

A Community Remembers
Interview: Elizabeth Salim 1-3

#1

ES: I came in by the time it was 80% black and 20% white, and so my perception of it was that I was coming in – you know, that they were already very comfortable there, very happy there, it was their school now.

LB: And that's different from other people – yes.

ES: Well, yeah, and I didn't know that they had wanted to go to Armstrong, and to Maggie Walker and that they were upset about being there.

LB: I know, that was a shock to me, too. Let me just...

#2

LB: Yeah, I agree, I thought that was extremely eye-opening.

ES: Mm hmm, yeah.

LB: And it was enormously eye-opening to the students as well, cuz they had never expected that.

ES: Right, right. And I think my brother knew that, I guess maybe because he was more involved in sports and so he was talking to guys that wanted to play for other teams and were playing for Wythe and upset about that

LB: It was really interesting to me how much sports became kind of the melting pot.

ES: Mm hmm, it was.

LB: That was a place where integration really took place.

ES: Mm hmm, I think so. Yeah. Even on the first day – you asked about the first day – the first day that I walked into Wythe, I remember walking up to the locker, I was very nervous because the whole atmosphere was different from anything I had experienced before in school. And it was very chaotic, very distracting, intimidating. I walked up to my locker, I couldn't get the locker open. And this big black guy, very muscular, very dark came up and stood beside me and that was intimidating to me. And he said, "Are you having trouble with your locker?" And I said "yes," and he said "Let me help you" and he helped me with it. And then he said "You're David's sister, aren't you?" And I said "Yes," and he said "I play baseball with him." And he and I

became good friends after that. So, yeah, even that, even though I wasn't playing baseball, you know, that effected me.

LB: And you were on the cheerleading squad, of course.

ES: Yeah, the next year, I was – after that. And that, you know, I guess that's not really a sport. (Laughs) I know there's a debate about that. That's not really a sport, but still, you're connected to the sports... in a way.

LB: You know what I would love to do, is to start off, if you don't mind, with you just saying, "My name is Elizabeth Salim" – or include your maiden name as well in there – and "I graduated Wythe High School in..." and give the year.

ES: Ok. My name is Elizabeth Bowles (?) Salim and I graduated from George Wythe in 1975.

LB: Elizabeth, why don't we start by you telling me something about how you grew up.

ES: Um, I grew up a couple blocks from Forest Hill Park, and it was a neighborhood my family had been in for a while. My grandparents lived across the street and gave the lot to my parents when I was young, probably 3 or 4. And they built on that lot and then my father's mother lived behind us, directly behind us, and our yards were connected. So, I was surrounded by grandparents, and I thought that was normal. And my grandparents were a huge part of my life, they took us on vacations, my grandfather was Santa Claus and loved that role and they took us on Sunday drives, and we'd go every Sunday and get ice cream and go on a Sunday drive. So they were really good to give my parents that little break and they really seemed to enjoy having us with them. So that was a real blessing. And then I had relatives – you know, aunts, uncles, cousins – in Richmond. So I feel like that's kind of unusual today, but, I loved having that. That meant a lot to me.

LB: So you were really from an old Richmond family, and had your entire family – you know your grandparents lived behind you and across the street from you – had they been there all along? Had they always been in that neighborhood?

ES: That was – across the street where my grandparents live – had been my grandfather's homeplace, I guess you would say, and they had a large area there, and I think eventually part of that sold and then he built a home there himself in that area. But they had owned quite a bit of area and he and his brother had built a tennis court there and later it became apartments and it changed quite a bit. But, so his family had been here a long, long time.

LB: So you had deep roots. What was Richmond like when you were a child?

ES: Some of the things I remember... it felt very safe. I remember a rite-of-passage was when I was thirteen... Well, let me back up. I remember even as a young child being able to run around and play in the woods behind my grandparents' house. And being able – we had a creek beside us – and being able to go play in the creek, and a rite-of-passage was when I was twelve or thirteen, my friend and I got very dressed up in our Sunday best, got on the bus, and went downtown to spend the day at Miller & Rhoads and Thalhimers. Now, I couldn't imagine sending my thirteen-year-old down town or anywhere by herself. [Laughs] But it was safe and we had a great time. And you know, Miller & Rhoads – I don't know if you were here at all during that period, but Miller & Rhoads and Thalhimers were just magical. And you walk in – first of all they were huge – and then you walk in and I remember there was a little perfume fountain over to the left that probably was perfume mixed with water and you could dip your finger in and put some perfume on, and then you walk in and it was all very elegant and, you know, the ding-ding-ding of the elevators, and – it was just, it was gorgeous. And you could just walk around in those two stores all day, and just have fun, it was fine. And um, so we would go down and have lunch, they had a nice restaurant down in Thalhimers. At Christmas, they had the real Santa, you know, so my grandfather always took us down to see the real Santa and all the storefront windows that were decorated and had just beautiful, beautiful... I don't even know – displays, you know, of animated creatures and all kinds of things. So, it was – it was quite a fantasy land down there. And um, I remember also in the summer, I could hop on my bike and go up to Westover and play tennis all day and nobody worried about me, and there was nothing to worry about. And the same people would come every day and we would play tennis, and in my neighborhood everybody knew everybody and we would go outside and play at night with all the kids – you know, 'kick the can' and things like that. So... it, you know – I didn't appreciate it at the time, but I look back and it was wonderful childhood.

LB: It really sounds like it. It sounds magical in every respect.

ES: Mm hmm, yeah, and... I had a best friend up the street, we met, she – her mother ended up buying the home that we lived in when I was born. And so I met her when I was five and she and I were inseparable. So it was really wonderful to have a best friend on the street.

LB: Now, when and how did you notice changes taking place in the city of Richmond?

ES: I think, for me, it was more a matter of hearing the talk in my home. My grandfather would come over every night when we were having dinner, and he would bring up topics of conversation, maybe things happening in the news, he and my father also would talk, and, um, disagree [laughs].

LB: Who was on which side?

ES: Well, I remember, we knew that if the word 'union' came up, there was gonna be

a fight. My grandfather, I think sometimes would bring it up just to... [laughs]. My father was in the union, and my grandfather didn't like unions. So they would debate that quite a bit. I remember thinking, if union comes up, I'm gonna finish and go, you know, and they – you know, it never got bad, but it was just, we knew it was gonna be a heated discussion. Or we knew my dad wouldn't like it. On a lot of other things, they agreed. So, but sometimes I would tune that out. So I don't know that I was really in tune with the community until, um, I guess busing. I think busing was what really changed everything for me, and made me more aware of the greater community because it was just kind of... I guess it was very myopic, you know. Just, what was going on with me and my life and my friends and family.

LB: How old were you when busing started and what do you remember hearing about, and how did it effect you?

