

Emma Flood Interview Summary

Interviewee: Emma Flood
Interviewers: Charlie Bloedorn and Kimberly Beasley
Interview Date: October 13, 2021
Location: Blackboard collaborate (virtual meeting)
Length: 1 video file, MP4 format, 1:34:14

THE INTERVIEWEE: Emma Flood is a lifetime citizen of Hampton Roads. She was born in Hampton, Virginia, and attended Hampton schools throughout her life. She attended segregated schools for the entirety of her education, and graduated from each just before the implementation of integration and busing policies. Flood received both her undergraduate and master's degrees from Hampton Institute. She went on to a successful career teaching government classes at Kecoughtan and Phoebus High School. She is also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and is a lifetime member of her local NAACP.

THE INTERVIEWER: Charlie Bloedorn and Kimberly Beasley are both senior students at Christopher Newport University. They are students in The Long Civil Rights Movement, and conducted this interview for the Hampton Roads Oral History Project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: On October 13, 2021, Charlie Bloedorn and Kimberly Beasley conducted an oral history interview with Emma Flood. During the interview, Flood emphasized a few points which she finds essential to understanding her life in the context of the civil rights movement. The first being that her structured upbringing was key to her success later in life. By learning and maintaining a disciplined lifestyle, Flood saw great success both during her education and in her career. The second point emphasized by Flood was the success seen by Hampton in utilizing voluntary integration. She notes that Hampton experienced a much smoother transition, with less tension between the races, during integration due to their comparatively early voluntary integration policy. Lastly, Flood underlined the importance of education in a democracy. In particular, she stressed the objectivity required by educators in shaping and molding new generations of citizens. Education has always been a defining factor of Flood's life, and she values the importance of a good education in the scope of one's life. Overall, while Flood was not directly active in civil rights protests or marches, she has always felt passionate about the fair treatment of everyone. In her words, "what you do for one, you must do for the other." She credits much of her success to the structure and support given by her parents, as well as the exceptional work of her teachers and professors.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Charlie Bloedorn: This is Charlie Bloedorn speaking and my partner is Kim Beasley. Today is October 13th, 2021. We are interviewing Ms. Flood. This interview is being carried out as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University.

Kim Beasley: Good morning, Miss Flood. We are taking what is called a life history, and we would like to begin our interview with a few questions about your childhood.

Emma Flood: Okay.

KB: So, where and when were you born?

EF: I really would not like to tell my age. I guess you know how women are about their age. But I was born [in] 1949 in Newport News at Dixie Hospital.

KB: Okay.

EF: In fact, at that time, Blacks in the community were housed in the basement. My mother told me this, as a young girl. And I was the last one to be born at that hospital.

KB: Really?

EF: The last of my sisters, yes. My younger sisters were born at Whittaker [Memorial] Hospital.

KB: Okay, is there anything else that we should know about that hospital that you were born at and things that your mother might have told you?

EF: No, other than I know that it was in the area of Chesapeake, and it was an outstanding hospital.

KB: Okay, very interesting.

EF: And I think at that time there were only two Black doctors that were allowed to practice there.

KB: Wow, very interesting. What did your parents do for a living?

EF: My father, he worked in the shipyard. And my mother, once she had children, she was a stay-at-home mom. And then, once the children became school-aged, she went back to work. But she worked in the cafeteria at one of the local schools, cooking pastries. She was an outstanding cook. Outstanding.

KB: Aw. So you grew up in Newport News. What were race relations like here growing up?

EF: You know, people ask me about that and I remember we were, our community, was such a closed community. Everything that we needed was in our community. So there was no need for us to go outside of the community for anything, other than—. If we wanted to shop, of course, we would have to go to Washington Avenue, for the most part. But as far as being impacted by it, as a child, I was not. I think my parents just protected us. We were told where to go, where we could not go, what we could and what we could not do. And you just obeyed. We didn't question.

KB: Right. Did you notice or experience discrimination in public facilities at all?

EF: I know that when we would go on Washington Avenue, and I would watch the people eating—. Do you remember? You probably don't remember. There was a store called Grant's, and there was a counter where people would buy their food and eat at a counter. We were always trained that we never ate outside of the home. Every meal, we were required to eat at home and

we could not eat at other people's homes. That was just understood for us. Now I understand why my mother said that, because I think she knew that she did not want us to get into situations trying to eat in public places where we were not welcome. But it never dawned on me that I would want to eat outside of my home, because my mother was such an outstanding cook and we always had good food.

KB: Right. Do you remember any events that stood out to you, or any conflicts between Black and white residents?

EF: Not as a child. Not as a child. When I began my student teaching, I did my student teaching in Newport News. And that was the court-ordered integration of the Newport News public school systems. But I did not experience any backlash or any kind of issues doing that. In fact, it was a wonderful teaching experience. My cooperating teacher had been one of my teachers at Huntington High School, and she had the reputation of being rigid. Everything had to be prepared and, you know, with excellence. And I remember I was the only one in my education class that was not allowed to teach the first two weeks, because I had to prepare all of my lessons for the semester and she had to approve them. And it was such a demanding job. But I loved it because of the impact that I had with the children. The interaction I had with the children. And I had worked my way through school, so I was passionate about being a teacher. I always wanted to be a teacher. And then to have an excellent teacher train me, that was just the icing on the cake.

KB: Right.

EF: I learned so much from her. I learned so much from her.

KB: Wow, that's fantastic.

CB: So following up on your younger experiences, you attended Booker T. Washington Elementary, right?

EF: Right.

CB: What was it like to attend a segregated school?

EF: Well, we didn't know it was segregated as a child. We walked to school. Booker T. Washington was on Chestnut Avenue and the 1100 block of 36th Street. I lived in the 1100 block of 36th Street. So it was a swift walk to school. It never dawned on me as a little girl that there was segregation. I don't even think we contemplated that as children. It was not until high school that I really began to understand what was happening in the nation, and why there was so much animosity against one group against another. But as a young girl? No, I never experienced that. No.

CB: Do you remember the conditions of the local white schools? Or are you just not aware of it because it wasn't an issue?

EF: Not aware. Not aware, because our community was there. I walked to elementary school. I walked to high school. I had some of my friends who did integrate Newport News High School. Two of them came back, but the others stayed and they graduated. They loved it.

CB: Awesome. Do you remember any teachers at that elementary school that were particularly influential to you?

EF: My first-grade teacher was exceptional. She made us feel so important, that what we thought and how we--if we had questions we were encouraged to answer them. She was so open to us, and she would listen. And I think that's because I loved my first experience in education. I wanted to be like Miss Holloway. She was exceptional, and I had excellent teachers. Each of my teachers were just outstanding. I had no poor teachers. They were all demanding, and I didn't

realize that their demands were essentially what our parents demanded. You know you go to school. We were trained. My mother would say, “Your only job is to go to school. That’s your job. And if you do not go to school, you don’t do anything else. And you have to go to school and excel.” That was the expectation. You’re going to go to college so you’re going to have to do well. And my aunt was the first in the [family to] attend college, to graduate from college. So I’m like a second-generation college graduate, but it was the expectation. My grandfather, I remember, shared with me—once he learned that I was going to Hampton, he said, “I just want you to understand that going to college does not make you a better person. That only compliments what you already are. It enriches who you are, it doesn’t change you. It enriches the person that you are.” And I never forgot that. Never forgot that.

