

Interview Date: Wednesday Nov. 19th, 2014

Interviewer: Lake Slabach

Interviewee: Yvonne Bostic-Short

Location: High Point University

Length: Approximately 35 minutes

Lake Slabach: This is Lake Slabach and I am with Mrs. Short and this is Wednesday November the 19th at about 9:20 am. So Mrs. Short, you grew up in the High Point area?

Yvonne Short: Yes I did.

LS: So you've lived here your entire life?

YS: All of my life.

LS: And you attended William Penn High School?

YS: I did attend William Penn High School, and I graduated from William Penn High School.

LS: What year did you graduate?

YS: 1959

LS: So what were some of the things you were into while you were in high school?

YS: Oh, OK, I was in the choral music (group). the home economics organization and several other organizations, but I can't recall their names at this time. It's been a long time

LS: So did you participate in any extracurricular activities? Any sports or anything?

YS: No sports, just the chorus.

LS: So what was it like growing up in High Point?

YS: Well, because we didn't know any better, it was ok. But at the end of my junior or senior year, that was when all the corruption and all the problems came in, with the marching for your rights and all those kind of things. I was in some of that; my brother was mostly a part of that. He was a part of the February 26, I'm sure you've heard about that. February 11th, when 26 students sat in at the Woolworth's counter. Well, my brother was a part of that, but I had to shield him from my grandparents because they didn't know what was going on. So I was like a cover-up for him.

LS: So he was doing this in secret? Or your grandparents knew but they just didn't approve?

YS: They didn't know, they didn't know. It wasn't in secret, it was secret from them (grandparents) but he was along with the other students, they were marching.

LS: So you weren't at the march, or you just didn't participate?

YS: No I didn't participate in the march, not that one anyway.

LS: Right. Was there a particular reason for that?

YS: No, there was no reason at all, I just didn't participate.

LS: What did you say your brother's name was?

YS: Robert Odell Bostic Jr.

LS: And he participated in the sit in and march?

YS: Yes, he was one of the 26, there was 26 students that marched.

LS: So what was the atmosphere around that like at the school? Were there a lot of kids talking about "I'm gonna go do the march?"

YS: Well it was sorta quiet like, because they didn't want the principal to know what was going on, but he found out, but it was a kind of thing that they planned at school, and then they went somewhere else and had meetings and then they started to march downtown.

LS: So where did the march start?

YS: It actually started on Washington Street, and went down to Main Street, where the Woolworth's store was at that time.

LS: And they just marched down there and sat in?

YS: They marched down there and sat in until they had to be moved.

LS: Who was it that moved them?

YS: The policemen along with the store owners, who wanted them to move and they wouldn't move, so they had to call the police to get them out.

LS: I took a North Carolina history class and we learned about the Greensboro sit-ins, but they didn't talk as much about the High Point sit-ins.

YS: It wasn't known too much about the High Point sit-ins because all the focus was on A&T. And I think that was the reason. The High Point students realized what was going on there and tried to have it going on here.

LS: Well and it's a little different too because it was high school students here and it was college students there

YS: College students there.

LS: So were there any repercussions for students, where their parents angry that they did it?

YS: Well they were angry when they found out, but it was too late then. Because it had already happened. But luckily no one was injured; they were threatened but they weren't injured.

LS: So when the sit-ins happened, at school, like you said the principal found out too late, was there anyone at school encouraging students to or not to participate?

YS: They were encouraged not to, but it was well in the making then, so they carried it out. But there's a lot to that story, and there's a lot of that story that I do not know.

LS: So you were born in High Point?

YS: Born in High Point

LS: Did you live on Washington Street?

YS: No, I lived in an area called Macedonia, have you heard of Macedonia?

LS: I don't think so

YS: If you go out College Drive to Wise Park (?). Have you heard of the Macedonia Family Resource Center?

LS: I think I have heard of that.

YS: Well that's the area I grew up in, and I knew High Point U is familiar with the center. Growing up in Macedonia in High Point, North Carolina, the elementary school we went to was Fairview elementary, have you heard of that?

LS: I have, with my education major I've heard of it.