ES: Well, I had grown up just knowing that I was going to Patrick Henry Westover and then George Wythe. And we lived close enough to George Wythe, walking distance, we heard the band practicing every day, and the older kids in the neighborhood went there and they would talk about it, and it was something very exciting to me. I was one of those kids that couldn't wait to grow up, and so going to high school was very exciting to me. And so the summer of my eighth-grade year, when I would have gone, I found out that Judge Maritch (?) had decided that I was going to Bainbridge. And my parents were very upset about it. My mom had gone there and it was rough when she went there 20 years before. And so she was upset that I was gonna be going there. Um... her fear I think mostly was just safety, and the area. And so it effected me – it really upset me as a child. You know, he had disturbed my dream (laughs) of where I was gonna go to school. And so I think that's how it effected me. I heard my parents talking about it, and well, all the relatives. Everybody. Everybody was talking about it. The neighbors, the relatives, it was everywhere.

LB: What kinds of things were they saying?

ES: I didn't know anyone who was in favor of it. I think most of all, they were upset about the thought of kids being bused to other areas because we walked to our neighborhood schools and they liked the idea of neighborhood schools, which makes sense to me. They didn't feel secure about their kids going into areas that they perceived were dangerous. They didn't – they were worried about the value of education, you know, that it would go down. There were those who were prejudiced and there were racist comments, but for me I think over all it was more a matter of education and safety. That's mostly what I was hearing, rather than racism. There were definitely racist... um, people who made racist comments in the neighborhood and in the family, but overall, I think it was safety and education.

LB: So what happened next? You're hearing all of this discussion, and then the fall comes and it's time for school. What happens?

ES: Well, first of all, let me just say... I think, the people that had been in my life that were black were the mailman, who everybody loved. Loved him. He was sunshine walking around – you know, they walked and delivered the mail. And he was sunshine, you know, he was a wonderful man. Lorraine who came and ironed for my mom. My mom and my grandmother would pay her to come iron. And she was a very gentle, kind lady. My best friend had a single mother, who really was the only single mother that I knew, you know, in my, in that day. It was very unusual. And so she had to work and she had, um, black maids, nannies for her children. And we always had fun with them. I mean, most of them, we had two or three – I say “we” because I was there all the time – and they were always nice to us and you know, we had fun. So, I didn’t have a bad view of black people, but I didn’t know... I only knew them in these ways that were just kind of like work-oriented, what they did for a living, rather than personal. And so the race was a bit of a mystery to me. You know, between what I heard and what I saw and the people that I knew, what I heard maybe in the news about some of the areas that weren’t safe. So, it was a bit of a mystery. So when I went to Bainbridge, the first day, I remember everything feeling very dark, and very... I think it was a dark day, because when I picture it, it just, it’s almost like... going into a dark castle or something. It just felt dark. Nobody was happy. Nobody was nice. The teachers were not nice. The students were angry. I felt very alone. I didn’t have any classes with anyone I knew. And so it was a very lonely feeling to not have welcoming teachers. Always before, the teachers had been very welcoming in my pervious schools. And so to have teachers who weren’t nice and weren’t welcoming was different.

LB: How far was Bainbridge from where you lived and how did you get there?

ES: Mom took me.... I don’t know how far. I don’t think it was that far. Maybe... it was across the river. I think I remember crossing over the river, probably closer to downtown – to this day I don’t know where it is. Isn’t that crazy? I can picture it, but I don’t know where it is. Um... it was probably a 15-20 minute drive. And then the second day and I know you’ve heard some of this story, but the second day I went and a girl flashed a knife at me, and I went home and said “I’m not going back. I can’t go back. It’s very scary.” And my mom said, “I don’t want you to go back.” And then there was a school, James River Academy, that cropped up out here – it’s funny, it was on Courthouse Road, but it felt like the Boonies to us. I just felt like we were going to the country. And I grew up – the parents had gotten together and hired teachers and some of the parents worked there, and they started this school and it was an excellent school. It was very orderly, very rigorous education. As an eighth grader, I didn’t really want that, I didn’t want two hours of homework a night [laughs], you know? But my best friend went there, a couple of girls from the neighborhood went there, my cousin went there. So we would get on the bus in the morning, and, I remember at first it was a Greyhound bus because they didn’t have school buses. They had literally just thrown it together. And it was an hour-drive for us because we were the first on and the last off. And we didn’t like that either. And I couldn’t really socialize with people because it was so far away... a lot of the kids lived in other neighborhoods, a lot of them were wealthier, in some of the wealthier

neighborhoods. In the south side, though, I think, a lot of them were from south side. But anyway, so it was out on Courthouse Road, um... I don't know what's there now. And it was just a little brick building and I remember there was a large field, it felt like we were in the middle of the country, and our punishment for acting up in class was to go run laps around the field, which was kind of funny [laughs]. So some days we would joke about, you know, needing to get outside, so just act up in class and you can go run around the... run laps...

LB: That's so funny. It sounds like a totally different world – from Bainbridge and from everything else. Was Bainbridge -- when you went there for your very brief, two-day career there, was it almost all black? Or, what was the racial mix there?

ES: Yeah, I would love to know. I don't remember. I think I've blanked out on a lot. I have very specific pictures in my mind, of a few things about Bainbridge. And the rest I think was just blanked out. It was traumatic. I had never felt so insecure and so unsafe. I'd always felt very safe – wherever I went before. So even though, I mean, Westover, I think Westover... Patrick Henry was this wonderful little environment that felt very safe. Westover was a little less secure in that way, but I remember there were kids that I went to school with that were in motorcycle gangs, and there were like three of them.

LB: But this was a junior high school, right?

ES: Yeah. One of them was 16, he was in the seventh grade. And so there were, you know, there were – it was a little different from my safe little world at Patrick Henry, but, um, but it was nothing compared to Bainbridge. It was... Bainbridge was just... crazy.

LB: And what year was this?

ES: Ok, let's see... if I was in eighth grade.

LB: So you would have been thirteen.

ES: Thirteen. Yeah. Twelve or thirteen.

LB: So this would have been 1970...

ES: No – was it '70? Um, yeah, about 1970, I guess.

LB: That's right cuz that was the year that busing started.

ES: Mm hmm, mm hmm. Yeah. So it was kind of different – so many different environments. And then I went into this environment that was very structured – more so than I had ever been in before, and very, um, hmm. More rigorous, I mean, just a good education, good teachers. The students were nice, but I didn't... I felt like,

kind of on the fringes, I didn't get, you know. I was kind of shy. And I had my friends that went there. And then living so far away. So it was a different kind of environment, too.

LB: So you're making it through that rigorous eighth grade experience, you're doing your two hours of homework every day, you're running your laps when you misbehave. And then it's time to pick a high school. How did you and your parents decide where you were gonna go to school?