CB: Yeah, that’s really powerful. Do you have any other memories of Booker T. Washington that stood out to you?

EF: Everything was so orchestrated. I remember there were no discipline problems. When we went to assemblies, it was quiet. You didn’t hear talking, none of that. Everybody was just—you just sat, and you waited for programs to begin. And when I went to high school, it was the same way. We had a principal, W.D. Scales. Mr. W.D. Scales. He was an outstanding principal. His reputation was so profound that whenever, wherever he was, people just stopped talking. You know, because you respected him. You know, being recognized by the principal or by a guidance counselor, those were exceptional things for us, you know, as students. Because we understood, once I got in high school, that that road to education was a very difficult one for those that preceded me. And so the opportunities that I had or that I would have was not because of what I learned or how smart I was, but because of what other people had done before me. And I understood that. And I understood that wherever I went, whether I was on the campus of

Hampton or in high school, I reflected what my parents taught me. And the worst thing was to have your parents called when you're in school, [and be told that] that you have misbehaved or you were disrespectful, because it was not going to be tolerated. It was not tolerated.

KB: Right. Now Huntington High School was another school designated for Black students, which you attended, correct?

EF: Right.

KB: Okay, so what was it like attending Huntington High School?

EF: I learned so much. I really did not appreciate how strict my teachers were until I went to college. It was then that I understood what they were preparing me for. I remember that, you know, we had to take the exit exams to place for placement in college. And we scored so high on those exams that we were placed in classes with juniors. You know with college juniors, especially in my English class. And it was a difficult course. But with the rigor that I had with my AP teacher, I was ready to embrace whatever that college professor was going to do. And the two of us who were in that class, the upperclassmen would say, "Well we know who did," "we know who went beyond what was asked," "we know who did da da da," because they knew as underclassmen that we were accepting. Because that's what we had been trained to do that you always, always do your best. AP English was the only advanced placement course offered when I graduated. And we would go on campus during the school year, and we would be taught by the professors. So some of the professors' faces I remembered, but they were not the instructors, you know, that worked with us. They were more or less like the department heads or whatever the case may be. We went to lectures, and they would always show us better ways of writing. And teaching us, not telling us, writing was the outlet for learning. And if you cannot communicate orally and in writing, you have no future. This was just embedded in us. So we have to be

proficient in not only speaking, [but] in writing. And I thanked my AP teacher every day, from my high school, because she taught us how to write. And it was difficult. But once that light comes on and you get it, you got it. But so much of it was done—. I think the openness during my elementary school years, and the strict regimen of high school prepared me for my college experience because, when I went there, we could not leave campus. We had to go to Vespers. Our schedules were just regulated. And if we went off campus, we had to dress because we were students at Hampton—. You know, at that time it was Hampton Institute. But I think each phase taught me to appreciate the opportunities that I had even more.

KB: That's really good that you had that positive experience during your high school years. What were the facilities at Huntington High School like?

EF: Oh, everything was spick span, spick and span. That was when they had real cooks in the cafeteria. You ate real food. I think that, I just feel that the care was there, the personal care. Not only for your mind but for who you were as a person. They were not only molding you to think as an intellectual, but also to become an advocate for your community. To be a role model for your community. Make contributions to your community. This was always a given, that you give back. Whether you give back in terms of being a politician, or you give back being an advocate or voting or whatever the case may be. But essentially you have the responsibility to not only take advantage of the opportunities that you have, but you also have that opportunity to give back to those who helped you get where you were, and to those who were coming behind you. Because you're paving the way for others. And I remember at Hampton, my sophomore year—. I think that was the year that they, if you remember the age of the '70s, that was the age of revolution. And young people were taking over college campuses. I was at work, didn't even know that there had been, you know, an administrative takeover. And security came and they

said, “Why aren’t you at home?” because they had already given the requirement that all students were to go home, be home by five o’clock. I was walked to the dorm, and I remember walking past the administration building and seeing the students and the TV cameras. There must have been a thousand TV cameras watching or taping these students who were in the administration building. They had actually taken over what we call “the illustrious administration building.”

And I was walked to the dorm. I had to pack everything. And I had to call my father to come and get me, because the campus was closed. And that was the only time that I really felt nervous about my college experience, because I didn’t know what was happening. And many of the upperclassmen did not realize that the grades that you had at midterm, those were your grades. And some seniors did not graduate. Did not graduate, and they were sticklers. And if they were participating in the takeover, they were not going to be graduates of Hampton Institute. And all of that changed. That’s when we had the co-ed dorm, no longer had the strict curfews, no longer had to go to Vespers. Everything changed. And I’m saying I grew up with a strict environment at home, but now we were given all this freedom. But I knew that freedom was going to be limited for me based upon what I had been trained, and how I’ve been trained at home. And some of our friends didn’t make it. They were removed. And when you flunked out, they would simply come and pack your things and take you to the bus. Or take you to the train. Or whatever mode of transportation you want to use to go home. So they still kept that academic regimen. But the freedom that they gave us, I think some students were just not prepared for it.

KB: Right. I know you talked a lot about enjoying AP English in high school. Were there any other subjects in particular that you really enjoyed or benefited from?

EF: I loved history. I loved history. And I loved English. In fact, when I went to Hampton [Institute] I didn’t know whether I was going to major in science, biology, or if I was going to

major in English, or history. I fell in love with my history professor. He was outstanding. Dr. Hughes, I'll never forget. And the first day of class, his point was, like my first-grade teacher, "what you think is important, but you have to be able to justify your thinking." And I said, "Now this sounds familiar. This really sounds familiar to me." But I learned so much in that World History course. He was just dynamic. He was just a scholar. I just felt like I was really in college with this teacher. And he was demanding, but not demanding. In other words, "I'm putting it on you. And it's up to you to take advantage of the responsibilities that I'm giving you." And I remember the rigor for the writing for our exams. And how we would have to—he would give us an idea, and we would have to put it in our own terms and how we would justify it. It was just one of the most outstanding, I'm gonna say, eye-opening courses I ever took. And it was because of him that I decided to major in history. And when I decided to major in history, I didn't realize that there were so few students majoring in history. I thought everybody was majoring in history. And because there were so many students going to the Martin Luther King building where the social sciences were taught. But there were more students majoring in political science, and not history. And I remember I was introduced to the chairman of the department. And they were just excited that I was going to be a history major. But I wanted to be a history teacher, not just a history major. The student teaching experience was just as demanding as the other courses that I took. But it was worth it. I just felt like I was prepared when I graduated. I was prepared to teach.

KB: What made you choose teaching?

EF: Well, even when I was a little girl, I would always—. I was the middle girl, now. You know the middle girl, the middle-child syndrome. So we didn't know whether we were leaders or followers. But whenever I had an opportunity to lead, I would be the teacher. So my older sisters and my younger sisters, they were my students. And I would prepare assignments. And we

would be on the side porch, and we would have school. And I just love—. I think I wanted to emulate the people that I saw that were so important in my life. And that my parents respected. Educators were so revered in our community. They were godlike, you know, because my mother's favorite line was, "If they call home and said you did it, you did it." No debate. You did it. So we understood that as, you know, as students going to school that you better behave, because you're going to be held accountable for the things that you do. But I think that that was the fact that they were so caring, and they valued how we thought. That was the most important thing to me. And then when we got to college it was the same thing [that] happened again. I said, "Wow, these people really are interested in what I feel or how I think." And even during that period of revolution, I could understand, you know, that some students didn't want to embrace the strict regimen at Hampton, well, because they were copycatting what was happening around the country. You know, students all over the country, you know, they were rebelling against establishment. But I was always taught establishment is what you adhere to. But I could not fathom me being a part of a revolution. At that time, no.

