



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER  
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA  
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



# Oral History Interview

with

Lillian Elizabeth Harris, Patsy Battle,  
Betty Overton, Michael Horton

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**Interviewer:** Francesco De Salvatore, and Kerry Reed

**Narrators:** Lillian Elizabeth Harris, Patsy Battle, Betty Overton, Michael Horton

**Location of Interview:** Charles Houston Center, Alexandria

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**Transcriber:** Dr. Donna M. DeBlasio

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## Summary:

This was a Story Circle interview with four interviewees. They discussed their varied backgrounds and focused on their jobs in the Alexandria Public School Schools. Ms. Harris was a special education coordinator; Ms. Overton worked in the cafeteria, Ms. Battle was a manager, and Mr. Horton started as a custodian and became a maintenance engineer. All three discuss their experiences in the Alexandria Public Schools. Ms. Harris attended school in Alexandria through high school and Mr. Horton attended high school in Alexandria.

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General	Alexandria Public Schools: prejudice/racism; memorable students, working in various positions
Places	Schools: Lyles-Crouch; Charles Houston; T. C. Williams; Minnie Howard
People	Bayton, Frances; Pollard, Lavina; Reverend Ross

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:00:03] Great. If we can start by maybe going around and introducing who you are. So, say your name. And, let's just start with that. If we could start with you.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:00:23] My name is Lillian Elizabeth Harris.

**Betty Overton** [00:00:26] Betty Overton.

**Patsy Battle** [00:00:27] Patsy Battle.

**Michael Horton** [00:00:30] Michael L. Horton.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:00:33] And I'm Francesco De Salvatore. I'm curious if you go around, maybe describe where you grew up. And what are your memories from growing up? You know, and it can be anything. I think it's an open-ended question.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:00:53] Well, I'm 77 and I'm a native Alexandrian. You don't usually find too many of them. And I actually grew up from the time I was six until I was 21, right across the street at 721 North Alfred Street. And I went to elementary school here at Charles Houston, and then I went to the only Black high school and graduated in the last Black high school. Black graduating class of the only Black high school here.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:01:20] And that high school was?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:01:22] Parker-Gray.

**Betty Overton** [00:01:29] Oh, I'm Betty Overton. And that's my married name. But I was born in West Virginia. And so, I came here, my husband and I, to make a living. Things was different in West Virginia, so, we come here. And, he was just working for a moving company. But after days and months, I found a job. It was one for the school. And I worked there until 50- from, until you know, for the job working, they announced that. That's when I decided, you know, I just started Alexandria School and I went there. And I got hired.

**Patsy Battle** [00:02:49] Me? My name is Patsy. Agnew's my maiden name; married name, Battle. I'm not from here. I'm from Mississippi. Born and raised there. Came up here in [19]67. Some of my family members lived here. And, my memories from home, well, you know, it's a lot of segregation down in Mississippi. And we went through a lot of stuff, but I guess it is okay, that's back in the day. When I was living there, we went through Emmett Till. The kids got bombed in Alabama, the girls. The three young Civil Rights workers in Mississippi--in Philadelphia, Mississippi. We went through all that. So, in [19]67 I came up here to live with my sister, and I brought my mom; I was real young. I was 17 years old, and I've been here ever since. I brought 3 of my sisters, siblings, to raise them. They went on to stay here until they got of age. They went to school here in Alexandria and they grew up and left. So, I'm the only one who stayed here. So yeah, I worked in the school system 39 years.

**Michael Horton** [00:04:09] I was born in Richmond, Virginia, and I came up here, I guess when I was about 14. I Lost both parents when I was young. And so that was the reason why I moved up here with my aunt; I was raised in Alexandria. And, I began to work for the school system in 1984. And I retired in 2019. I gave them 36 years. And, the memories of Alexandria is like, really is like, I went to T.C. Williams and graduated from T.C. Williams. And, that's it.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:05:03] So I know some of you didn't go to elementary or middle school or high school here, but I'm just curious if each of you could maybe share what are some of your fondest memories of school, whether it was in Alexandria or elsewhere. What are some memories that really stick out to you?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:05:21] I did go to school here on this site, Charles Houston School, and it was a

lot of fun because, like I said, we lived across the street and there was a big playground. So, every day after school at a certain--I think you had to stay off the playground for about half an hour and then you could just come up, and this is where you met all your friends. But also, back when I went to elementary school, all of the teachers are Black. I never had a white teacher, in fact. And so, they knew you and they knew your parents. And so, anything you did, you knew that they knew you lived across the street. And so, they were subject to walk over and let your parents know if there was an issue or something. And so, I liked that. And today I appreciate that because when my daughter went to school, we didn't have that closeness or that familiarity, with teachers. I did because I worked in a school system. And so, I had that. But when I was in high school, I was a cheerleader. I was a pompom girl. I was pretty popular in high school because just like I am now, I was pretty talkative, and I didn't have an issue with being friends with anybody.