ES: Well, I wanted to go to George Wythe. I didn't want to stay in the private school environment, my brother was at Wythe...

LB: How much older was he?

ES: He's 13 months older than me. So very close. And um, I had friends at Wythe. Um... I didn't... I had been there two years, James River, and I didn't want to go make another adjustment to another private school. I think my parents wanted to put – it was my sister was six years younger, so I think they really wanted to put her in a private school, and they figured I could handle Wythe. And I remember my mom having a discussion with some of the older kids on my street, two girls, um, from up the street, and asking them what's the environment like. And I remember they said something like, "Well, you know, she'll hear some cuss words, ummm, but I think it's ok, you know, she'll be ok." [Laughs] I remember that sticking in my mind. And I just remember for them it was just, you know, they deliberated a bit about it but they felt like – I begged them. I really begged. Please let me go to George Wythe. And so, they let me go. And then of course the environment there was so different.

LB: Tell me more about that first day when you got there, and your first impressions -- and you made it through the trauma of getting your locker open [laughs].

ES: Yeah [laughs]. Well, I think, it was just so different. It was, um – the biggest thing that I felt, my biggest impression was, the kids are in control here. And I had never been to a school where the kids were in control. Always before, especially at James River, it was absolutely adult-controlled. Absolutely. There was no question who was in control. Patrick Henry, the same way. A little bit less at Westover. But, I remember thinking, "Wow, you can act like that and get away with it?" Um, just cra... running around, yelling, you know, horsing around, cussing, and smart-alec to the teachers, and very boisterous, and I remember thinking, you know, this is pretty amazing, that you can really get away with acting this way. So it appealed to that little rebellious side of me, but also on the other hand it made me insecure because my pervious environment had been so secure. And then to go into this environment, it felt a little shaky to know that the adults weren't really – didn't appear, really, to be very much in control.

LB: [Laughs] So, as you settled in... I mean, you became very much a part of this school, it sounds like. Can you tell me more about your time there and some of the

experiences that really stuck out in your mind?

ES: I think for me, I wanted desperately to get along. And I wanted – I appreciate so much the openness of the kids. They were just wide open... you know... I was raised kind of reserved, you know, my environments were pretty reserved. And this was just wide open. And if it was in your mind, it came out, and if you wanted to do it, you did it. You know, it just – it was so different...

LB: Give me some examples.

ES: Just... oh, goodness, let me see. Mostly with teachers, you know... just the utter... just... saying whatever they wanted to say to teachers. And, you know, um... just... I wish I could think of some examples. Mostly just, there were just students there did what they wanted to do. If they didn't like what the teacher was doing, they'd walk out, or, you know, if they wanted a ticket to get out, they would act up so the teacher would give them – there was a guy in one my classes who we knew he was gonna do something everyday to get a ticket out. And the English teacher gave him a ticket out, everyday. You know, it was just, "Ok, Michael, that's it. You're going to the principal's office." And she'd write him this note and she'd hand it to him, and he'd smile and walk out the door and go to McDonald's or, you know, he was laughing on the way out the door because he never went to the principal, he went wherever he wanted to go. So there was kind of a joke of getting kicked out of class so you could go to McDonald's, which was right across the street. Or, um, roam the halls. You know, it was – if you didn't have accountability at home – like, I knew, I would never have tried that because I had a lot of accountability at home, so... My brother skipped science once, I think, and I came home and found him in a heap of trouble because they had called home and said, "Where was David today," and she said he's supposed to be there, and he had skipped one class in his high school career and got caught.

LB: Ugh.

ES: So, we had a lot of accountability at home. And so, I knew I had to toe the line. And um, but anyway, back to... I'm not sure I can remember... um, I mean, kids would come to class stoned, they would... um... they just kind of did the their own thing. Some of the kids – not all, not all by any, ya know, not all.

LB: Well, it sure sounds like my high school in the '70s. [Laughs]

ES: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think schools changed after that, where someone who went to school later, maybe that was a little more normal. But in my day, that wasn't the norm, so it was... And they had been, it had been, I guess busing had been a couple years. So a lot of the white students – Wythe had been predominantly a white school, so a lot of the white students had graduated. And a lot of the white students my age I think were going to other schools – either bused across town or in private

school. So that's when, I think by my junior year, it maybe was about an 80-to-20 ratio.

LB: And how was that for you? How did you make your way in that environment? I mean, it sounds like you had grown up in basically an all-white environment. And now you're in a 20% minority. Tell me about that experience.

ES: Well, I think there was, um – I think I talked about this the first year – there was the realization that there were groups of people, and you had people who wanted to get along on both sides. And you had people who didn't, who were determined not to. And you had people who just wanted to get an education, they didn't care what was going on around them, they didn't want to be a part of the school. They just came, did their work, went home. And so, I wanted to get along, and I was very interested in knowing people that were different from me. I wanted to know them and understand them, and I enjoyed that.

LB: Where do you think that interest came from?

ES: Well, I think my mom – just my mom always made sure that I understood that we were all equal before God. That God created us equal. And that we had no right to think of ourselves as better than anyone else. Um, that wasn't the message I got across the board, you know? In my family or neighborhood, but my mom was really clear about that. And... and maybe also it was the people that I had known that were black that were nice and non-threatening. But I also think I just was fascinated by people that were different from me. And I found that very, very interesting. And I loved it – to be able to get along with somebody that was so different from you – I loved that. You know, I just thought that was great. Or to overcome the obstacle of starting off badly. You know, because there were relationships that started off very badly. And then to overcome that, to find the commonality and become friends... To me it was huge.

LB: Tell me about that.

ES: Well, you remember the story of walking down the hall and the girl –

LB: I do, but I'm gonna force you to tell it to me all over again – I'm so sorry, Elizabeth, I feel like – I was driving here and I was thinking, "Elizabeth is going to be the most interviewed Wythe alumni on record, and I hope she won't mind telling me these stories again."

ES: Ah, I don't, cuz, you know what, they've been hidden for so long. I think, there've been times in my life where I've thought, that was so huge and it's so... people don't... don't remember it. Or people don't know what it was like for us back then and how it was traumatic but it was also exciting, it was just all that it was. And um... You know, and I think there's been quite a bit of time I've spent overcoming some of

that educationally, socially. Um, but, it's really nice that somebody wants to know. You know, that somebody wants to hear about it.

LB: It's so amazing to me that people in Richmond really don't talk about it all.

ES: I know, I know. Or for people – you know, people have this, I'm sure George Wythe right now has quite a stigma attached because of all the things that have happened there, but people don't know the transition that it went through. That it was very much a very nice school and a very revered school. And then it was the melting pot school, because it wasn't like, um, say, Armstrong or Walker, where they were already in a black neighborhood, and they brought white people in. It was kind of like, people just from all over the place came there. You know, the people from Church Hill... And I didn't realize, either – I mean, I understood that there were clashes between some of the blacks, but I didn't realize it was because of neighborhoods. Because I knew a lot of the kids that were in the neighborhood right down the street from Wythe, but then there were others that were bused in and I didn't know that there was a rivalry... there between them. When I heard Ellwood and Royal talking about that.