KB: At Huntington High School what kind of extracurricular activities were you involved in?

EF: I was on the, what do you call it? The yearbook staff. I was in a lot of extracurricular activities, but the most famous, the one that I enjoyed the most, was journalism. Preparing the yearbook for our class and whatever. Then being voted Miss Debonaire for my senior class. It was really not only a learning experience, but we enjoyed it because they took us beyond the school to show who we were as students. And I remember when we went to [the] Mariners' Museum—because the cover of our yearbook at that time were the editors of the yearbook posed with the Viking at Mariners' Museum. And everybody said, "Wow, nobody's ever thought of that before. Why does this class get that privilege?" We had so many opportunities being on that

yearbook staff and interacting, you know, with the community. That's what I remember most. It was the studying. I remember having so much time. Not having free time. The only free time I had was Sunday, because that was church time. So any work that you had from high school or whatever, you had to do it between Friday and Saturday because you were dedicated to church on Sunday. When most girls were excited, you know, when they were 16 they could date, I was excited when I was 16 because I didn't have to go to BTU anymore! The Baptist Training Union. And I was ecstatic because I could stay home and study and do my [school work], you know, because the work became more difficult, you know, by the time you were juniors. So not that I wanted to date or anything like that, but I was excited that I had more time to study. That I wasn't required to, you know, do what I had been doing for years. And then my younger sisters, of course, they were not held to the same restrictions because my mother gave them more freedom than I ever had. You know, I was the last one that was held to the regimen.

KB: Right. Do you still have a copy of that yearbook, or any pictures, or anything?

EF: Yes I do, yes I do.

KB: That's fantastic. Do you have it somewhere readily available? Are there any pictures that you'd like to show us?

EF: I didn't have it in my—. I may have it here. I don't know if I have it with these yearbooks, but I may have it in the storage.

KB: That's all right. But it's really interesting that you still have it, and you can keep those memories with you.

EF: When I taught at Kecoughtan [High School] I bought a yearbook every year, to document what I did as a teacher. That was the best school. I started at Kecoughtan [High School].

Outstanding students [and] opportunity. Hampton City Schools gave me so many opportunities. I

felt so good as a teacher because the latitude was—. They stretched you, you know. It was up to you how far you wanted to go in terms of reaching your students, keeping that academic regimen at the same time. That was the time that I enjoyed it the most. Had the most outstanding students. That's before the age of computers. It was after the age of computers that I began to see a change in regimen. Because the students became reliant on the computer. And I'll never forget, I had one student who had copied a paper from the computer. So I think they felt, because we were older, we didn't know anything about computers. So I put the first line of his paper in on Google. Paper pops up. Well, they always have to come. And we have a, you know, interview whenever we do our research. Because they have to justify [to] me the resources that they use, or they reuse, or whatever. And I said, you know, "I found a paper on the Internet. Exactly what you gave me, but it wasn't your name on it. Somebody stole your work." And he was outdone. But it was a lesson for them, because they understood then they can't cheat. So I gave him a second opportunity to redo it, you know. I didn't fail him, because it was a test. Because I think the students are waiting to see, "How is she going to handle this?" You know, and he was a senior. Of course I wasn't going to fail a senior. I knew that what he had done was wrong, and they really debated whether or not they were going to remove him from the Honor Society, because of the plagiarism. And I said, "No." I said, "Everybody makes a mistake. Students will test you to see how thorough you are in your instruction." And I said, "For him to do that"—. Because he was testing to see if I would be smart enough to figure out what he had done. I said, "No, this is not the language that this student writes in. No, this is not his language." Because by this [point in] the year, you understand how students write, and that's what really baffled me. I said, "No, this doesn't sound right to me." And that's when I said, "I'm going to check this out and see if this was written by someone else." But even when I started teaching at Kecoughtan, it

was a predominantly white school. I was so interested in my job and how I was interacting with my students. In some classes we had 35 students. Teachers today have no idea of the luxuries that they have. You had 35 or 40 students in one class. That was a challenge, but it made you work. It made you think and work even faster, for the most part, because you had so many eyes on you. You had to be prepared and you had to be innovative. You had to keep their attention. It was fun. It was fun to me. But I knew, in 2014, it was time, because things had changed tremendously. It was time to retire.

KB: Returning to your high school experience, during your senior year at Huntington Dr. Martin Luther King [Jr.] was assassinated. What are your memories of that event, and how did the student and faculty respond?

EF: I remember teachers crying. We didn't have TVs in our classroom at that time, you know, you'd have to go to the library to get a TV. Of course, they were at a premium. The only technology they had at that time was overhead projector, and even that was a luxury. But I remember teachers crying. And I remember I was in my English class, and the teacher came in and told us that Martin Luther King [Jr.] had been assassinated. And there was just stone silence. Nobody said a word. In fact, you could only hear sniffing from teachers in the hall. No loud outbursts. Everything was a still quietness. And that's what I remember about that. And I remember coming home, and my mother was there, and we watched it on Walter Cronkite. You probably are too young to even know about the three channels. We only had three channels for news: ABC, CBS, and NBC. And our favorite was, I believe, was NBC with Walter Cronkite. And he would just give the news, and they showed the tapes and everything of what had happened. And there was just quiet. Everybody was just astounded that it happened.

KB: How did the local community respond to the event?

EF: I don't recall any—. As a high school student, I don't recall any kind of violence. I just think people were just surprised at the length that one person would go to destroy hope for so many in the nation. To silence one doesn't silence the group. I think people don't understand that concept. Because he brought together a collective response to ills of the nation. And tantamount to killing or attempting assassination of Reagan—. You can't silence change by killing one messenger. And I think assassins don't understand that, because once a movement begins it doesn't stop with one person. And of course we see now today the legacy of that movement, and how the nation is now beginning to embrace it on real terms. I don't remember any violence in Newport News. I just remember the programs—I guess you would call it the programs—that would salute his efforts, Martin Luther King [Jr]. That's what I remember. Not that they were passive, but people were hurt. It was a time for sympathy. It was a time to empathize with his family, you know. You're taking a man away from his family, from his children. That was just something we just didn't, could not comprehend. I don't remember deaths, people being killed in our community. I don't remember any of those things, because it just didn't happen. If they happened, we didn't know anything about it. But I think it was a reaction: a passive reaction to how we saw what was going to happen to that collective effort. Because there was no other, I would say at that time, national leader that brought everybody together.

KB: Right.

EF: Because you had two leaders who were more or less more divisive than they were bringing about collective change.

KB: So you talked about some programs in his honor. Could you talk about what those programs were, or if there were any demonstrations following his assassination?