YS: Okay, well we went to Fairview Elementary from first through sixth grade. Let me go back, first through sixth, seven through twelve was at William Penn. So when we finished the sixth grade at Fairview, we went to William Penn. Not like it is today, because today you go one through five elementary, and then six through eight junior, then nine through twelve so it's a big difference.

LS: Yeah, I know my parents until the ninth grade were at the Junior High and then they were only in high school for three years.

YS: So actually I was at William Penn for five years.

LS: So, what have you seen as far as the City of High Point since then? Like growth, or decline? I know the furniture market has been big.

YS: Well the growth in High Point has really stepped up. As far as William Penn High School, part of the building is still there because Penn Griffin houses there now. When we were going, we walked to school. We even walked to elementary school, so when we went to high school, that was a further walk, but we did it. In the rain, the cold, sometimes the snow, and my brother and I we walked to school together because my sister had graduated two years before. So the two of us walked to school, well he was a walker, he walked so fast I had to run about all the way. When I got to school, I was so tired, it was a really long walk. Then after school, we all get together because there was a lot of us who went back that way. Some would stop off at this area and some in another area, but we kept on going because we had to go to Macedonia, but we enjoyed it, it was a lot of fun.

LS: I bet it would be freezing to walk. I walked to my first class this morning.

YS: It would be freezing, but once we got to school with all our friends, we had a great time. We'd go to classes together, we studied together, I never had a problem at William Penn. I never had a problem.

LS: Now you said earlier that High Point was great because you didn't know any better.

YS: We didn't know any better. At the time, we were young.

LS: So looking back on it now, what do you know better now, that you didn't really think of then?

YS: Well, of course things have changed. Some have gotten better, some worse. As far as housing, community outlook, all these things have improved *some*, but not to the point where they should be. High Point is not a slow town, but it's not as fast growing as some of the other towns. I think what really makes High Point, High Point, is because of the University. We have a lot of great things here, not like larger cities, we have transportation problems, we don't have buses that run everywhere they should go. We have jobs, housing, dilapidated houses, communities that should be kept better, you know? And the schools situation is a little bit better.

LS: For this class, we've read a book called *Civilities and Civil Rights*, and it talks about the Greensboro area, and how public perception was that Greensboro was very progressive. But, if you dig under the surface a little but, maybe it was just them smiling and nodding their heads and saying, "Yeah we're going to integrate, yeah we're going to desegregate," when they're not actually doing it. Did you find that to be how High Point was or was High Point different?

YS: Somewhat similar.

LS: So do you remember when they decided to desegregate?

YS: I think it was '68, '67

LS: So it was after you graduated

YS: Oh yeah

LS: Do you remember what people thought about that?

YS: Well most people wanted to go and graduate from William Penn High School. That was the colored school at the time and everybody's hopes and aspirations were to finish at William Penn High School, but when they closed it down, some had to go to Central and some went to Andrews. Well they weren't happy, some stopped going to school, but the majority of them went to Andrews or Central

LS: Some of what we've been reading kind of hints that African Americans were happy at the schools they were at, they just wanted the same materials, textbooks and that type of thing.

YS: That's true, that's true, because at William Penn we were handed down, now at Central and maybe at Ragsdale it might have been a different story, but some of the material was outdated, some of it was outdaed. But on the other hand, we still learned what we needed to learn and we graduated and had a nice sized class. Some went off to school, some went into just working, married, raising a family, but it was still a happy time, because like I said, if you don't know any better, you accept what you have.

LS: One of the people that we've been learning about is Principal Burford, was he principal when you were there?

YS: Yes.

LS: What did you think of him?

YS: I liked Mr. Burford. He was very hard, I mean very, very hard on you. If you looked like you were going to look wrong, he would say something. We had assemblies every Friday, and that was his time to talk and make jokes. So one day we had an assembly and he said, "I was looking out my window one day and saw Bostic (my brother) walking across the campus, nothing in his hands and nothing in his head." Man, the audience laughed so hard, and my brother just sitting there smirking. But Mr. Burford, actually, he liked to joke, he was actually joking, but a lot of them probably thought he was serious, but my brother just laughed it off. It was so funny, we all laughed.