LB: I know, I thought that was really fascinating, too.

ES: Yeah, that he wasn't worried about the whites, he was more worried about the people from Church Hill. Um, but, well the story of walking down the hall – there really was quite a thing about changing classes, and the chaos in the very crowded halls. And there was really, kind of a *thing* about, don't get in my space, you know. And it was because we were in the minority, I felt that we were always expected to be the ones to move. And I had a friend who was, um – she really became friends, close friends with me after high school – but I had known her since seventh grade and she was very feisty. And she one day didn't move and a black guy pinned her up against a locker – like threw her up against a locker and they both got kicked out of school. And um... so there was kind of this feeling of standing your ground to be respected. And so I didn't – even though I was shy, I felt like, if I don't stand up for myself, I noticed that the kids who didn't stand up for themselves – and at least put on the persona of not being afraid – were walked over. They were the ones that were picked on or walked over. So when it came time to – I knew I had to stand up for myself, if it came to that. I wanted to be friends, but I also wanted to be respected. And so, um, I became very tired of the 'you have to move out of my way' mentality. And so, uh, this girl and I, my friend and I, were walking down the hall, it was between classes and so we were the only people in the hall, and around the corner came another girl and her friend. And they aligned themselves in the middle of the hall with us. And she said, "Ok, what are you gonna do—" my friend said, "Mm. Who's gonna move?" And I was on the inside and this other girl, I knew her. I knew who she was. And she was kind of feisty and she was headed straight for me, and I said, this time I'm not gonna move. And so we were walking and the girl and I, I think we both kind of moved a little bit. And so when it came time to meet, we hit shoulders, and she kind of rammed her shoulder into me. [Laughs] And when she

got past me, she said, "This hall ain't big enough for the both of us." [Laughs] And I, I am so embarrassed by this, but I said, "And I am not about to move." And she started screaming at me, and my friend...[laughs] say, "run!" You know, she just started screaming and yelling but she didn't come after me. But it was such a redneck thing to say, I can't believe I said that. But anyway, she and I later became friends in art class because we kind of, I think we were sitting across from one another in art class, and she liked what I was drawing and we began to talk and became friends. And so that was all behind us, and so, um.. And then there was the experience with the car where I was in a hurry, I was trying to park my car, I think it was after a football game and, um... some girl saw me pulling into the space but they purposely walked across the space. And looked at me, kind of like daring, you know. And I kept going. And I knew I wasn't gonna hit them, but I wanted them to know that I wasn't intimidated by obvious things like that, that were: I'm going to intimidate you. And so, it was wrong, I know it was wrong. But I did it. And, um, later on, we ended up, um... I was cheering at a game at another school, and a friend of mine and I went into the bathroom, and I was standing outside, she was in the stall, I was standing outside. And two of the girls that were friends of the girl that had done this came in. And they began to talk about me as if I wasn't there, "Well, you know, that little cheerleader, that little white girl, who drives that little yellow Vega, well Katie, she tried to hit Katie in that car, and Katie's gonna kill her." You know, and so they just went on and on and on [laughs], so anyway, later on, Katie and I became friends. And I can't remember how that happened other than I think we ended up in a class together, and I was friends with her boyfriend from a class I was, and I think she and I started talking. Katie was a big, very intimidating girl, and she had a fro out to here, she was just very, very intimidating. But she was really, at the core, she was very nice, sweet.

LB: So, how did you get over, I mean one moment, you're head to head, issuing death threats and posturing and all this other stuff, and then the next moment, you're in a class together and everything's great. What I'm still trying to wrap my head around is that transition moment, how you got past the posturing.

ES: Mm hmm. I think because I really wanted to get along with people. And I think sometimes it was just, um, almost like a testing. It seemed like there were some kids that wanted to test you, and see what you were made of, so there was kind of a respect that came. If you were feisty and you didn't back down, there was a respect that came. So even though it really wasn't... I don't know how I... no, I guess it was a part of who I was, but I, um, I put on that tough exterior, and I guess, you know, my brother had been beat up the year before, and had had the concussion.

LB: Your – was that your freshmen year?

ES: That was, well, I went in sophomore year, my sophomore year, and so, um—

LB: That's right cuz junior high school was longer then, right?

ES: Eighth and ninth was middle... No, I guess ninth? I don't know if ninth was considered high school at that time. I think eighth and ninth might have been middle. And then um, tenth was the beginning of high school, and that's when I started Wythe. And so my brother, the year before I went, the summer before, well at the end of the school year previously...

LB: So he had just finished tenth grade when this happened, right?

ES: Yes, yes. And he... And so I think that that was another thing that caused me to feel like I really needed to toughen up and be... not give in to the intimidation, but on the other hand, really try to get along.

LB: Now, one thing that I've been a little bit confused about is, David was an athlete, right? I mean, it sounds like was very much a part of the school, and he got the crap beaten out of him. Who did it, how did it happen – tell me that whole story.

ES: Well, he was going home, he and Mark Person were walking home after school, and it was, I think, the last day of school, and you could walk down Crutchfield, and there were woods, and walk through the woods, it was a shortcut to our home. And there was a guy named Johnny who went to George Wythe and he was with some guys I think from another school, I don't think they were from that school. And, um, they called to Mark and David and they said, "Wait, wait" and they came up and they said, "Give us your money.... we need some money" for the bus or something. And they said, "No, we don't have any" or whatever and they kept walking. And the guys attacked them and just threw David down on the ground and kicked him in the head and that's how he got the concussion. And... I remember being at home, mom was wondering where they were, and they came walking up – I remember looking out the window and I saw David and Mark walking, and David looked like something was wrong with him, and Mark was kind of leading him. And they took him straight to the hospital. And then, there was a trial. He could only remember Johnny's name. But they said Johnny didn't do it. It was the other guys that did it. So they went – the police went and got Johnny and tried to get Johnny to tell on the other guys and he wouldn't. So, Johnny had to go to court. He had to take the charge. And that was – my parents got calls at night saying "We know you have other kids, we know where you live, and if Johnny goes to jail, you'll regret it." And they went ahead with the trial, Johnny went to jail, and my mom wrote to Johnny in jail and you know, talked to him about the Lord, she talked to him about redemption. He wrote back, he really responded and he said, this was the best thing that happened to me, you know, I've changed, you know... I was going down the wrong track and this has really straightened my life out, so I'm grateful. But I remember at the time just not having as much freedom as I'd had before and didn't know why. And later my parents told me that it was because they'd been getting the threatening phone calls. So, whereas I used to be able to walk up the street at night, now my dad had to walk with me, or you know, they wouldn't let me go places that I had been able to go before. And so for David, I think, it was really, that was a really, really hard thing.