EF: I don't remember any demonstrations. I remember our teachers. They were so eloquent in explaining to us what had happened. It was not just the assassination of one individual, but it was an attempt to kill a movement. And this is what we had to really begin to embrace. That what he [Martin Luther King, Jr.] had done, he understood that he was risking his own life. Because in order to promote change, somebody has to take up the challenge and, in some cases, that challenge may lead to death. And I remember we listened to his speech when they had the March on Washington and when he was in Tennessee. I remember all of that was on TV, and everybody was just so excited for him. That this man, this intellectual, would go to Tennessee and take up the cause of garbage collectors. That kind of humility we don't see today. That, to me, was just unbelievable because we knew that he was fifteen years old when he went to college. And, of course, when he earned his PhD, [he was a]young man. But that did not stop him from understanding that if you mistreat one of us, you're mistreating all of us, so everybody's interests are paramount. If we're going to make a movement be successful, you have to look at the whole spectrum. Not just those that are doing well, but the least of us should be able to embrace what's happening and have opportunities. And this is what he saw. And I think when you see it from that point of view—this is why people were so, they were so quiet. It was painful. It was a painful hurt. It was painful, because was the dream going to die? Was the dream going to die?

KB: Thank you, that was really powerful. Charlie, did you want to go ahead?

CB: Yeah, so I just wanted to expand more on your experience after Huntington. What led you to attend Hampton Institute out of any college?

EF: Well my mother told me—I'll never forget the summer of my senior year—"You need to sit down and write to Hampton for your application because you're going to Hampton." And I'm saying to myself, because, you know, you didn't talk back to your parents at that time, I said,

“Hampton?” Hampton never was on my mind, it was never on my mind. I really wanted to go to Howard. And so I said, “Now she’s already made up her mind.” My sister is working in D.C. She graduated from Hampton. She’s working in D.C. This is why I just figured that I would be going to Howard. My mother said, “No, you are going to Hampton.” And that was the end of it. That was the only college that I applied to! And I said, “Well now what happens if I’m not accepted?” [My mother said,] “You’re going to be accepted. You’re going to be accepted.” That was the kind of parental control there was, that parents had. You didn’t debate, you know, with them. Whatever they said, that was fact and you accepted it. I laugh about it now. But it was the best decision for me, because I realized I did not understand that Howard was located in the roughest area in Washington, D.C. I didn’t know that at that time and, when my sister explained it to me, she said, “It’s a whole different world. You’ve got to be a strong person, an independent person, because the forces there are much stronger.” Whereas, on the campus of Hampton, everything is closed. The community is not open to come on your campus, for the most part. So, from that point of view, it kind of pacified me for a while, but I was really disappointed because I really wanted to go away from home. I wanted to be away from home because I’d been, you know, with my parents all that time. And I said, “Well, I’m 18 years old, my mother just shattered my dream.” And I said, “Okay, listen I’ll write,” and I received my application. I filled it out and she said, “I’ll look over it before you mail it, and then I will mail it.” She said, you know, “You’re not gonna mail it, I will mail it,” and she mailed it. So when I got my letter of acceptance and, I’ll never forget, she held the letter of acceptance until that Sunday morning. And then when she gave it to me at the dinner table, that’s when I realized that I had been accepted to Hampton. But it was like your parents were doing everything. I think because that time was such a volatile time in the United States with the revolutions and the demonstrations

throughout the country. Parents were really afraid for their children, and they wanted them to be protected.

CB: Were you ever involved directly in any demonstrations or protests like those?

EF: No, I knew better. I knew better, because I knew my parents would not support me. Because they already told me when I left, “Don’t do anything that you would not do at home. So if you think you’re grown enough to question an authority, you don’t belong under this roof because that means you’re going to question your father and I.” So we understood that concept, that we were just obedient to authority. We were afraid—I’m not gonna say what we afraid—we did not want to disappoint our parents, if I can say it that way. Because when I called home, my mother said, “Well, where have you been? Everybody else is at home and you’re still at school!” I said, “I did not know that there had been a takeover of the administration building until security came and escorted me to my dorm.” They waited for me to pack up all my things and help my father lift them, you know, to the car, because it was over. That semester was just over. And whatever grades you had at that time for that midterm, that’s your grade. So I understood that. So they made a point: “No, you don’t challenge. If it’s right, you don’t challenge right.”

CB: Were you interested in the Hampton model of education or how did you feel about that model?

EF: Which model are you referring to?

CB: The Hampton model of education?

EF: The Hampton model. You talking about open schools?

CB: More like the work focus. Like getting teachers directly in schools as soon as possible.

EF: Oh yeah. In fact, I was invited to serve on the first faculty of the first open school in Virginia. That was in Hampton: Phoebus High School. And I taught there that first year, and then

the principal at Kecoughtan asked me to come back and I went back to my previous high school. But Hampton [Institute] was at the top of the leaderboard for education in Virginia. Hampton was a role model. When we would go to conferences they would say, “Oh, she’s from Hampton, she’s from Hampton.” They would say, “Oh, they’re from Hampton, they’re from Hampton.” Hampton was at the top of its game, and many of the teachers were graduates of Hampton. So many of the people, when I went to Hampton, we would go to our teachers’ meetings [and] I would see graduates from Hampton, I said, “Well she was at Hampton.” So we understood that they were recruiting many of us, of the Hampton graduates. And I remember my interview with the superintendent of Hampton, and I was so excited about it. I just felt that they were really interested in what I was going to do as a teacher to make Hampton better, and that just impressed me. I was the first in my class to receive my letter of intent for education. And I was just excited. I was on cloud nine, and all my father said [was], “She needs a job. She needs a job.”[laughter] He told my mom, “She needs a job.” And when I got my letter, my mother called because they didn’t send it to me, they sent it to my home. She was just excited. They were just ecstatic that I had this job. And I went that summer to get my materials. And when I walked in the office everybody’s mouths just dropped. I said, “Well, I have been hired by Hampton. I understand that I’ll be teaching here, and I would love to have the instructional materials.” And everybody just looked at each other like, “Who is this girl, who is this girl?” And of course, you know, I introduced myself, but they gave me all of them, all of my instructional materials. And that summer, I sat down and planned all my lesson plans for the first year. But Hampton was at the top of education when I entered the field. Everybody wanted to teach in Hampton. The leaders, my supervisor from my discipline, always encouraged us to do innovative things [like] go to workshops, learn new methods of teaching. You know, don’t become stagnant. And so many of

our young teachers, we were always at conferences, always learning new things, always applying new things, and it was a challenge. It was a good challenge, a good challenge.

CB: So you already spoke about this a little bit, but what made you want to become a teacher? I know you're inspired by some other teachers, was there anything else?