LS: We've learned a lot about him being such a key figure in William Penn, were there any other faculty that were there that...?

YS: Yeah, we had some teachers that were pretty hard on you, but they were good people. It was easy to learn from them, and with Mr. Burford keeping peace and harmony in the school. You go to your classroom, stay in there until the bell rings, and when the bell rings, you come out and head straight to your next class. There was nobody in the hallway talking, fighting, all this you go straight, because Mr. Burford had a strict school.

LS: You were at school to go to school?

YS: You were at school to go to school and you came to school to learn. Then, when it was time to have fun, you had fun.

LS: So he had a strict side, but at the same time he enjoyed joking and having fun?

YS: Yes, yes he did. I remember we would have lunch in the cafeteria every day. So two girls, two of my friends, there was three of us, we decided we weren't going to eat in that cafeteria, we were going down the street to where they sold sandwiches on Washington Street. So we decided to leave the school, not knowing that anybody would see us. So as we were walking down the sidewalk, someone from the window upstairs said, "Little girls, where you going?" Well we just kept on walking. He said it again, "little girls where you going?" We just paid him no mind because we thought it was another student saying that so we just kept on walking. We went on down the sidewalk on Washington Street and we had gotten maybe a block down the street and a car drove up. It was Mr. Burford. We could have died right there. He said, "Get in this car! Get in this car! I'm taking you home." We thought the world had come to an end. He took all of us home, and my grandmother was there and she said, "What is going on?" Mr. Burford said, "If they don't wanna stay at school, I'll bring them home, you keep them." So one of the girls couldn't go home because nobody was there, so he ended up taking her to someone else's house, but he gave us three days to be out. But it kind of made my grandma mad because she thought "why would he do this? Why wouldn't he just take you back to school? to stay away from school for three days. But it all ended ok, we went back and it was just another day, but we thought it was Jared Gibson that was teasing

with us but it was Mr. Burford. I'll never forget that as long as I live. We had a lot of good days, we had a lot of good days and like I said he was very strict. When he said something he meant it, and when he said get in this car, I'm taking you home, that's what he meant. He took us home.

LS: Now you said you had a brother, was he older or younger?

YS: One year younger.

LS: So he would have graduated in '60.

YS Now, he's deceased now.

LS: Oh, I'm sorry. Another thing we've been talking about a lot is the marching band. We've heard a lot of people say how bug the marching band was. I know you said you weren't a part of it, you were a part of vocal.

YS: The marching band was very big. In fact, if you ever heard anyone talk about A&T's marching band, William Penn's marching band was a carbon copy of A&T's marching band. They really loved the band and it was a great band. During the parades, the word "Show-Out", they showed out. Concerts, whatever the band had to do, it was A-ok.

LS: I know now, Penn Griffin is very musical.

YS: But now the Andrews High School is the new William Penn High School. So the band students there started out like William Penn, but now they're following behind another college or something, but its actually the next William Penn's band. My grandson is actually in that band, the Andrews marching band. So they're very good.

LS: One of the other things I guess we've learned too, is about how they used to walk down here for football games.

YS: They did.

LS: So did you walk down with them, did you march down with them?

YS: I didn't march down with them, but I did go to the games, but it was like everybody knew that William Penn's band was outstanding, so everywhere the band went as far as we could go locally, people were following behind. Even in the Christmas parades and all that, they were right behind William Penn's band. Forget about the other part or whatever. It was William Penn's band.

LS: So they probably weren't there to watch the football game

YS: No, no, no they were there for the band. That's the way we are now for Andrews, we go to the football games, but we're there for the band.

LS: So you said you were vocal ensemble?

YS: Yes, the chorus. Mary P. Brown was the director. She was about as bad as Mr. Burford. If you'd get one note wrong, you'd have to go drill it, she would drill you. She was very, very good but she was very, very mean. Mean, in that she was meaning for us to do right, but we had a great choir. We sang at the Christmas Messsiah, if you've ever heard of that. Every year we'd sing that Messiah/ We sang so hard that by the time it was time to do the program, we almost didn't have a voice. But she was very strict, very, very good instructor in instructing you how to sing and what parts and all these. But Mary P. Brown, I will never forget her.

