able to understand English. We had finance problems...ah...the faculty and employees were wanting raises and the community was pretty well divided. We, as far as integration was concerned, we actually had four different groups of citizens concerning integration. A white group wanting total integration, immediately, integration. And then we had the black coach, Charlie Miller group, he didn't...they didn't want any integration. Then we had a white group wanting one grade at a time and then we had a white group--no integration at all. So there was lots of talk and discussion and finally a \$500,000 bond issue was put up--was put to the citizens--and it passed by a 4-1 margin to build new schools. Two identical schools were built--Westside was built on City property. We talked them into giving it to the school, and then Northside was built on property that was donated by Mr. Parker. And I had a very difficult time in getting him to donate it. Back then, that was nothing but pasture land for livestock, all the way from there to Andice. Ah...I had a very difficult time convincing the other board members to build gyms with these schools. And I'm very glad I did because now every school has a gym built with it. And it came in very handy. And then we had a lawsuit against the school and the court approved one grade at a time. Then the next year they approved two grades, then they approved the 6th, 11th, and 12th grades. And in 1966 the whole district was integrated. My son called me Tuesday evening after Obama was sworn in as our first black president and he congratulated me. And I said what are you congratulating me about? And he says, "well, I remember now that you was

chairman of the school board and you...there was no violence at all in Georgetown in integrating the schools. And I was the first graduating class from Georgetown in an integrated system."

CHRIS DYER: Steve was?

CARL DOERING: No, that was Danny.

CHRIS DYER: Oh, Danny, it was Danny.

CARL DOERING: And he said you handed my diploma and everybody else's diploma. And I said, "Thank you!"

CHRIS DYER: I hadn't heard about the four groups before, you know the four different groups, how they felt about desegregation and what...how did you fit in with those groups? What was your position at that time, in 1962...I guess this was '62 to '68...what was your position? Where did you fall in with one of those four groups or did you not fall in with any of them at all?

CARL DOERING: Well, our school attorney was the Honorable William S. Lott, and he kept telling me and kept telling me, "Don't take a position, keep calm, and keep everybody talking and we won't have any problems." Day after day he told me this and this is what I did.

CHRIS DYER: It's good to listen to Judge Lott. I always do! (Both laugh)

CARL DOERING: The...there was a time...and I don't remember, I guess it must have been '63 then, when we had a school board meeting set for 7:00. And at 4:30 that afternoon I had a telephone call from the sheriff's office, for me to come down. I went to the sheriff's office and he introduced me to an FBI man and the FBI man said...told me to get in touch with two or three other board members and when you call the meeting to order, ask one of them to immediately make a motion to adjourn. And this I did and I had a second and it adjourned. There was a white group then, ten or fifteen people there, and they became pretty angry. And it wasn't until a couple months ago that I really revealed that the FBI and the sheriff told me...or, told the School Board what to do. And what it was all about, they never did tell me. What the problem was going to be, or was, or anything.

CHRIS DYER: Well, I guess I...the School Board doesn't usually get reaction from Washington, so, you know, that's really a unique event. So you guys, you went ahead and adjourned the meeting right away.

CARL DOERING: Right away, and then we left.

CHRIS DYER: And then were there any incidents after that or just...

CARL DOERING: No, no incidents, they were just sort of angry what we did.

CHRIS DYER: That's interesting. I want to touch on some of that in later interviews. I'm glad you brought that up. So...you mentioned that you didn't really take a side and you listened and you listened to Judge Lott and what was your role in desegregation? To kind of go into a little more detail of the activities that you really participated in. I know you were on the School Board, but, can you describe a little bit how you kind of facilitated each of those groups? You had four groups and you...you know, I'm sure they came up often to speak to you. How did you deal with them...with all that, if that makes any sense?

CARL DOERING: Well, I was in the tractor business and they would come by and let me know how they felt. And I listened, just like Judge Lott told me to.

CHRIS DYER: So, you had a lot of people through your office quite a bit.

CARL DOERING: Quite a bit.

CHRIS DYER: Is there any one instance that sticks out when somebody came and talked to you that really stuck in your mind? Did you have a visit from somebody that is just really memorable to you and, you know, when you were at the tractor business, one of these groups coming in? You don't have to name any names or anything, but was there any one occasion--a heated meeting or somebody who was mad, or somebody who was excited, or anything like that, or...?

CARL DOERING: Well, I suppose there was, but just right now I don't recall.

CHRIS DYER: You'll have to think about that and I'll get back with you on that. Because it was only 40 years ago, as we mentioned earlier (laughs), so...