EF: Well, I wanted to give back. I wanted to be like my teachers. I wanted to emulate what my teachers were. They made so many sacrifices for us, and at that time we didn't really understand the sacrifices that they made. But they made far less money than I made, you know, as a teacher. And I remember my first check, and I was telling my mother how much money I was going to make, and dadadadada. And my mother said, "Okay, okay." So when the new teachers went in to get their checks, I made less money teaching than I did reading airline flights as a work study in college. I cried. I had worked so hard, and I said, "This is all I'm going to get?!" I think my annual salary that time was \$7,200. I think that it was about \$7,200. I came home and I told my mother I said, "You know what? I was not prepared for this." I said, "I worked fourteen hours a day!" And this is—. Then I realized it wasn't so much the money, but the gratification when you saw students that excel. Then I began to think, "This is not about the money. It's not about the money, because you're gonna make it. You're gonna find a way to make it, whatever salary is going to be." But it's just something about teaching that you don't have with other professions. It's not your ability that's really the platform. It's what you are able to convey to a group of people whose minds at some point are just totally blank as far as your subject is concerned, but you get them enthused about your subject. That was, to me, the most gratifying thing for me: understanding that, what I did in that classroom, I would not see the results for many many years. And I had one student that came back to me in tears, and he said, "I just wanted to apologize to you, because I made teaching for you so hectic." I said, "Yeah, you were a challenge," and he

stood there and he cried. He said, “But it’s because of you I am now working on my doctorate.” And I’m saying, “Wow, like what kind of impact is that? What great impact can you have on the lives of children?” And I think out of forty-two years, there were only about three or four students that I would say were incorrigible, that I don’t think anything anybody would do could help them. But that’s a pretty good average, because you’ve taught about 5000 [or] 6000 students. But, to me, it was sitting down, doing those plans, and doing it in a way that the students really don’t know where you’re coming from. Until they realize, “Oh, I see what you’re doing, I see what you’re doing.” Then they finally realize, “Okay, she’s going to do this.” And I would always showcase five or six students each day. I would pick five: “Okay this is somebody, split them.” The kids would come in [and say,] “I hope this is not my name because I did not do this,” and so you would hear that conversation. So I would purposely not do the ones that I knew who were not prepared, because you don’t want to embarrass them. And everybody would take pride in being the showcase, you know, being able to respond and challenge Ms. Flood. And it was fun to me, it was—. Learning should be fun. It’s not drudgery, it’s opening up their minds to be more or less tolerant of ideas that are not consistent with their own. And they would always ask me, you know, “Ms. Flood, what’s your political preference? What’s this?” I said, “Well, that’s not my purpose, you know. My purpose is not for me to tell you who I am. My purpose is to help you develop the person that you’re going to be. Because if I tell you I’m a Democrat, everybody in the classroom is going to want to be a Democrat. Okay, let’s be realistic.” And they would just laugh, and so I said, “I’m bipartisan, I’m bipartisan,” which I was. But it was fun. I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed my teaching career, but I knew in 2014 it was time. It was time.

CB: What motivated you to join Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority?

EF: Well, when I was in college I was on line with Alpha Kappa Alpha, and I became ill. One of my big sisters wanted me to create a colorful mailbox, postal box, for her. And I said, “You know what?” That’s when I was young and really creative. It was really nice what I did. But it snowed that day, so I had to trudge across campus to take this mailbox to my big sister. And it was not until about a week later that I developed a severe case of tonsillitis. And my doctor said, “No, you’re not staying on campus. Because I know if you’re on campus, you’re not going to take your medicine. You’re going to class. You’re going to go home for a week, and you’re going to be, you know, take all the antibodies or whatever so that you can get well.” And so I had my tonsils removed that summer of my sophomore year. But I had to withdraw. I did not know that my supervisor was an Alpha Kappa Alpha lady, and one day she just asked me, you know, what did I think about fraternities and sororities or whatever. And I said, “Oh, I was on line.” She said she almost fainted. She said, “Oh, but which one?” I said, “There’s only one, Alpha Kappa Alpha.” And she was just ecstatic, so I joined the Graduate Chapter in Newport News. I always wanted to be Alpha Kappa Alpha. They were the smartest girls on campus. Yeah, they were the classy ones. They were the classy girls. And, of course, it was the first Black sorority, you know. So, you always want to be the first.

CB: Does that hold any importance to you that that was the first Black sorority?

EF: Yes, and it held importance to me because it was done at a time in which there was so much strict segregation and violence in this country against minorities. And for those young girls to realize that you need a support system. You’re away from home. You need a family in college to caress you, to take care of you. You need somebody that you can depend on. And I think they used that concept of family in creating the sorority because they knew outside of that college environment, for many, life was a real challenge. Probably challenges I would never

identify with. But to create an organization at the height of lynching in the United States, that was just phenomenal to me. That these young ladies, who are immersed in their studies, thought about other people being impacted about what's happening in the nation, and what could they do to help relieve some of that tension. That was important to me, yeah. Yeah.

KB: Right, that's wonderful. We see that you began working in the Hampton school system shortly after graduating in 1972. We'd love to learn more about your memories of school desegregation in Hampton Roads, both as a teacher and as a community member. You noted on your pre-interview survey that you have memories of desegregation, and that you even wrote your thesis on the subject. Can you tell us a little bit about the progress, or the process, of desegregation here in Hampton Roads?

EF: I think [the city of] Hampton was so progressive at that time, and everyone that I spoke with wanted to teach in Hampton. Hampton was, I guess, the pinnacle of excellence in education, because they were so innovative. And their teachers were involved in so many things. Once I was on board, I remember how they went out of their way to make sure that opportunities were there for every teacher regardless of your race or whatever. I never felt the tension, never felt the tension. I remember when I first started teaching and I went into my first class, I had all white students. I think there were only seven percent of minorities at Kecoughtan the first year I taught there. And that was my first exposure to, "Oh wow, this is going to be different, this is going to be a challenge." But I accepted the challenge because I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Regardless of whether the students are Black or white, what I wanted [was for] them to achieve as students. And I received so many "thank yous" from parents, from students, thanking me for giving them the challenge. It wasn't easy, and they, you know, they even told me this is something that, "You know, I never imagined that I would have you for a teacher." That was the

first day of school, I learned the students were saying, “Do you have her? Do you have her?” I said, “Who are they talking about?” and they would just look at me and nobody would say anything. Well, nobody wanted Ms. Flood, and I said “Why? What is Ms. Flood doing?” But then I had students come to me later to say, “If I had not had you, I don’t think I would have been as successful in college.” And so many of them took their government notebooks with them to college when they took their classes. And I think they take class in political science or whatever the case may be. But it was a challenge. It was a real challenge. But for me I knew—I had never experienced discrimination, and I never wanted a student to feel discrimination in my class one way or the other. And I made a point of that. I made a point to let them know everybody’s opinion is important, but you got to substantiate it, okay. I may not agree with you, but I protect your right to say it.

KB: Right. So when you began teaching, were you teaching during the process of integration? Or was there still segregation, or was it post-integration?