LB: Do you feel like it changed him?

ES: I do, I think he – I think, he was... I think he was a little bitter for a while. I mean, he was on the baseball team, he got along well with the other guys on the team. But I just think it was a really difficult thing for him.

LB: You know, Patricia and I have talked a lot this spring and summer about how at Wythe – you know, especially when we had those big interviews with everyone, but also just in one-one-one conversations – the hardest thing for people to talk about and deal with was the violence. And the cross-racial violence, and how do you put that together with all of the positive things that were going on, you know, this undercurrent.

ES: Mm hmm.

LB: And I remember when we had that giant group in our class – there were almost 20 of you all there. That was the toughest thing, it was like a third rail that people didn't want to go near, in a funny way. And the week before that when Royal really broke down and cried. And I wanted to ask you about that and your thoughts about that and how you put it all together. Because it seems so complicated to me.

ES: It was very complicated. It was – you really had to navigate through your day being very conscious of your environment and what was going on and, I mean, people would come up and ask you for money, and you really... You never knew if they were gonna get upset if you didn't give it to them, I mean, we never gave it to them. But it was almost like they were playing with us, like, "Give me a quarter." Just walk up, just, "Give me a quarter." And you'd say, "No, I don't have one," or, you never knew if that was gonna become a fight. Or, you could look at someone and they'd say, "What are you lookin' at? Why are you looking at me, what do you want?" So you even had to watch where you were looking at times. There were certain people that you just knew, you didn't look at them.

LB: Were there tensions between white factions the way there were between black factions.

ES: I wouldn't say there was tension but there was a definite difference. You really had your very different white groups. You had the druggie hippie group, you had... and they kind of kept to themselves. You had... the kids that were racist that you knew didn't want to be there, didn't want to get along, stuck together. Kids who maybe weren't racist but they really wanted to be with each other and they were nice to other people, but they really stuck together. And then you had people who mixed, and there were people on both sides who didn't like it that we mixed.

LB: It sounds like, when you're talking about it, that it was actually kind of a small group that mixed. Is that accurate compared to everyone else?

ES: Umm, it would be interesting to know. To really think about...

LB: Like at the – in the cafeteria: was it all white tables and black tables, and then just a couple of tables that were mixed?

ES: Probably so. Yeah, probably so. And I remember David was talking about a fight that happened in the cafeteria. I don't really remember it. Um... yeah, that was kind of a strange environment. The cafeteria could be strange.

LB: Yeah, tell me more about the cafeteria because when I... get this transcribed, no one's gonna hear what I say, they'll only hear what you say. So you have to say, "In the cafeteria..."

ES: Uh huh. Oh, ok. Well, in the cafeteria, it was very segregated. You generally would have blacks sitting together, whites sitting together. Sometimes I think sports teams would sit together and mix. There were people who would go outside, I think if I could go outside, I would go outside. Cuz it was kind of territorial in there. And um... I don't remember a whole lot about... don't remember a whole lot more about the cafeteria.

LB: Was the smoking room mixed? I assume you had a smoking room then.

ES: Smoking room? Gosh, I don't remember.

LB: [Laughs] Maybe you weren't a smoker.

ES: I wasn't, but I – I think they just went outside to smoke. I don't think they had a smoking room. Because I think technically, you weren't supposed to be smoking, but I think kids went outside. I mean, kids were – or they'd go in the bathroom and they'd smoke pot in the bathroom... and cigarettes. But I think technically, you weren't supposed to be doing either. But it just wasn't really enforced. I think they had greater things to worry about than that [laughs]. But I think more and more there was a larger group that wanted to get along. As I went through the years – I was there three years – and I think by the time we were seniors, there were – each year it seemed to be more and more kids that wanted to get along. Or that enjoyed getting along. But you always were gonna have those who were determined not to, and who really just wanted to make trouble.

LB: It sounds like there were certain places where kids who wanted to get along gravitated. Can you tell me about that?

ES: Well, I think it was more the kids that stayed after, the kids that got involved in sports or in clubs, wanted to get along. Because they wanted to be a part of the school. And so, they were determined – you know, to be involved in things like that you had to get along. Because if you didn't, if you fought, you were gonna get kicked off whatever team you were on, or if you fought, you know, you just – that was one

area of control, I guess, that they had. You know, you couldn't cause trouble and remain on those teams. And so I think we found ways to connect and get along. And, just, I guess, being on those teams was a commonality that caused people to get along in a different way.

LB: I'm just smiling because both years that you came and talked to my class, the thing that stuck with them the most was the cheerleading squad and what happened there, and you learning how to dance. Can you tell me all about that.

ES: Yeah, well, just first of all, just surprised that I was able to get on and be a cheerleader. You know, because I think – when I was thinking about going to a white school, my dream was to be a cheerleader, but then when it became a black school, of course I knew that I couldn't dance as well as they could. And I recognized that most of the black schools had black cheering squads. But, Mrs. Mims – you know, the sainted – I loved Mrs. Mims because she – when we had the try-outs, you know, we decided to try out anyway. And I didn't think I would make it. And I don't even think I did very well when I tried out. Which I know made those – the black girls that had wanted to get on really mad. Um, I just don't think I was very prepared. But I guess... I guess she saw something. In me and in the other white girls that she chose, and she had half-and-half. Let me see [begins looking through pictures]... a picture... of maybe a couple of years, but um... But I do remember going out in the hall and just feeling like, you know, there were girls out there that were livid that we had gotten on, Gloria and me. And you know, there was a ruckus out there. I guess this is the same squad... Um, well, this is Milton... This is my family... Now, this was another year, I think. ...But you can see that the teams were pretty – they were predominantly black. This is... Milton. This is David, the guy that opened my locker. [Laughs]

LB: These are great pictures.

ES: I know they are, I love these.

LB: So, who taught you to dance?

ES: Oh, well, I mean, we would go – I think Valerie instituted, you know, sessions over the summer – to tweak us because we needed to be ready for the school year. So we would go out to Fonticello Park and she – they would work with us and work with us and work with us. And we had some very sassy cheers, and you know, some very dance oriented cheers, and it was a lot of fun. And it was a high compliment. You know, if they complimented you on your dancing or your cheering, it was – we considered it a very high compliment, because we knew that we would never be able to do it as well as they could.

LB: What kind of music were you listening to then? I mean, if you could put together a soundtrack for your years there, growing up, and you know, thinking about the

Civil Rights movement and busing and your high school experiences, what would be on that mixed tape.

