

Interviewee: Barbara Carter

Interviewer: Jamie Goldman

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Jamie Goldman: Hello, this is Jamie Goldman and I am interviewing Ms. Barbara Carter on Saturday, March 7, 2015 in the High Point University Bakery in Wanek Center for History Detectives.

Barbara Carter: Here in High Point, I grew up in Daniel Brooks Apartments, so my family and I were a product of public housing. Daniel Brooks was just a rock throws away from William Penn. So I went to elementary school at Griffin, I went to Junior High at Griffin, so we could just see William Penn right from the elementary schools. I am not sure how much you want of my life. I'm the youngest of four, both my mom was—worked as a domestic worker in a home, she worked as a maid for the Slane family. And I understand the building has just been named here for Jack Slane, I think.

JG: Yeah, Slane Center.

BC: But yes, she worked for Jack's brother, Willis Slane and my father worked for the Stroops. So neither my Mom, only had a fifth grade education, my dad did get to High School, and I think actually one year of college. Being the youngest of four, I think I was the one the most out and about in the community. You know, by the time you get to the fourth child you don't pay attention to them that much (laughs) so you can get away with a lot. But our parents, even though they did not have the higher education, of course my mom only making the fifth grade. Their focus was on making sure we would have a better life than they. So they focused on education as well as the extracurriculars. They wanted to make sure we were exposed to whatever we had the opportunity to be exposed to. So they pushed us, to be the best that we could be.

JG: That's awesome.

BC: Yeah.

JG: So what kinds of extracurriculars did you do at William Penn?

BC: At Penn?

JG: Yes.

BC: Well, I was in the band, and I'll tell you more about that as we go. YWCA was very important, about around the time I was at Penn, VISTA was in vogue then, it was just beginning. So, I was a volunteer and I tutored other students, went to other neighborhoods and worked with kids. Because I was in band, the music teacher also took us places. And this was during the time when a teacher

could drop by your house, pick a kid up, and take them someplace. You know, or after band practice we would drive around. He took us to museums, he took us to concerts. So you know, we were exposed that way.

JG: That's awesome. So, umm, what would you—what instrument did you play in band and that sort of stuff?

BC: Okay, I played the flute.

JG: Oh, Wow.

BC: And I started as a flutist in the fifth grade. The band teacher, J. Y. Bell at that time, even though schools had been integrated, the schools were still separated at that time. So Mr. Bell was the music teacher for every black elementary school, for the Junior High, and the High school. Okay, so he was able to, to build his band from elementary school up. He wanted me to play the clarinet, but my best friend who was two years older than I was played the flute, so I was determined that I was going to play the flute (laughs). So, like I said, I started out in the fifth grade, and actually majored in music.

JG: Oh wow. Where did you go?

BC: I did my undergrad at East Carolina, and did my graduate work at the University of Iowa.

JG: That's awesome, so cool. So did you feel that you had a community of people who were really supporting you?

BC: Oh gosh, it was the epitome of it takes a village, you know. Growing up in Daniel Brooks, and by the time I was in High School we actually moved just a couple of miles from here, on Elwood right down Montlieu. We all knew each other; the parents knew all of the kids. Even in William Penn itself, the teachers were part of our communities. You know, they lived right out—on the outskirts. They didn't live in Daniel Brooks, but they lived on the outskirts. We went to church in the same churches. You know—my mother was a bridge player, she might have lived in the projects, but she played bridge with our teachers, and that sort of thing. So, they had a pulse, a good pulse on what was happening with the kids. And the one thing I remember is that our teachers did not just teach in the classrooms, they gave us life lessons. You know, and we didn't have the best textbooks, in fact they were probably hand-me-downs from Central High School, or other schools. We didn't have the equipment, but our teachers made the best of what they could with what we had and they produced good students, they produced good students. It was a different time. When I was at Griffin as a Junior High School kid, when we would be at recess, we could look up the hill and see William Penn. And we, it was every black kid's dream to be a student at William Penn High School, and when I say that I'm not exaggerating. Because, we looked up to the students there, they were bigger than life; the band was bigger than life. I can remember on football nights, Friday nights, leaving my apartment 1B, Daniel Brooks, and following Penn's band when they marched down to the stadium. Yeah, I can remember doing that and it was the, you know, William Penn was my school of the arts. I did have the opportunity to audition for the North Carolina School of the Arts, when I was in the ninth grade,

and I didn't audition because I was afraid I was going to make it, I wanted to go to William Penn.