**Patsy Battle** [00:06:32] No she didn't.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:06:33] And, we had just a lot of activities. And, besides being in school here, on, Pendleton Street, it was a USO [United Service Organization]. And so, on Friday and Saturday they had dances, and that was where the Black children went to dance, because we were not allowed to go to the [Oswald] Durant Center that was down on Cameron Street, or that is there. So, there were just a lot of things. We had active social clubs, right across the street and the Black history center [Alexandria Black History Center, now the Alexandria Black History Museum]--that was our library. Not like it is today--only the very front part was our library, just a little part. There was one table, a fireplace. And Miss Davis, who was always the librarian there. But it was a lot of stuff to do. Of course, we had curfews, unlike today. You knew when the streetlight came on during the summer, you went home. And when it was winter, you were probably home by 6:00 because there was just nowhere else to be. And, so it, it was a lot of fun. A lot of the people I grew up with in this neighborhood and like, from the 600 block to the 800 block, I'm still friendly with, because we all went to the same schools together.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:07:51] Thank you.

**Betty Overton** [00:07:53] Then we went down, for our school. I didn't, you know, graduate from here. So, my, connection with him to work with him was through the school.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:08:11] How about, even if he didn't go to school in Alexandria, what are some of your memories of school, whether it was in West Virginia?

**Betty Overton** [00:08:20] In West Virginia, because we it was just like it, you know, you didn't, did you didn't. Oh, how do I put it? Well, things were just different. You know, we had the living because my dad worked in the coal mine. And that's how we live. And like for a living would you just had living quarters; just like a normal living. But just, you know, there were things that came through in that by him working as coal miner. And they did, whatever did, did come for us, you know, to live with, that's how we lived. But it was, to me, it was a lot of fun from, you know, the childhood. And we played, and you know, and enjoyed, but the only thing, we didn't have things like they have here. And, when we learned to, you know, to do things for yourself like dancing and enjoying stuff like that, that's how we did, you know, and to enjoy that. So, now in the school system after we joined there, and I see it was a lot of things it was good for us only it was, you know, very different that you had to wait to see. I just feel at one time when we were working that, to being offered another position up, which I thought I could do, and we were never, you know, to do that until now. Later, now, I know that they have, you know, different positions open and there's people that, you know, filled that.

**Patsy Battle** [00:10:14] Well, in Mississippi. I came from a family of siblings--14 brothers and sisters. And, going to school, I remember we had this one big room from, they told us back in the day, from first grade to 12th grade--everybody went to school there. Everybody, all the Black kids. My going to school, going to town school was--my father used to take us and put us in the wagon and drive us to school on a tractor. And we all sit there, you know, like. Before we get to the school, my oldest siblings, they jumped off the wagon; they didn't

want their friends to see them coming on the wagon. [Laughter] But we've said that we thought it was a great joy to us because we just got out, you know. And we went through a lot of difficult times there, you know. We sometimes couldn't go to school because my father worked at Helms Farm. We had to do cotton and so, we picked cotton in the south; well, my older siblings did. And that was a fun time during the summer. We did go to school every day. I did graduate in 1967. The school was [unintelligible] now it's integrated; anybody can go there now. I liked living on a farm. Like I said, I had 14 siblings and my father made us a band to play--the piano out of a wood; sticks, out of the creek. And we formed our own band and everything, you know, brothers and sisters, like I had eight sisters and six brothers. And, it was just, like, kind of different. I lost my mom when I was 17. I'd just graduated from school, so I came here to live with my siblings. Left the other siblings at home, and we grew up here. They went the Parker-Gray. Me and her, I remember her, you know, when I came here. We all grew up in the church and we went to, you know, the times that--hard times. When Emmett Till was killed in Mississippi, my brothers, they couldn't go anywhere because they weren't allowed to go anywhere. Kids got bombed in Alabama, and I'm just across the creek from them. We couldn't go anywhere. Everybody was scared if kids go out, you know. And, it was a hard time, but you know what? It got better. But when I got up here, it was totally different. There was a lot of prejudice in the South, but I found out it was prejudiced more up here because at times we couldn't deal with how people treated us. Because down South was totally different. Everybody knew everybody. Black and white. It was no such thing as, you know. But here, it was kind of different, it was kind of hard for us to deal with it for a long time. But it got better, you know what I'm saying? Everything don't last forever. So, that's that. Great joy. I've been here fifty-some years. Yeah.