ES: Ah, let's see. The OJ's, the Temptations, the Supremes – I was a huge Supremes fan – Chaka Kahn, I loved Chaka Kahn. I remember the Funkadelics. I think they recently played in Richmond. Um, Make my Funk the P-Funk. You know, it was – Um, who else? Uhh... really good music. Isley Brothers, I loved the Isley Brothers, and um... Hmm... Who else? I liked the Doobie Brothers, I liked uh... let's see, Led Zeppelin for a while. I think as I got into my college years, I liked some Southern Rock, but I really, really loved black music, and um, that was something that I was exposed to a lot of, black music, and I really, really love the black music of that period.

LB: Did you go to parties?

ES: I went to a few. Um... I'm trying to think. Um... let me see. It was mostly after games, we would go out to have pizza. Or we would go to somebody's house. My parents opened their home, we had a Ping-Pong table downstairs and they would open their home, and so the first year I was at Wythe, my friends and my brother's friends would all get together every weekend and we would do things and play Ping-Pong and um, I think, as far as parties go, I don't remember having the freedom to go to a lot of parties. And I don't know that I was really invited to many black parties, so it would have just been parties of friends of mine. I remember there was a dance that George Wythe put on, where we went somewhere, I can't remember where, and it was a dance party, and it was very mixed, black and whites. And that was a lot of fun.

LB: Did you have black friends over to your house to play Ping-Pong, or was that more your white friends.

ES: The Ping-Pong was the white friends and Milton. And then, I would black friends home. My mom – it was very important to her that I be able to bring my friends home. My grandparents really struggled with that. My grandmother in particular.

LB: Your mom's mother or your dad's mother, cuz they were both...

ES: Yeah, they were both – the one behind us was a little less involved.

LB: That was your dad's family?

ES: Dad's, yeah, my dad's mom. She was a widow and she was um... um, I think she had broken her hip a few times. She didn't around as well, whereas my grandparents across the street were very, very involved in our lives. And um, she had grown up in Danville, out in the country – the country, as she would say – and she definitely had her prejudices. And, um, she was a wonderful, wonderful, amazing woman. And... she would never be mean to anybody. She was – if you saw her

conversing with a black person, you wouldn't think she had a prejudiced bone in her body. But she very much believed in separation as far as, you don't mix, they're not the same as us, so, she never got over it one day when I stood out on the front porch and talked with Milton. And, um, she thought that was just wrong. That that looked wrong and I shouldn't have done that. And I would bring my black friends home and my mom was determined that that was ok, and, you know, if they're your friends, they are welcome in our home. And she really opened her arms to everybody that came. And so I was really happy to have that freedom, but I remember friends coming in and feeling uneasy. Or I would go to their homes and feel a little uneasy. So, um, I guess it was just the adjustment of the newness of it. You know, and um, so... Anyway, I always felt – it was sad that my grandmother felt – well my grandparents felt that way, but, interestingly enough, I saw them change over the years. They sold their home to a black woman. Well, she did, she was windowed, she sold her home to a black woman. And at that point, you know, I think she had changed quite a bit. But I don't think it ever went away. And she'd say, "Well you don't know what it was like, growing up in the country," and the...the people who worked on the farm, I think – I don't know what she experienced but she would say, "You don't know what I saw, you don't know what it was like" and um, she would kind of excuse her feelings. And I guess that's just the way she was raised.

LB: But your mother was raised by her and it sounds like was very, very different.

ES: Very different. My mom – my mom resented it that my grandmother – nobody was good—my mom was adopted when she was five. And my grandmother really tried to protect her and tried to, um, uh... I don't even know how to put it. I guess she just wanted to give her a really good upbringing. And so nobody was good enough for her, you know. Only this one and this one is good enough for you, you can't hang around with her, she's not good enough for you. And that really upset my mom. And so my mom said she determined that when she had kids, they could be friends with anybody and everybody.

LB: I can't even imagine being adopted at five. That's very late.

ES: It is, it is. Um, she... her mother, um, who we've just come to know in the past five years, I guess. Not even that long. Had her when she was 17, and um... it was very difficult for her. She had to leave home, live with relatives here in Richmond. She, um, it was very difficult to support my mom. And so when she was turning five and getting ready to go to school, one of her relatives came and talked to her and said, "You know you can't afford school. You know you can't be – you know you just can't give her what she needs. You really should think about giving her up for adoption, and she did." And I know, it breaks my heart to think about what she went through. Um, because, you know, I've experienced having a five-year-old, I mean, can you imagine? Can you imagine? So, um... But my grandparents were so, so good to her. So good to her. And so good to us. They were amazing. Grandparents and so involved, and so it was – it turned out to be a good thing for her. But, um... And then my mom, being a Christian, she really believed that God wanted her to love all

people, and that there was no discrimination. And so I think that informed her view of how you treat other people. Um, so... They were very different in that way. They never saw eye-to-eye.

LB: What kind of church did you go to? Because I know that wasn't always a common message in Christian churches of the period.

ES: Yeah, I mean, you know there's a saying that Sunday morning is the most segregated time, and it's really sad. I think that has probably more to do with worship styles than prejudice, at this point. We went to Forest Hill Presbyterian, which was just up the street and it was kind of a... um... just kind of a traditional church. And we never really heard anything racist, you know, it was never talked about, I don't remember, at church. But my mom, I mean, she had a born again experience and really that church didn't really suit her after that because it was just so traditional and um, they kind of thought she was crazy, so...

LB: How old were you when that happened?

ES: Do you know, I was three and I remember a change in my mom, because she got married when she was 20. She had my brother, I guess she was 21. She had me 13 months later. Can you imagine at age 20. I would have died. And I didn't really understand that until I had my child and I was 30 when I had my - 30, 31 - when I had my daughter. And I thought, if I were to have - when she was 13 months, and I thought if I were having a baby right now, that would be my mother but 20 years old. So I remember her changing, even as a three-year-old, I remember seeing a change in my mom. And what had prompted it was when she had my brother, she looked, she said, "I looked at that baby and I said, 'if there's a God in heaven, I'm gonna know him, because I don't want anything to happen to this baby.'" So she set out on this journey of seeking, and she found a radio station and began to listen to it, began to read the bible, and she had that experience and completely changed. And she met with a lot of opposition in the family, uh, when she did that. My dad didn't like it. Certainly her parents didn't like it. But she... you know, we grew up hearing that from her and reading the bible and I - I really - I believed it, but it didn't become real to me until I was in my mid-twenties, and had hit a low point in my life and I gave my life to the Lord and completely - complete difference. It was amazing. It was an amazing experience, an amazing time. So, I think I had always believed like mom, but I didn't want to... Uh, I kind of thought that it was rule-based - I didn't want to follow the rules. Um... but then once I experienced it, I realized it was not, it was relationship rather than rules. And so, um, so I always had kind of this duality in my head of, this is what I believe, but this is what I want to do kind of thing. So I guess I was about 24 when my life changed. But I remember, even as a three-year-old, I just remember Mom's life changing. And um, so, her views were informed biblically, of, you know, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And um, everyone is created by God, so you treat them with respect. And so, that didn't line up with racism. At all.