JG: That's awesome.

BC: Yeah.

JG: So you spoke a little bit about academics, what kind of things did you study outside of flute, and being part of the band?

BC: Okay, we had the regular curriculum, academic curriculum—the algebra, the geometry, the English, chemistry. I was in—by the time I was in Junior High, Junior and Senior, I was in the AP English classes.

JG: Okay.

BC: Our math teacher, Mr. Hawkins, taught his algebra and Geometry classes as if we were in—college students. And he had a classroom that had double doors. And you know, he would be at the blackboard and he would start at the blackboard, walk out one of the doors, walk down the hallway, come back in the next door, and he would finish his statement coming up from the back. But he expected a lot from his students, I do remember that. I did well in Algebra, but for some reason Geometry was not my thing. I was in tenth grade when I took Geometry and Mr. Hawkins, you know, just kept drilling me, saying, “You can do this, you just need to open your mind.” He would meet with me at seven o'clock in the mornings, every morning as long as I needed him to do that, and he would not flinch about it. Until that light bulb finally went off. My English teacher, Eva Stuart, at the time we thought she was the meanest person on the earth. But, as you look back all she wanted us to do was to achieve. She was certain that we read and we knew about the Canterbury tales, you know, Beowulf, Shakespeare, introduced us to all of that, even if we had to share the books. But, she was certain that we were exposed to that, you know, kids don't take sentences and break them down anymore, and you know, analyze them. They don't do that anymore. We did all of that. They were certain that even though we were at a disadvantage, we weren't at a disadvantage, if that makes sense to you.

JG: Yeah, that makes sense.

BC: Okay. They did not want us, and by they, I mean our teachers, did not want us to wallow in the unfairness of having to be ten times better. They wanted us to work at being ten times better. And as a consequence, I would say 80% of my graduating class went onto college.

JG: That's awesome.

BC: You know, when I look at my classmates, we have doctors, we have college professors, and we have politicians, in my class. We have teachers, both at elementary, high school and higher education. We have business owners from my class. So the time I was in school I guess was the proverbial phrase from *The Tale of Two Cities*, It was the best of times and it was the worst of

times. The worst of times because it was a time of unrest, but the best of times because we had a unity, we had friendships; we had teachers who were the cream of the crop and cared.

JG: That is very cool.

BC: Yeah. The music program there, the band was phenomenal.

JG: I've heard a lot.

BC: It was phenomenal, both the marching band as well as the concert band. During marching season everyone wanted to follow us (laughs), you know, the holiday Christmas parades, we—they had us last because once we passed; everyone who was viewing the parade would follow us. If we were in the middle or in the front of the band, by the time the other bands and Santa Claus got there, the viewers were gone, because they were following us. And it didn't matter if we were in High Point, or some other city, you know, during the concert season we would go to the district and state contests—we were the band to beat.

JG: Yeah.

BC: You know, and the music we played was top notch. Italians in Algiers, Rienzi, the Overture, Trittico. We played things that professional bands today, have trouble with.

JG: Yeah.

BC: And that was because of J. Y. Bell, I mean he had a music program to die for.

JG: That's awesome.

BC: Yeah, and you know, as I said, I was a flutist in the band. During arching season I was a majorette, and my Junior and Senior year I was the head majorette. So, I loved being part of the band.

JG: Awesome, that is so awesome. I love hearing about the band. We have looked into it a lot, and there are actually a few people that have been interviewed in the past. It's fascinating, you guys were awesome. So what class were you in, I am guessing the last class?

BC: Yes, the class of '68.

JG: I thought so (Laughs). So what were your thoughts when they closed it? I mean I am sure after everything it was just—there was such an emotional connection to it.