**Michael Horton** [00:13:43] The fun part I remember is the gambling part at school [Laughter] and attending the sports events, you know. Pep rallies and parties and everything. And yeah, I was there the year that T.C. Williams [High School] won their championship--football championship--in [19]71 and I graduated in [19]72. But overall, that's about it about me.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:14:21] Thinking about that time when you were younger, anyway were--they could be teachers, or it could be a staff person, or it could be someone in your community, who were kind of role models for each of you, that kind of helped, you know, show you, your way? You know, or helped you get on your way?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:14:45] My role model was really my mother. But, one of the teachers from this school lived next door to us.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:14:54] Who was that? Who was that teacher?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:14:54] Her name--oh, shoot--what was her name? Alma was her first name, and I cannot think of her last name. But she was very instrumental in helping all the children in the neighborhood. And, because I read a lot, she would give me books to read and, you know, just kind of talk to me a lot, kind of mentor me a bit. Because I might have been a little bit headstrong. And, [chuckles] and she would just, like, remind me that, "Okay, if your mother's saying it, it's probably right," because, I just thought that I should have a say. But there were also teachers here--this was a small school. Even though all the black children in the community went here, half of them went to Lyles-Crouch. But, like I said, your teachers lived in the neighborhood, and they walked home, back and forth from school. And, so they knew you and they took interest in things that you were doing. And so there were quite a bit. Lavinia Pollard was one of the teachers that by the time I was in the seventh grade, and I liked this boy, and, and she would just say to me, "There's always going to be a boy around. Don't make him more important." But things like that that you should know. A long time ago, parents didn't really talk to you about things that you should know about. If they didn't tell you in school, you kind of didn't know about these things. And so, she was instrumental in getting us in her room in the evenings after school and talk to us about, boys and health and PE kind of things that affected girls, and, so she was very instrumental in that. And I like that. And I think about that a lot. My aunt was married to Reverend Ross, who was at Third Baptist Church, and both of his daughters, Alma Brown and Frances Bayton were both teachers. I had a good rapport with them, because when I thought that I was going to be able to go

to college right from school, they were instrumental in helping me with what I should do, what I should know. That kind of stuff.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:17:13] How about you?

**Betty Overton** [00:17:15] Oh, I had one. She wasn't my teacher, but my daughter's teacher, Miss Hunter. And, the things that I saw her, how she was teaching, and I wanted her to help my daughter to be that way. And at first, I thought she was too strict. Then I saw, oh, this was to help her. And so from then on, it was just things like that in, from, [inaudible] in the church, Reverend Ross, I met them. And these were people that I didn't know anything about. And just to go to church, and I learned from them. And those are things that just so desperately I wanted in my daughter to be where she listened but, you know, things that they were doing Sunday school and stuff like that. And this was, what I really enjoyed about Miss Hunter, the teacher. For, you know, for, to me she did a lot to help her where she she's young and, I can go to church, but the thing that she did, you know, taught to the kids, I liked it that it, with my daughter.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:18:35] What were the things that you learned from her?

**Betty Overton** [00:18:38] How to be courteous people, but she knew. But just like, if something that didn't go right, or talking back--stuff when she's there if they have rules at the church, Sunday school or whatever, you're to listen. These are things that I, you know, if I wasn't there, so she was good, you know, for her. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:19:05] Thank you. How about you?

**Patsy Battle** [00:19:09] Oh, I'm sorry.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:19:09] You're good.

**Patsy Battle** [00:19:09] Like I said, I came here in the [19]60s. My mom taught us a lot of stuff. She had eight girls, so, you know, I was low on the totem pole. When I came up here, I had a sister that lived here, and she taught me a lot of stuff. Like I said, me and her were in church together. You know, we had a lot of great people that helped us along the way and everything. I have a daughter and son. My daughter's a deputy sheriff in Alexandria now. My son, he's a tractor-trailer driver. And I worked in schools, so I knew a lot of people. I've been getting to know a lot of people over the years. 39 years, you know everybody, anybody, everybody, all the kids, you know, in, and everybody in Alexandria you probably know, and you know you have a meeting with them. My kids went to school in Alexandria and when they got in trouble, something like that, I already know what's going on with them. I trailed them all the way up to 12th grade. So, it was different. Like I said, I wasn't from here, I just, I will say I grew up here more than I did in Mississippi because I came here when I was so young. But other than that, it was, it got better, like I said.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:20:45] Thank you.

**Michael Horton** [00:20:47] Basically, I didn't have no role model. And for me, I had to figure out life myself. And it was rough. So, I had, you know, decide, was I'm going to go right or left? Good or bad, wrong or right. So, I figured it out and here I am, for the good.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:21:16] Are there any teachers from T.C. Williams that you remember?

**Michael Horton** [00:21:22] No; just Coach Boone, you know.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:21:25] Who's Coach Boone?

**Michael Horton** [00:21:26] He coached the Titans in football. Mr. Campbell, which was PT2. His name was

Webb. Mr. Webb. He was a history teacher. Yes. That's about it.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:21:47] Was it Weber?