CARL DOERING: I do want to mention the positive results of integration. It was really...well, I want to talk about the football game--my son Steve, that particular year we had two blacks playing on the football team and they were running backs. And Round Rock had a real good team that was supposed to win State in our division. But, anyway, our coach found out that he was telling his players not to watch out for Steve Doering because all he does is pass the ball. And, so, that particular night, ah, our coach let Steve call his own plays. And when the two running backs would move out, that's when he would run. The Round Rock backfield defense would move out on those two blacks and he scored three running touchdowns that night and Georgetown beat Round Rock 21-0. But then when they got back from the football game, and before they got off the bus, ah, Ernie Miller and Ronnie...I can't think of his name right now...but anyway, one of them got up and told everybody to wait just a minute. They said, "Ronnie and Ernie Miller just voted Steve Doering an honorary Negro because he can run as good as we can."

CHRIS DYER: And these are the two...Ernie and Ronnie Miller that were the two black players on the football team at the time? Was that their...?

CARL DOERING: Ah...It was Ernie Miller and Ronnie...I can't think of his name right now.

CHRIS DYER: Well, we'll think of it in the future. You have a pretty good memory, though, and what about...was the Round Rock team that you guys were playing, were they integrated at that time as well, or was it an all white team?

CARL DOERING: It was an all white team.

CHRIS DYER: Okay! I didn't know that. That's interesting. Did you have anything else you wanted to mention about that or do want to...do you have any more...I guess we were talking about positive results of integration. Did you see any more, or did you see any negative results, or did you have any feeling about that either way?

CARL DOERING: Well, some of the negative results were that teachers lost their jobs and children did not have support from the family members to study and learn. That was a real problem and I guess it's still a problem today. And children then had further to walk to school. But as far as the community they came together and Birdie Shanklin and Paulette Taylor are two people to be commended for their community work. Ah...

CHRIS DYER: And you mentioned...so, you said, a lot of the black...teachers lost their jobs. Was it Anglo teachers or black teachers or both...who?

CARL DOERING: It was mostly black, but a few whites did, too.

CHRIS DYER: Okay. And why did they lose their jobs? Because they...since they...

CARL DOERING: Well, the classes became larger and didn't have to be duplicated.

CHRIS DYER: There was more in a class, you needed less teachers?

CARL DOERING: Right.

CHRIS DYER: And who...how did they determine who lost their job and who didn't?

CARL DOERING: That was the principal's...superintendent's job.

CHRIS DYER: Okay. I'm learning as I go along. This is interesting. So, is there any more you want to speak on? Negative...positive...results of desegregation? Anything that...because at that time you had a kid in school as well and was there anything else that you had on that?

CARL DOERING: Well, we had actually four children in school.

CHRIS DYER: Four children in school.

CARL DOERING: Right. And, 'course we were concerned about our children and everybody's children getting a good education.

CHRIS DYER: Okay. Ah...let's see...what were the opinions of your friends, your family, your neighbors concerning desegregation? I know it was very divided, but in your neighborhood did you have any...I mean what was their view? Was it not a cohesive view? Did every house you go to, was it a little different? Or...

CARL DOERING: Well, we lived on South Lane, 2001 South Lane, at the time and our whole neighborhood didn't talk about it. I had no problems one way or the other with our neighborhood.

CHRIS DYER: Okay. Did...we've seen through the desegregation that churches were very...they had a very forward role in this. What was the opinion of your church on desegregation? Because a lot of them were very pro desegregation and I'm sure there were a few that weren't, but what was your...what church did you attend at that time? I think you mentioned it, but...

CARL DOERING: Christ Lutheran Church.

CHRIS DYER: Christ Lutheran. And what was their...

CARL DOERING: They were not involved in any way.

CHRIS DYER: Not involved.

CARL DOERING: In fact, churches are really barred from participating in politics.

CHRIS DYER: Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. (Both laugh.) Okay. Because you were on the school board and you were very involved with all of this and you were a listener, and you were a decision-maker as well, did you experience any negative consequences personally? I mean, you had a business, you know you were involved in the community and, you know, there's four groups. You're going to make a decision that's going to upset somebody. Did you experience any negative consequences at

your business, through your st...well, you said you didn't really take a formal stance. But because of the school board's decision did you experience any negative consequences from anybody in the community, or any impact on your business, because that happened, historically, in some places.

CARL DOERING: No, I didn't. Evidently everything was all right because I was elected to the Council for eight years and then Mayor for two years.

CHRIS DYER: That was what I was about to say. So, did you notice anybody who did have negative consequences? Any businesses or anything in town that did suffer because of integration.

CARL DOERING: I don't think they did.

CHRIS DYER: Well, this kind of covers what I wanted to...you know...the basics I wanted to hit, but is there anything you want to add? We do have some more time and I'd be happy to hear anything you want to add or that I've missed, or....

CARL DOERING: I think we've pretty well covered everything.

CHRIS DYER: Okay. Well, great! The time is now 25 'til 12 and I appreciate your taking the time to interview with me and hopefully we'll get to do some more in the near future.