BC: It was, it was bittersweet. It was time, but the frustration with closing Penn was, why close Penn? Why do you have to build a new school in order to integrate the schools? So that's what the frustration was, from the black community. Not that we did not want the schools to be integrated, but why won't the white kids come to our side of town, when they are expecting us to go to their side of town? So I think that's where the anger and frustration, what that's all about

when they closed Penn. I am very, very happy that the building itself has remained. And so that legacy and history can carry on. But as far as forcing the integration issue, yes it was time.

JG: Yeah.

BC: It's past time for that to happen, and though students could go to Central, we chose not to. You know, we wanted to be at Penn because our teachers were just as good—we didn't have as good of textbooks or as good of chemistry equipment or what have you, but we wanted to be there.

JG: Did you have any friends or anyone you knew that went to Central?

BC: No.

JG: No one?

BC: Well, let me take that back, a couple. There was one young man from my class, Larry Mangum (?) and I think he went to Central one year and then came back to Penn. And I think that's the only one from my class that I can recall. There were folks from older classes whose names, I can see them but I cannot remember their names. But, very few, less than 10 I'd say.

JG: Okay, and did you—were there any tensions going on during your four years at Penn with the whole integration issue and all of that you were involved with?

BC: Not that I was involved with personally.

JG: Okay.

BC: That was the time when there were a lot of demonstrations. I guess I was younger when the sit-ins at Greensboro occurred, I was probably in junior high at that time. When I was at Penn, I was part of the High Point Youth Council, which was an integrated board, and through the Girl Scouts we had interaction. But, oddly enough I remember a trip that the Girl Scouts took to DC. We were on separate buses, and we slept in separate places. But, when we actually got to the event itself, we sat as one Girl Scout group from High Point, but it struck me of course.

JG: Yeah.

BC: You know, we go to an event to celebrate the anniversary of Girl Scouts, we were supposed to be—we were different troops but we were supposed to be one organization, but yet we have to travel on different buses, we stay at different places. The Youth Council as I said, was good exposure. We got along really well with that. The tension between Penn and Central because we were just as good, and you know our academics were just as good. And of course we had a better band (laughs) so there you go!

JG: That's awesome.

BC: (Laughs) There you go!

JG: Did you have any teachers that like pushed you that you felt like—

BC: Oh gosh, yes! Eva Stuart, the one that I just mentioned to you. In fact behind her back we called her Evil Stuart (laughs), yeah but she really pushed us. Dr. Hawkins, our math instructor pushed us. The school counselor Mrs. Hughes was always there for us. Our Science teacher G. P. Davis, and Mrs. Kendall were constantly pushing us. And the Chemistry room, when I took Chemistry we had a really young teacher, fresh out of college he went to Livingston College, Pete Hunter, Mr. Hunter, who later after teaching became a judge and in fact I think he retired from the bench here in High Point. He actually started out as one of our Chemistry teachers. All of the teachers, no matter what their expertise was, they pushed us. The janitorial staff kept us accountable, the cafeteria staff kept us accountable, the office staff, Burnell Leek, the office secretary knew every kid's name. Our principal, we thought that he knew magic because he could be at one end of the building and before we could get to the other end of the building, he was already there. You know, like how did he do that? (laughs) Mr. Burford I think was principal at Penn for forty years, at least. In fact I think that he was the first principal of Andrews. I am not sure how long he was there before he retired. But, Mr. Burford he did not take any junk. He knew our parents, he knew our names, and he respected every student. He called us by our last names, "Miss Carter, Mr. Carter, Ms. Collins, Mr. Camp," so he gave us that respect, but he knew every kids name. Every kid—he didn't have to think about it, he knew our names. How many principals can do that now? You know, the schools are so much larger now, but yeah they pushed us.

JG: I graduated in a class of 53, and our principal didn't even know our names, so that's phenomenal. That's so cool. So did you—you were the youngest, so did your older brothers and sisters do anything like band and stuff like that?

BC: Uh huh, my sister who is the eldest played cello in the orchestra. My older brother played percussion, and he was fantastic. I remember one time we were at the all-state band and I can forget the piece we were doing, I think festive overture or something else. But they didn't have the timpani music and he played the entire concerto from memory.

JG: Wow.