EF: Hampton had instituted voluntary integration long before Newport News. So when I went to Newport News, I remember my professor saying—. Well, the cooperating teacher said she didn’t want any more student teachers. And then he told her who it was and she said, “Okay this is the last one, no more, no more, no more.” But I knew that she had already established a pattern in that class with her students, and I knew her as an exceptional educator. So I couldn’t go there and do less. And I would share, when we had our seminars, what my teacher expected of me and people were just looking around, just to say, “This is crazy. You’re doing all of that? No way, I’m not doing all of that.” But I learned from the ground up that, you know, you can’t just walk into a classroom. You got to have a plan, you got to have a plan. You got to have an alternate plan. And sometimes a lesson that you plan for one day, you may have to entertain that second

lesson on that, you know, on that first day. So you have to learn to be flexible, and that's what I learned from her. That is flexibility. But you also have an environment that challenges students. Your job is not to indoctrinate: your job is to encourage them to enhance what they're learning. And not so much as dictating to them what the information is. Let them find the information. Let them interpret information. Then you have a discourse. That's what learning is about. It's not what Ms. Flood says, because you're not going to go to any college with just knowing what Ms. Flood says. You're going to have to take the energy to have that intellectual stamina to do the research, you know, go beyond what I asked you to do. And it was so funny when some of the students would just go beyond, and the students were just joking. Oh, they would just be proud. And when I was observed, the principal would say, "Wow, what did you do?" I said, "No, this is student initiative." This is what I tell them on the first day I meet them, you know it's on you, it's on you. You establish how much you want to learn, not Ms. Flood. And you have to take them where they are, and bring them to the point where you want them to be. And you have nine months to do it. But it was always a challenge, it was always a challenge. But as far as the Hampton experience, it was just one that I just felt that, as an educator, I was valued because they gave me so many experiences in which to grow as an educator. I had so many opportunities, even in serving as President of the Virginia Social—. I can't even remember the name, the VCSS, Virginia Council [for the] Social Studies. My principal would allow me time, you know, to go to conferences and everything. That kind of flexibility, most schools just are not going to give you. And going to the national conferences, being elected to the national, you know, national board. I mean, these kinds of things, and having administrators accept what you're doing, but really, you know, appreciating what you're doing. You're doing this because it's for your students, it's not for you. Because all the materials that I receive, I use them in my class. When I would go to

conferences, I'm looking for new ways to do things. I don't want to do the same old, you know, question-answers. No, that's not me. Show me an innovative way, and that's what I loved. That's what I love.

KB: Right, that's wonderful. So you wrote your thesis on desegregation. Is there a copy of that somewhere that we can read? And what made you choose that topic for your thesis?

EF: I chose it because I was a product of Newport News school system. And I did not witness, you know, for the most part, the violence of desegregation. I never witnessed that in Newport News, and I wanted to learn more. I wanted to learn why was Newport News being required by court to desegregate. What's going on? Well, then I thought back. Well, I was a product of a segregated system. It never dawned on me, at that time, that it was wrong because I felt I had the best teachers. I felt I had the best educational experiences. But really, when I read in the paper about the court-ordered desegregation, I thought about the Deep South. I didn't think about Virginia. No, not Virginia, this doesn't happen in Virginia. But I did my student teaching the first year that they had the court-ordered desegregation. And so that really excited me. I wanted to know, what was the reasoning? Why was there such a stalemate? Why wasn't this city, eight miles, away not progressing like Hampton? You know, why wasn't it happening in Newport News?

KB: So how did the process of integration differ between Hampton and Newport News?

EF: For one thing, Hampton started much earlier than Newport News. They voluntarily had students going to the predominantly white schools. They had teachers, they had exchange teachers, minority teachers into the white schools. They were years ahead of Newport News. I don't know whether this bastion of segregation was promoted by leaders by themselves, or by the community. You know, that the community maybe did not want to integrate. And being a

product of that segregated school, I never felt any ill will as a young citizen. But I wanted to understand what's the network here? Why are they being court-ordered? And you have a city eight miles away, and they're off and running with it, you know. At that time, if you remember, Hampton, not too long after I started teaching, was named one of the top American educational cities, for the most part. Well, that was because of how they embraced this volunteer integration that was not taking place in Newport News. But any ill effects of it, I did not witness.

CB: Do you remember the process of bussing either within Hampton or Newport News? Do you remember any of the attitudes towards that?

EF: Once I began teaching I was so involved in my stuff, you know—. You people would not believe this, but I would rush home from school and I would immediately start preparing for the next [day], you know, getting my lessons. I'm gonna have to adapt this lesson plan for the next day, checking my papers. Oh, I was so into my job, doing extra because I wanted excellent evaluations. And I understood that I represented more than just this girl, just this young girl teaching. She's representing the product of Hampton Institute, the product of the Newport News school system for the most part. So you wanted to show the best, or be the best that you could be. But as far as seeing or being impacted by [integration], I refused to be. Because I'm a confident woman, and I think some people were kind of, you know—. I was, believe it or not, I used to be 125 pounds. Thin as a rail. But I always was, I loved to talk. I loved to, I loved writing speeches. I loved it. So when I stood in front of my classes, my students would just look to say, "Where is she going with this?" And the thing was, "Don't you ask her a question five minutes before this class ends." And I would hear students say, "You better not ask the question," because they could not jump up when the bell rang. They would have to wait for me to say, "You may now be dismissed." And you were always invariably, especially doing senior week, you would

invariably have a student that would do it just for fun, to see what I would do. Then I would say, “We’ll just discuss that next time. You may be dismissed.” But you learn your students. You learn how far you can go with them. They know that you’re not going to play with them, but it’s going to be rigorous. And I think they accepted the challenge, because it was a challenge for me. I love being challenged by my students. I love studying, that’s why I stayed in school. In fact, I was taking graduate courses and I hadn’t even enrolled in graduate school. And the graduate advisor came to me, and he said, “What are you doing?” I said, “Well, what do you mean what am I doing?” [He said,] “Do you just love giving this school your money?” And I’m saying, “What is he talking about?” He handed me the application. “Fill out this application and enroll in graduate school, because you’re wasting your money just paying this school all this money.” And I just laughed. I said, “Oh, I hadn’t even thought about getting a master’s,” because I was just learning. I was learning so much. And that’s, I guess that’s youth, you know. We don’t see the practical side of it. But I never felt that I had to get a master’s because I felt that taking classes, and going to college, going to conferences, you’re learning all the time. But, you know, it looks good in your resume, and, you know, to say you have a master’s. When I enrolled at the program at William and Mary—and that’s when I was the president, I had been elected to the executive board of the National Council. I was traveling all over the United States. I was having a good time, learning, but I knew when I got back in that classroom it was pressure, you know. I knew that I would have to produce, and I always had something new. And the students would say, “Oh wow, this is different.” And when you get that kind of expression from students, you know you’re doing something that’s going to involve them. But it just wasn’t in me to—. I felt that I didn’t need a doctorate to teach high school. And one of the professors just begged me, “Please don’t leave, please don’t leave.” But I just felt that I loved what I was doing so much.

And I felt that it wasn't about me. I could have all these degrees, but it doesn't mean anything if you're not teaching anything in the classroom. I didn't want to sacrifice my personal goal for my, you know, for my students. I don't think that they deserve that, because if I'm working on a Doctorate, I'm not going to be doing the best in the classroom. Let's be realistic about that. Now, I could take summer classes, but I took that time to do other things, you know. Go to other classes or whatever. But not to pursue another degree.

CB: As an alumna of Huntington High School, how did you feel when it was converted to an intermediary school as part of the integration process?