LS: Were there any songs that you remember singing?

YS: Hallelujah, Hallelujah chorus.

LS: If you had to go back to your high school experience, would there be anything you would do differently, or would you do everything the same?

YS: If I went back now, there may be some things I would do differently. I know I wouldn't have left school, I wouldn't have gone down Washington Street to the restaurant. But other than that I had a good year. We had Home Economics, have you heard of Dorothy Bostic? Well she was the Home economics teacher and she was my cousin. In that class, I kind of skated a little bit, but she was a wonderful teacher, she taught you everything you needed to know about your home. Everything that you need to do in your kitchen, how to clean up your house, how to decorate, all these things and how to sew, how to make garments for your family and all this she taught us in class.

LS: So what would you say is your biggest take away from your high school experience, like how has it affected you or impacted your life?

YS: Well, Dorothy Bostic affected my life because she taught us to be homemakers and treat your families and all those things. There were other teachers there that I sorta liked, I respected them. I had no problems with them and they never had any problems with me, I never was a problem maker. And Mr. Burford was, I think he was another one.

LS: So you talking about how to be a homemaker, was that just sort of the expectation when you were there?

YS: Mm-hm, that's right.

LS: So you took this Home Economics, were there many guys in that class?

YS: No, there may have been a couple, but mostly girls.

LS: So, the guys, you said that they would either go on to college or stayed around here and worked, where did they work?

YS: There wasn't anywhere here for them to work, so they went to college, and once they finished college, they went to other states.

LS: Why?

YS: Because of the job situation. There was no jobs in their field, so they had to go away. And also girls.

LS: So what was, you said there's not very many jobs around here.

YS: At that time, there was jobs, but not in their fields, so they had to go away. But jobs were plentiful years ago, but not the right kind of jobs. Not for those coming out of college.

LS: So what type of jobs were there?

YS: Hosier mills, Thomasville Buses, working in homes, furniture, basically furniture.

LS: That's one thing I've been taught my entire life. I think High Point...

YS: The Furniture City.

LS: But now that I'm here it seems more like the furniture market.

YS: It's the furniture market, but several years ago, they started shipping all the furniture making overseas and a lot of people lost jobs. They had to survive, so they took whatever was available, maybe the restaurants, fast food, all that kinda thing. A lot of people that had jobs maybe were getting ready to retire or they moved from the city. Different things like that.

LS: So, you graduated in '59, so I'm trying to think about who the president would have been. It would have been right before JFK, is that Eisenhower? So was that on your radar at all, the kinda national civil rights movement or national politics at all?

YS: We just went with the flow.

LS: So your brother was more involved with the sit in and things, did he keep up with the national things at all?

YS: Well, number one he was a football player and when you're a football player especially at William Penn High School, all the girls flock. All the girls, they loved football players, it was something about football because they didn't bother the basketball team. I guess they were supposed to be more manly and men. But he played football and studied and graduated and then he went into the Coast Guard and was he stationed in Massachusetts. He was there a few years and met his wife and started his family and several years after that he died.

LS: Well, is there anything that I didn't ask that you thought I would ask?

YS: No, I didn't really know what you were going to ask me, but I hoped that whatever you asked, I'd be prepared.

LS: Was there anything from your experience at William Penn that you can remember that maybe you haven't gotten the chance to talk about?

YS: I told you about leaving school? Because I don't normally tell that to anybody, but that was the only thing that actually happened to me at the time that I wasn't proud of, but at the time who know about being proud and all these things, because we were just wanting to go off campus and get something to eat. We said

we were tired of the cafeteria food, so we just took off, not knowing the consequences, but it was okay. It didn't wreck anything with my school life, it didn't wreck my grades, it didn't wreck anything, it didn't have anything to do. So I did make good grades in high school, and back then they didn't say, "you're on the honor roll" you just got A's or B's or C's or D's or F's or whatever, but I always had a good report card and for that my parents were proud of that. And all my siblings did very well in school.