BC: Yeah he was that good on the Timpani that he knew it. So, he was the percussionist. My other brother who is presently the President of Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte tried his hand at trombone, but it was not for him. He was more of pure academics, which was his forte. But we all went to college. My sister is retired from the Guilford County School System as a teacher, my older brother retired from IBM, he was a designer, I am not sure what all he did with IBM. And as I said, my brother who is two years older than I, he has his Ph.D. in Higher Education.

JG: Okay, so what are you doing now?

BC: Right now I am working for Congresswoman Alma Adams, I am director of constituent services but yes, I told you I majored in music. And when I left University of Iowa I needed to work, and my plan was to work a year, two at the most, and then work on my Ph.D. The job that I got, this was in '74 was with the Department of Corrections and they hired me as an education coordinator. Because during that time the prison system was trying to introduce more programs into the penal system. Once I started working corrections, it kind of got in my blood. I stayed in corrections for over 25 years; I became the first woman in North Carolina to be the warden of a male prison. That is commonplace now. (laughs)

JG: Yeah.

BC: (laughs) It wasn't in the 70's. I left North Carolina in '84 and moved to Kansas to be the Warden of a co-correctional facility in Kansas, stayed with that in Kansas for another 8 years and that's when I married and started a family. Did not want to be called in the middle of the night to go to the prison. But I continued doing consulting work in prison work for a while. Then I went back to my roots of music and worked with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City for about six or seven years. And then I took another four years to be with my daughter and my husband passed. And when I went back to work full time, I started working in the school system as a parent liaison, bringing other parents to be certain they were involved with what their kids did. Moved back to North Carolina in 2010 and at that time I was working for the former congressman Mel Watt and the reason I moved back was because my mother was getting of age, she was in her late 90's at that time, and not well and I needed to be with her more than once a year.

JG: Yeah.

BC: My daughter had just graduated from Kansas State University, so she was out on her own, so I've been back in North Carolina for 4.5 almost 5 years now.

JG: That's awesome. Well, so we have all that. Do you have any questions that you thought I was going to ask that I didn't as of right now?

BC: Not really. I thought you would've asked you know, what a typical day at Penn may have been. One of the things we looked forward to, and I guess all students do, is lunchtime. We would eat our lunch hurriedly and go out to the common areas outside to be together, that's when we would interact with all of the classes, the different groups. My class, the class of '68 we get together on a regular basis because there are still quite a few of us here in the area, and you probably have interviewed some of them. But, I think you may have covered everything.

JG: Well what would you say "a day in the life" was? We actually have someone who is going to write a section on it—the day in the life, so I am sure she would be very excited to get a little bit of what was going on (laughs).

BC: Okay, yeah as I said we, classes started at 8:30, we'd start in the classrooms at the time you have your announcements and I guess they still do that—the pledge of allegiance, we actually had homeroom classes. Do kids still have homeroom classes?

JG: I did. (laughs)

BC: Okay. (laughs)

JG: Yeah. (laughs)

BC: We had homeroom class the first 10-15 minutes of the day, and then you would follow your schedule, and go from class to class. Band at that time—the music classes were at the end of the day. And practice—the actual class may have started at 2:30 in the afternoon but it was probably after 5 or 6 before we would get away, because of various things. We were not allowed to go off campus for lunch, which was fine with us. No one drove a car anyways; we all either walked to school or the kids from Trinity and the Archdale area rode the buses to school. But we walked, there was no such thing as a student parking lot because nobody owned a car. So we stayed on campus most of the day and the interaction, the passing classes, I was a hallway patrol. I would stand around and be certain that everyone got to class and that sort of thing. So, you know, I guess that was a typical day. And just interacting with each other whether you were working on the school newspaper, the yearbooks, and I don't know if you have seen the yearbooks or not but I did bring two of them. And the other extracurricular activities, the football, basketball team, the dance ensemble, cheerleading, all of that would take place throughout the day too.

JG: Wow.

BC: Yeah, it was just a different time. It was just a different time.

JG: It sounds like such a great place, when you talk about it.

BC: It—I don't want to make it appear that everything was ice cream and cake because it wasn't. It was hard, not being able to participate in some of the same activities as the students from Central or have the opportunity to do some of the same things that they were exposed to, but we made our way, we made our way. I think the most important thing of that time was the fact that, as I said earlier, that teachers, our janitorial staff, the office staff, were certain that we were doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons.