LB: It sounds like it was a very powerful lever in her life, and then in your life.

ES: It was. It was. Very much so. Yes.

LB: Um, when you think back to that time at Wythe, with so much going on, good and bad, is there an example of really good leadership that sticks out in your mind? You know, from a student, a teacher, an administrator... anyone.

ES: I think my mom, first of all, just leading in that way of accepting people and welcoming people into our home, even though she faced opposition. She knew when that happened that she was going to hear about it [laughs], you know. And so, to me, that was good leadership, on my mom's part, of leading us as kids. And then, I think Ms. Mims, was an excellent leader because Ms. Mims was so strong. And she didn't care what people said about her for having the only mixed squad. You know, they called us tired white cheerleaders. She didn't care. She didn't care, you know – she didn't put up with anything from us. If you couldn't get along, then go. You know? You weren't gonna fight, you weren't gonna squabble. Deal with your issues with each other. She was very much a leader in that, and um... not all the adults in school were like that. You know, a lot of the teachers were not good leaders.

LB: What sticks out in your mind as an example of not-so-good leadership?

ES: I think, some of the teachers that just didn't care. They... they were there because it was their job, but they didn't, um... they had their own prejudices, whether they were white or black. You know, and if they walked in the prejudices, they were not helping anybody else to overcome their prejudices and get along. You know, there was a teacher where I felt very – well the teacher I gave the example of her kicking the guy out every day – she gave him a C. He never did any of the work. She gave me a D, I was there every day. And I did the work. And I... so, you know, we had to go talk to the counselor about that, but I felt like that was an example of someone who didn't seem to want to be there, had her prejudices against certain students, and uh, didn't lead well, and you know, she should have helped this kid that was purposely getting kicked out every day. She should have been a little more proactive, you know, maybe expected that he was gonna behave that way and then dealt with it, rather than just giving him a pass to go walk the halls. It was kind of saying, "I don't care about your education, I don't care about you, I just want you out of here." Um... And uh... And I guess during that time period, I heard a lot about City Council and how that was kind of crazy but I don't really know what was going on there. I just remember hearing a lot about...

LB: Did your family talk about... the kind of changes that were going on at that time? How did they all talk about it? Cuz it sounds like there would have been some really different viewpoints.

ES: There were. I don't remember a lot of discussion... Maybe the discussion didn't take place much in front of us. And I think – I don't think I came home and told a lot

of what was going on at school because I was afraid of being pulled out and sent back to the private school. So I think I kept some things to myself, because I didn't want to leave there.

LB: But as you say, there was also a lot going on in Richmond. The city was changing a huge amount. Were you tuned into that at that point?

ES: I think only from the context of dad talking about City Council and the editorial page I think was always a big thing – lots of letters written in, lots of news about what City Council was doing, people were upset.

LB: Do you remember what they were upset about or what City Council was doing at point?

ES: Well, I think it was just crazy. I don't – I wish I – I should look into it and find out, or ask Daddy. But, um... I just remember it being a topic of conversation. I wouldn't say I was a kid who was very tuned in to politics or what was going on in the news, or what was being talked about that much. I wish I had listened a little better.

LB: It's an absorbing time of life, for sure. There is so much else going on. [Laughs]

ES: [Laughs] Yeah, that's true.

LB: What were some of your personal turning points during this period when you were a kid and so much was happening in Civil Rights in Richmond? What do you think of as your personal turning points, and what do you think of as personal turning points for the community, however you define that.

ES: Mmm... For me, I think a personal turning point would have been... not living by what others thought of me, but doing what was right. So, if I was friends with someone – a black person – and we were gonna go out somewhere and walk together, we knew that we were gonna be stared at, comments maybe would be made, and I had to make a decision that that was ok.

LB: Where would you go that this would happen?

ES: Um, let me see... Um, I guess to restaurants or maybe, um... where would we go? Maybe to the mall? Um, no there weren't any malls. Maybe shopping, I guess [laughs]. The Plaza. Umm... Where would we go?

LB: Would you go to Thalhimers? Or Miller & Rhoads?

ES: With a black friend? I would have, yes. I would have. I'm not sure that we ever did that. I think by the time I was 16, I wouldn't have – they wouldn't have wanted me to go down there by myself. I think downtown was changing where it wasn't as

safe. And so, it had felt very safe at age 13, but I think as I got older, downtown was changing, and it wasn't as safe.

LB: So you'd be more in your neighborhood...

ES: More like neighborhood, or um, at games, school functions, um... I'm trying to think of where we would have gone. I guess restaurants, maybe?

LB: Where you'd still be hearing those comments.

ES: Mm hmm. Or people would stare. Like what are you doing, you know.

LB: So you really made that inner decision.

ES: Yes, it had to be an inner decision of if they are my friend at school, they are my friend everywhere. And even though we faced some opposition at school, it wasn't the same as what you would face if you were out in public and you were walking together. Especially if it was a guy and a girl of two different races walking together. Then you really, really faced stares and dirty looks and things like that. So, it was just a matter of saying if this is who I am at George Wythe, this is who I am wherever I go. I can't let other people determine that.

LB: Were there personal, I mean, turning points that you remember in the community at large events, either at school that changed everything or in Richmond that changed everything?

ES: Mmm... now that I don't remember. I – I saw that question and I've been trying to think about that and I just don't remember anything in particular that would have changed things.

LB: I mean, sometimes there is, sometimes there isn't, you know? Sometimes things are just gradual.

ES: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

LB: But a lot was going on for you. And how do you think your experiences at that time shaped who you are today?

ES: I think – I think it demystified races. And it helped me to realize that we are the same underneath it all. We come from different cultures, our cultures may be very different, but underneath it all, we can connect on a human level. And so I think it helped me not to be intimidated by other people that are different from me. And, um, it might have even effected me in that I married an Arab man from Israel. And when I would go over there, I felt that it was easy to fit in. And probably without the experience at George Wythe, it would have been a lot harder.

LB: How did you meet your husband?