EF: That kind of shocked me. It kind of shocked me, because it was such a huge school. It's a large school, it was a large school. But I was happy to see that—because in most cities they'd simply just, you know, just destroy the building and create another building. Newport News didn't do that. So that, to me, was okay. They're now in the 20th century, okay. They understand that there's legacy, that that school had tremendous legacy. I remember I was reading, I was doing some research, and that's when I found out that the University, I think it was South Carolina, had recognized Huntington High School as “the” premier school for negro students. And I said, “Wow.” And they have a whole collection. I said, “I'm going to make it a point, one time to go to South Carolina, because I want to see it.” But Huntington was viewed as a model, you know, for negro students. It was just to me, I think Newport News recognized that the legacy was there. You cannot destroy it. It has been such an integral part of the community. It had been a major feature, a rallying cry for the community. And I was glad to see that they're going to, I think they're going to, create another building but it's going to keep the name Huntington. For the most part in Newport News, I think that's a good idea. I think there's respect there. There's some respect there. For the work of individuals who were paid far less to do a job. But they

never, never—. And my teachers, if they were underpaid, I never knew it. Not the way they dressed. They were professional. That's what I remember. When they walked in the classroom, they were not only dressed to impress, dressed professionally, but they performed professionally. So I would say, "Oh wow. That's what I want to be. I want to be like that. I want to be like that." They were such tremendous role models, such tremendous role models.

KB: That's fantastic. What were your personal experiences with integration like as a teacher in the Hampton City School System?

EF: Again, I made a point, because I knew that I was in a minority—there were so few Black teachers in the school, and so few Black students—I wanted to be the best teacher that I could be. That was my goal. And I wanted my students to realize I was going to be fair. If you're not fair, students identify immediately. You cannot do for one that you don't do for the other. And I made a point to do the best that I could, as a teacher, to prepare for my students, prepare lessons for them, to give them opportunities. I even had students who—. They did so many projects. I had a student who was invited to the Turkish Embassy, as a part of her project. I had given the students research that they had to select a country, and then they would have to write to the embassy. Well the Turkish Embassy wrote this young lady back, and they told her, "Nope, your parents cannot come, only your teacher." This is how much other countries respect their teachers. I had never been in an embassy before. It was lavish. And we had these beautiful, what do you call those? Teacups, and the cookies, I mean. And he sat there, and he answered that student's questions for over an hour and a half. That young lady has not forgotten it to this day. The opportunities that they had with me. And well, the kinds of activities that we did, because they were different. They were out of the mainline. Look, nobody would ever think of this child. And when I told my principal, I didn't realize at that time, you know, they do all this checking on who

you are. And they know more about you than you know about yourself. So when you walk into that embassy, you realize you're in another country. You're no longer in the United States. And they were so respectful to us. But they really admired that young girl, with the questions that she was able to ask. And she was just writing vigorously, responding, she was so impressed. And her parents, they met us later that day. They were so impressed with that opportunity. And I have one young lady who's now one of the major movers and shakers in D.C. She was so excited about Political Science, and that's what she majored in, you know, when she went to college. So she's one of those movers and shakers up there in the D.C. area. But those are the kinds of opportunities that you want to give students, outside of the class. You can't do everything in the classroom. And you have to give them an opportunity to go outside of the classroom and engage. And one thing I did do which I found was most beneficial for them was the participation in political elections. If they could volunteer, I only required 15 hours. But do you know most students worked 30 to 60 hours, because they enjoyed it that much? But that's to give them an opportunity to understand that this class goes beyond learning government. It's how you're going to function as a citizen. So that was one of the big pluses for me. That they were civically engaged and responsive.

KB: Right. As a teacher how would you describe the relations between Black and white students [at Kecoughtan]?

EF: At Kecoughtan? I saw no, well, I saw no difference anywhere, because I think students—students have a different networking system than we do. They respect each other for reasons that we don't recognize. If a student is smart, okay, that's a plus for that student. If that student has other abilities that we don't know about, that's another set of respect. I never saw the tension. Never saw the tension. Never saw the tension, because I remember when one student was

stabbed in the cafeteria, everybody cried. Everybody cried. We didn't know whether the student was, Black or white, but everybody was crying, because of the fact that that was such a violent action at our school. And our school had done so much to get all kids, you know, all kinds of responsibilities. And serving as the Student Activities Director, you were able to engage with students more on the outside than you were in the classroom, so you really got to see the real student. What is the student's interest? What do they really want to do? What do they really think about this situation? I was a debate coach. Loved it, loved it. (1:15), that's when you really see what kids are made of. And they really showcase what they are about.

KB: Right.

EF: But as far as seeing tension, no.

KB: Yeah, with regard to the stabbing that you just described, did you know why it happened or anything like that?

EF: Everybody was just shocked that it happened. Nobody knew the details. But we knew one of the principals went out of his way. He was one of the ones that helped save the life of the student. But he was always such a go-getter. He was a young principal, assistant principal. The students admired their teachers, if I could say that. Or either, I think they respected their teachers because they understood that their teachers worked for them. They worked hard for them, the coaches. I mean, they had wonderful coaches at Kecoughtan. And the students just had tremendous respect for them. I never, never, never, never saw that. And if I did, I would've responded to it.

KB: Right. How were the relations between the Black and white faculty or administration?

EF: It was not so much a relationship as, you know, interacting, as it was doing your job. In other words, you do your job. And one of the principles that I had [said,] "You do your job, you won't

hear from me. But if you don't do your job, and I hear that you're not doing your job, I'm on you." So this was the kind of atmosphere that we had. "Do your job! Because this is our school. It's not just Kecoughtan and name, but what you do impacts the whole school. So if you're not a good teacher, people are going to talk about our school." There was a kind of fascination with our school, because Kecoughtan was recognized as the premier school for, you know, for Hampton. And I remember, when I was Student Activities Director, we had people writing us from other school districts, because they wanted to know what we were doing in our student activities. And so we would share what we were doing. And my principal, he was just so excited because everything we did, it just went like clockwork. I mean it was a good environment. It was a good environment, a good environment, for learning, and for fun. Learning and for fun. The parents were just more excited about the games than the students. They really supported the school. They really did.

KB: That's fantastic. How would you say that the school board handled integration as a whole?

EF: How do they handle—?

KB: Integration.

EF: Well, I think in Hampton, that's all that I can relate to, I think they did well. I think they did well. I think they understood the implications as a, what is that title that they had? One of America's best cities. I think they got that one year. I can't think of it, but they were recognized as—. Because it was really unheard of. It was the first time it ever happened in Virginia. Hampton had received this recognition as the model city, and I remember all of the accolades that Hampton received and all the coverage, the television coverage, and everything. I think that they understood what, you know, what was going on. And even when Governor [George] Allen came to my classroom, I'll never forget, he was supposed to come just one time, and the students asked

him so many questions. I was so impressed with my students because I didn't even know he was coming. I didn't. I never tell my students, because even when I had observers, I never share with my students, "Observers are coming" or whatever. But he came in, and he was so impressed with my students. He left the technology classroom to come back to the government class, because he was so interested in what those young people were saying. I was so proud of them. I told them that, "I was so happy that you didn't freeze up!" And yet, of course, they had the entourage: the state police, and they had all these policemen with him, the bodyguards. Those students, they were adamant about their interests, and they wanted answers. It was really one of the best sessions I think that those kids really remembered. I had a student who was an artist at that time, and he drew pictures [that] captured the energy of each student in a portrait. And gave it to me at the end of the year. That was the one class that Governor Allen came to. So I don't remember tensions. I do remember, you know, things in the community or whatever. But as far as impacting me? No.

CB: So we also see that you were a life member of the NAACP. What kind of work were you involved with in your NAACP chapter?