JG: Yeah.

BC: We helped each other out, and they had high expectations for us, therefore we had high expectations for ourselves. Our parents were totally involved with the school. You know, PTA, the auditorium would be packed with parents. You know, when I worked in the school system in Leavenworth when we would have parent-teacher association nights, I could count the number of parents who would show up. It was just a difference, parents were totally involved with what we did, and that makes a difference. I think that makes a big difference. The parents are just as involved as the teachers, they did not consider it the teachers' job to do it all.

JG: Yeah

BC: You know, like I said, you know, our teachers, for those of us who lived in public housing, the projects, because the business, the black business community lived right on the periphery of our community, it gave us hope.

JG: Yeah

BC: You know, we knew if they could do it, we could do it. And the circumstances of our birth did not define our life. And that's they way they approached us. You know, we wanted to be in school.

JG: Yeah.

BC: We didn't skip school, we wanted to be in school. You know, we craved the education, because, you know, we wanted to be successful.

JG: Well, do you have anything you wanted to share with me? You brought your yearbooks.

BC: This is '66, this is the year my brother graduated, let me change glasses here. (Flips through the yearbook). This is my class, we were sophomores at the time. Jerry Camp is a business owner here. ..that's me as a sophomore. Ada Clinton was the president of the class, Dorothy Collins is here. You've probably interviewed Carlvena Foster too. There's Carlvena, she was a Steed at the time...she's now a county commissioner. Hank Wall played trombone in the band. He's very active in the High Point community now. Thomasina Moore was a year ahead of me, she's an attorney in Jacksonville now. Gerald Truedale was in this class, he's a plastic surgeon now. Teachers...the football team was great at that time. And this is my brother. I think this is part of the High point youth Council. That's me. There's the band. That's me as a sophomore right there. Teachers. Here's Mr. Burford. He was a phenomenal, phenomenal man. This is Mr. Hawkins, math. This is my brother's graduation. I can identify where I was sitting, where he was sitting. So that's '66, and this was the last program from graduation. Class flower was the white carnation. We chose that because the white carnation symbolizes pure love, not just love but pure love, which we thought complemented our motto "Deeds, not words." If you look at the professions that some of us went into, we're following that motto "Deeds, not words." That's the program, and this is a picture of our graduating class. This is Eva Stuart, English teacher. Sandra Kendall wrote about Penn in the High Point Enterprise. I don't know if they still have student news or not, but she wrote the column for Penn. Let me show you pictures of Mr. Bell. Gwyn Davis, fabulous, she taught biology and physics. Miss Kendall taught biology Jones taught sophomore and junior English. Miss Hernandez was Spanish. And Miss Hill was French. Ms. McConnell did civics, sociology, economics, that sort of thing. Business, our business teachers there. Home economics, I don't know if they still teach that. Here's the great J.Y. Bell. I love, I love, love, love this man.

JG: Can I take a picture of that by chance? I feel like he's had such an impact on your life, I'd love to share that with my teacher. He would love that. Thank you.

BC: Thank you. Mira P. Brown, and she started doing the community Christmas program with the Messiah, I think it's still carried on here in High Point now...this is the band. This is really

an assimilation of our marching. I think we did this for the purpose of the picture. Here's the choir, and the choir was equally as good as the band, but since I was in the band that was the cat's meow. Mr. Russell was dean of students, he was our counselor. Mrs. Hughes. Brown Leek (?) was the school secretary, but had a pulse on every student. If we were late to class, she would call us on it. That's the board of education. Mrs. McConnell had a great influence on a lot of kids lives. I only knew her as a teacher for one year, she passed soon after I got there, but as I said she taught civics, sociology, that sort of thing. And that's the great Tigers.

JG: That's so cool. Thank you for sharing that with me.

BC: Oh, well thank you for the interview.

JG: Thank you for taking the time out of your day. I'm sure you're very busy right now.

BC: It's a busy time. You gave me a chance to get back to High Point. I'll go see some family and friends before heading back to Charlotte.

JG: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.