ES: Oh, in church. I, um, I had just been, um, let me see. I went to a conference that was over in Taiwan. And we went to Taiwan, we went to Hong Kong, and it was connected to our church. And I remember feeling like, if these people weren't caring for us and walking with us and translating for us, we would be so lost. And I was so appreciative of that. Came back home, and the first Sunday at church, I stood up – and they wanted us to give testimonies as to what had happened over there – and so I stood up and I saw his face. And I thought, who is that, I know everybody here. I don't know him. Who is that? And there was a couple at church and she was from here and her husband was from Nazareth where my husband was from. And they – he was staying with them. And they called and said, "He wants to meet you. Can you come over and have dinner with us?" And so, I think, because of the experience in Taiwan, I felt like, "Well, sure. I'll do that." So, went over, met him, and um, at that time, English was very difficult for him. So we would communicate with a Hebrew-English dictionary. At that time you couldn't find an Arab-English dictionary in America. I mean, it was -- you couldn't find Arab-speaking programs. It was very different. Um, and – but he could speak fluent Hebrew, so, uh, we just had fun, getting to be friends and you know, he'd say, "Do you know what I mean?" And I'd say, "I'm not sure" and we'd flip through the dictionary and go, "That?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." You know, and so we had a lot of fun. And um, and he began to go to church there and we became friends and we ended up getting married. And so then we went over to visit his family and it was so different, but – Oh, but the other thing – backing up to having just been in Hong Kong and Taiwan and understanding that you are really at the mercy of the people who live there to help you. I began to help him. To you know, take him to the grocery store, help him with English, include him in things that my friends were doing, um, and so...

LB: So that's how it happened?

ES: Yeah, that's how it happened.

LB: So it sounds like your experiences at Wythe really opened you up to—

ES: Yes.

LB: other cultures? Other ways of living maybe?

ES: Yes, just not being intimidated by differences. Just... um, breaking through the differences, finding commonality, and even celebrating, enjoying the differences. Enjoying, learning about how they do things and why they do things and the food and... it's fascinating to me, the differences. And so just, uh, just enjoying – just relaxing and enjoying it. Enjoying the people.

LB: How do you think your experiences, and David's experiences during this time, how do you think they changed your family, or shaped your family?

ES: I think, um... I think they, um... I think my whole family was effected. My dad was very involved with the baseball team. So for him, he began to know black people, whereas he had never grown up – I don't think he had black friends, you know, he didn't know many black people growing up. And so for him, you know, he really enjoyed being a part of the baseball team, and, um, enjoyed getting to know the guys. And so I think it opened him up as well. And, let's see... And just having those friends, welcoming them into our home, um... I can't – I can't think of any other ways. I guess, um, the difficult – you know, the difficulty of going through what happened to David. Um, you know, working through that. Coming to terms with that. I think those things, even though they're hard, God can use them to make you stronger, to make you closer. Um, to forgive... you know, to be able to move on – past that. And not let it determine how you see people.

LB: I know that's very challenging for a lot of people.

ES: Yeah. Yeah.

LB: Are there things that you'd like the generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

ES: Um, I think... I think that I would like them to know... um... and I know this is controversial, but the founda—I believe the foundations of our country are biblical. And so I believe that to get along, you have to... say, you know, I'm gonna treat someone as I want to be treated. And I'm gonna respect them, even though we're different, I respect them as a person. And even if we disagree on things, we can still be civil to each other, we can still love each other. Because we're people, we don't need to divide over the issues. We can talk about the issues, we can agree to disagree on things. Um, I think... the big thing would be to treat other people the way you want to be treated, and treat them with respect, and um... And I think, move on past the history. I think something that was disturbing to me at George Wythe was um, a lot of what was left over from slavery and how that effected us, and just feeling like, I've never owned a slave, I would never own a slave, and you've never been a slave, so we *have* to put all that behind – we *have* to – to get along. We can't forget it. But you have to move past it. Because that came up a lot. Um, it did come up a lot, I remember, in different ways. Um, maybe just, uh, I remember a play where it came up, um... And it was very offensive. I remember—

LB: A play...?

ES: It was a play that was put on at school, and I just remember at times that coming up.

LB: Was it... in a way that was offensive because it was... or – how was it offensive, I should ask.

ES: I think—

LB: I mean, cuz I can imagine a thousand different ways.

ES: Yeah, and I can't remember the specifics of it, it was more of a feeling of just, um... it was hard for us – it was hard for me, when the issue came up, because, if I don't agree with slavery and I've never owned slaves, why is this issue – why am I being treated as if I agreed with it? You know?

LB: I see.

ES: And then, if you are a person whose – yes, your ancestors were slaves and that's a horrible, horrible thing. But if you never experienced that, if you and I are now on equal footing, things are changing, you are able to move freely in society, you are able to get an education, you're not being held back. So, why is this coming up between us? Do you understand what I'm saying?

LB: Yes. I didn't know whether you meant that it was whites [laughs], or blacks—

ES: Oh, no it was blacks. It was blacks in the play, but I honestly can't remember what was being said.

LB: Yeah.

ES: But I think for me, um – and that could be... I hope it doesn't sound insensitive because I know that that was a horrible thing, and a very painful thing. But I think we have to move way past it. In the context of the day that we live in.

LB: But on the other hand, I guess, my final question really is: Are there things that we as a community particularly need to remember, that we're in danger of forgetting? I mean, what would those things be in your mind?

ES: Um. Ooh. As far as racism goes?

LB: Well, as far as anything goes. As far as... what happened at Wythe, as far as the Civil Rights Era. I mean, cuz, you know, when we sat down, you were talking about how in Richmond we don't talk about those times. Are there things that you feel like we should be talking about or we should be remembering that we may be in danger of forgetting?

ES: Mm hmm... Hmm. Hm.

LB: Cuz there was, as you said, so much change going on.

ES: Yes. There was. Umm. Wow.... I... I don't... I mean, I think, just, um... I think the issue of treating people as we want to be treated is the biggest thing to me. And I

guess, realizing that... what we've come to was hard-won. It was very hard won. You know? Over the years, a lot of people, um... suffered a lot for it. And so we need to keep on moving forward... and attempting to get along and to mix... and see people as people, so... and for me, I think the biblical underpinnings of how we treat people, how we see people.

LB: Is there anything that I haven't asked you, that you wanted to talk about – anything that you'd like to add?

ES: Let's see. Umm... I can't think of anything. Umm...

LB: Well, thank you so, so much.

#3

LB: ...about the commonalities between your husband's experience and yours, cuz I think that's fascinating.

ES: Oh, sure. Oh, ok. Um, my husband, when his parents moved to a Jewish area of Nazareth, he met people and wanted to go to school with his friends, so they allowed him to go to a Jewish high school. And he was so fluent in Hebrew, more so than Arabic, that people thought he was Jewish. And he, um... really was cross-cultural and experienced a lot of teasing from people, from Arabs, or from family members who called him Moshi (?), which means Moses. And, um, you know, didn't like the fact that he was kind of in both worlds. And so, I feel like we experienced the same thing, you know, going to a high school where we were the minority, and learning how to get along with both, you know, and move in both cultures.

LB: It's really fascinating, I wonder whether that shared experience was part of what drew you together when you met.

ES: It could have been, although we didn't talk about it, but I think, maybe, him being able to come here, and just fit in and learn the language very quickly, and uh.... Do whatever he needed to do, you know.