EF: Well, I did that because I wanted to be an advocate for my community. I wanted to make sure that opportunities are there. Not only for my age group, but for young people who were, you know, living in the city. Growing up in the city. But the tensions, there was no tension. There was no need for that. When I bought my life membership, I was serving as secretary of the organization. It was more or less to educate. It was not an organization that, you know, planned marches or anything of that nature. They were really dedicated to uplifting Hampton because Hampton had been so progressive in addressing, you know, those social ills for the most part.

CB: Were there any particular moments or causes that you found particularly memorable or important to the community?

EF: I'm trying to think. There were so many things going on in Hampton. I can't remember any one event that I felt the need to respond to, or whatever. Because I think people understood my job is to teach, you know. My job is not to advocate for a cause, because you can't use your classroom as a platform. That's one thing you just do not do. And when I read some of the things that are happening in education today, I just cringe, you know. I said, "Ooh, if I had done that, you know, I would not have had a job, you know." I think when we were trained, I think the focus was doing your job. I think now that there are so many devices out there that are impacting education in the classroom, that teachers do have to address. I think there are things that are happening now that we never would have had to address in my early years. I just wish, if I could be teaching now, because this is government in action, you know. And I really don't think people understand what's happening in government. This is what it's all about, you know, not only learning it, but becoming a part of it. And I look at those [who] are rebelling against government. I said, "You know, if they really understood—. If those rights were taken away from you, and you do not have a voice, most Americans wouldn't be able to adjust to that because we're used to advocating for ourselves, and advocating for others." This is an exciting time to teach government. This would be an exciting time to teach government, really. Really.

CB: Yeah, can you elaborate on the exciting times that we're in, and what you might regard as unfinished legacies of the movement that you saw growing up and how it's impacting African Americans today?

EF: It's almost as if those goals that were planted in the 1950s, 1960s, are here in real-time. These young people today are not willing to wait. They want the change now. And I saw that

with the, you know, with the George Floyd movement. Recognizing that, you know, all individuals have rights. And the fact that this society, socially, is changing. And every industry, the educational system, everything, the political system, has to adapt to that. They told us fifty years ago what's happening today. Nobody was reading. I think only the teachers and the students are reading, you know, what to expect fifty years from now. We knew in the 1970s what this society was going to be like. So when I see these adults, I said that, "They were in high school when this was predicted. Did they study it? Evidently not." I know my students did. Do they study climate change? Probably not. I just think that we've lost— what is causing this friction? This is what I don't understand in our country today. Because everything has always been up and above board. That they've always talked about the fact of, you know, what's going to happen in the country in terms of the rise of minority population. We knew that, we knew that was going to happen. We know that now these cities that we have on the coast, they will no longer exist if we don't do something about climate change. Can you imagine Florida just drifting away? California just drifting away. We need to look at the issues. We really need to look at the issue. And it's not that we didn't know. This is nothing new. This is nothing new! That's why I'm so frustrated with people talking, "Climate change is not real, this is not real." Where is your education? You know, where did you go to school? And we have congressmen that don't perceive it, you know. What's happening here? Are we no longer electing professional politicians? People that know when you go to Washington you're supposed to make decisions? You know, it's not about showboating. It's not about being on TV. I blame journalism for that. I blame journalism for that. I think that those people should realize, "My job is sitting in that Congress, sitting in that room, and making decisions. And not being on all of these TV shows or whatever." I think that that's one of the disadvantages that I see. But I'm concerned for our

nation. I'm really concerned for our nation. I don't think most people understand what's happening to our nation. When you start criticizing public ed—which is the mainstream for equality in this country—when you start questioning individual rights for individuals, you got a problem. And when you don't listen to science, you really have a problem. You really have a problem. And all of that is Social Studies. I was doing this fifty years ago! Almost. Well, I'm not gonna say fifty years ago. Almost fifty years ago, we were talking about these topics, you know. So I know they're not my students out there who were not, you know, understanding what's going on. I know they understand, but I'm wondering what was being taught that these people just blindly accept anything that they're told. Frightening to me. Frightening to me.

KB: Right.

EF: But, but I--

KB: Sorry ma'am, you can continue.

EF: No, I was just saying. But if I was in the classroom today, you can embrace a topic, but you let the students take the lead, you know. You let them share their view because in most cases, students are more adept to an issue than you think they are. They know more about it because of impacting them. They know that fifty years from now, what these people did not decide in Washington D.C. is going to adversely affect them when they're older. These people are going to be working till they're eighty years old. You know, do they understand what's happening here? I don't think they do. I don't think they do.

KB: Right. Before we wrap up the interview, is there anything else that you want to talk to us about over the course of your life? Living in Hampton and Newport News, growing up here, or teaching here. Is there anything else that you think is important that we should know?

EF: I just feel so blessed to have the family that I had. I remember my grandparents, the guidance that they gave, and the opportunities that I had to go to college, to become a teacher, and to work in helping shaping the minds of young people. Having that kind of impact, I think, no other career has that role. No other career has a job of a teacher in helping people think, showing young people how to think, what questions to ask, what demands, you should, you know, that you should require. That's what teaching is. It's not just making A's and B's. And I told my students, "This goes beyond your graduation from high school. We're talking about what kind of citizen are you going to be, you know? When you're really working, you're going to start making demands as a worker, as a citizen." This is what government is supposed to teach our children, you know, that if we're not responsive, the system doesn't work. You know, if we're not knowledgeable, the system doesn't work. And I think if students understand that concept, that it's not about one person—. It's not about you, but it's about the whole. It's about the whole. And if you mistreat one, you might as well mistreat them all. What you do for one, you need to do for the other. This is what democracy teaches us. And as Benjamin Franklin said, "It's a democracy if we can keep it." And that means we have to be enlightened as citizens. We have to know what government is supposed to do. Know what your elected officials are supposed to do. Know what you're supposed to do, you know, as a citizen. And that's a tremendous responsibility. I never would have thought in my lifetime that this would have happened. I envisioned it, because we would talk about the threat of autocracy—. Because it was a driving movement, and remember in the '80s, we would talk about it. And I would say to myself, "Oh that would never happen in the United States." Well, I never would have envisioned where we are today would have happened in our country, that people are questioning the legality of the votes. That's what makes us different from every other society. You know, we have confidence

in each other that we're going to do the right thing. Like I would tell my students, democracy is ninety-nine percent of doing the right thing. That you know what the right thing is, and you do it. Not for yourself, but for everybody. It's a collective response. And when you start thinking individually, that it's all about me, you're losing it. When you feel that you have no lines of communication with people who are not like you, something is wrong. Something is wrong. What has happened in America that has produced this kind of response? And I remember the legislators that we would write to. They were professional about everything that they did, and they never cursed. They were always polished. They always presented the best picture. And I'm just wondering, "How did we get to this place in America? How did we get to this place?" And I would love to bring my students back together and see what they thought. I would love to just have a conversation with them. "What do you think about what's happening today? You know, what do you think [about] America? Do you think it's good? First of all, is it a good change? Is it good that people are questioning?" I don't know.

KB: Right. Well, Ms. Flood, it has been so interesting learning and hearing from you about your whole life experiences, and growing up, and teaching, and going through college. It's just been a real treat to interview you. And I'm so glad that, you know, we were all able to participate in this project.

END OF INTERVIEW.

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