LS: Now you had a sister and a brother, did you have other siblings too?

YS: Yes, while I was at William Penn, I had three sisters and three brothers at the time.

LS: So where did you line up as far as age?

YS: I was number two and my brother was number three and then there were three others. Then later on my mother had two more children.

LS: So y'all kind of were all in the civil rights movement, as far as segregation. Did any of your brothers or sisters have to move to Andrews?

YS: Yes, two, my sister and brother, they didn't go to Andrews they went to Central.

LS: What did they think of that?

YS: Well, she almost didn't go, but it was okay with him because he was determined that he wanted to finish high school. It wasn't a case of I'm not ever going, it was a thing you had to do if you wanted to finish high school, it was just that simple. It wasn't like I'll go to another school or go out of town, it wasn't like that, you either go there or that's it. Because back then, if you were in Andrews district

you had to go, it wasn't like it is now with the magnet schools. You either did or you didn't.

LS: So one of the things that my professor for this project is thinking about doing is eventually extending it to an entire Washington street project, so is there anything about Washington Street that you can remember growing up?

YS: Yes, well of course the school is set on Washington Street, back on the street. If you leave the school and go right there were a lot of black owned businesses. One was the cafeteria that we were going to, there was a black pharmacy, dentist, medical doctor, I'm trying to remember all of 'em. Anyways, there were several black businesses and to the left was the funeral home, a black funeral home and behind the funeral home was all where the blacks lived and on the other side of the railroad track, you know where that bridge is on Washington Street? We went across that bridge, every day we went across and we came across and the businesses on Washington Street, of course they are all gone, some new establishments are there now. But back in the day it was a little community all in itself.

LS: Just kind of secluded?

YS: It was nice because that was what we had, and we enjoyed that. There was a movie, the Ritz theater. Have you heard of the Ritz theater? There was two medical doctors and one dentist.

LS: So like you were saying earlier, not so much concerned with the national, but more of just your own community going with the flow. The railroad track, was it very active?

YS: Sort of active and we would walk across the bridge, look down, and sometimes I would get a little shaky, but we had no choice. We could either go that way, or we didn't come at all, but it was really nice. If I think about the days that we walked, once we got across the bridge there was a little grocery store here, had all kind of little goodies. So we had a little change and would go in that store and get a drink and a candy bar and walk on home just having fun.

LS: You said you had change, did you have a job or anything?

YS: No my parents gave us money.

LS: Did people have jobs?

YS: Yeah people had jobs, great jobs.

LS: What type of job would a high school student have?

YS: I really don't know any high school students that worked, I can't recall,

LS: So that just wasn't a really big thing for high school students to have jobs?

YS: Not really, not like today when they can go to McDonalds and all these different fast foods. They have jobs today but they won't work. But then we only went to school, came home to do our homework, maybe a football game or two. Basically, we went home, studied, got ready for bed, woke up the next morning and did the same thing. It wasn't like you would run over to this one's house and to that one's house, we didn't do that.

LS: And there weren't any travel sports? Like my brother's all into travel basketball

YS: No, only the football. We didn't go anywhere at the time.

LS: I know in high school, I wouldn't have had a job if I hadn't had to pay gas money, so y'all were walking to school I guess you didn't have to pay gas money?

YS: No, we walked to school every day, every day.

LS: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

YS: Its kind of hard to think back, there's so much going on now, and so much I've been through since then. But, all in all I would say that we had some pretty good teachers, they were pretty smart, and they believed in you sitting in class, not making a sound, not talking the way they do today. You were focused on your teacher and you learned, that's how you learned. They made sure that you had a great education.

LS: It seems like there was a culture around the school, starts with Principal Burford, kind of no-nonsense.

YS: That's right, you were here to learn, and I'm not sure that Mr. Burford ever put anybody out of school, but I'm pretty sure he had to suspend them, but it was so different back then than it is today. We had a great time, we enjoyed going to school.

LS: Thank you so much

YS: I hope I answered what you wanted.

LS: Oh, it was great, yeah.