**Michael Horton** [00:21:49] Weber.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:21:50] George Weber.

**Michael Horton** [00:21:52] Right, thank you.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:21:54] Do you have any specific memories with any of them?

**Michael Horton** [00:21:56] No, because I was, you know, basically to myself all the time. In there, do what I had to do. You know, and I'm out. So, you look at it, you know, going thinking back, when I was like, 14, I could go up the street, play cards, drink liquor at 14 years old. So, you know, that's why I was saying that I had to figure it out for myself.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:22:30] I'm curious to hear more. I want to hear more about what the schools you either worked in or attended as students, you can do either or both. What do they look like for people who've never seen them, during those times? Can you describe what those schools looked like? And you know, if it's helpful, maybe you can think about what your favorite place in the school, maybe--if you had a favorite place. If you had a favorite place. But, for someone like me or others who've never seen these school. Can you describe them a little bit for us?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:23:15] Well, in both Charles Houston and Parker-Gray, everybody looked just like me. Students, teachers, everybody.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:23:22] And just to clarify I mean, the physical building.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:23:27] Okay, but that's what I was going to get to. This building actually was a two part; they had an upstairs and a downstairs, here. And so downstairs we had the music room. And that was a lot of fun, so you really looked forward to the two days that you had music, because it was just a lot of fun. You kind of were on your own. We had music teachers, but you were on your own and being able to just enjoy. And at that time, we had PE every day, so you went out on the playground and you played all kinds of stuff. Yesterday Margaret, who was the assistant in there, was doing something, and I said, "Oh, are we going to do a maypole dance?" And she didn't know what it was. But every year on May 1st, we had May 1st Carnival Day, and we wrapped the maypole. And so, you looked forward to that. That was a lot of fun. But there were also rooms that you could go in to. We didn't have, a study hall or any of that kind of stuff. But if you were having a bad day or you were having a bad time with this particular teacher, you were allowed to go into this room to kind of get yourself together, get you away from the teacher and teacher away from you or something--which was elementary school.

High school started in the seventh grade, which is unusual now. And so, by this time we walked down to Parker-Gray. Sort of looked the same, but it was a much bigger school. We had a gymnasium where we had PE instead of going outdoors. You actually had an orchestra room and a choir room and a music room. And so, it was different. We had an art center, you know, things that children have today. It wasn't as elaborate as it is today. It might have been that the music teacher also taught art because they didn't have all this. There was an auditorium that you were allowed to go in at a just a certain time of day. But the thing that's funny because my grandchildren think this was really crazy--we were not allowed to wear tennis shoes in school, except if you were in PE in the auditorium, I mean, in the gym, and you were not allowed to wear pants to school. And they're like, "Really? What was that about?" But that was just because we had a dress code, which I think is a great thing they ought to have today. But a dress code allowed us to look like we were students, you know, like we were going

somewhere to learn and not concerned about what we had on or something.

And we had a track; you could go out and run track after school. You didn't even have to be on a track team. So there were a lot of physical things you could do, and there are a lot of things that you wanted to do because unlike today, we didn't stay in and play on games and, you know, do that kind of stuff like they do. I think that it gave us more of an insight into what we ought to do. My grandchildren today would never think about going out to do this because they've got a computer and a this, and a that, and a something and something, so they don't even need to go outdoors unless they just went from building to building for something else. I think that taught us how to be entertaining to yourself, because we know how to entertain ourselves, because we didn't have to rely on other things. And just because, you kind of, make friends with people; you became friends rather than, electronics, you know, not knowing who it was you were with.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:27:09] So one quick, I don't know what just happened.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:27:13] And you missed all this stuff I just said?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:27:15] I think we missed maybe the last minute of it, just the last minute.

**Betty Overton** [00:27:19] Something happen?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:27:21] I guess.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:27:24] Oh, we got unplugged. Alright. Sorry about that.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:27:31] And I talked way too much to remember what it was I just said.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:27:35] I think we got most of it, just the last part of it.

**Patsy Battle** [00:27:37] Hmm hmm.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:27:37] But, but that's why I have multiple recordings going, so we still got what you said.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:27:44] They are also not nice to me. You notice how quickly they said, "hmm hmm." I'm offended. I'll leave. [Laughter]

**Patsy Battle** [00:27:53] Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:27:53] They're used to hearing you talk, huh. [Laughter]

**Patsy Battle** [00:27:59] All day.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:28:01] All day [laughs] Alright, let's see.

**Unidentified** [00:28:04] [sounds like owl hooting]

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:28:11] It's called an owl [Owl Labs Meeting Owl]. That's why it makes that noise.

**Betty Overton** [00:28:14] You have owls out here?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:28:16] Well, this thing.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:28:18] I saw that owl lab over there.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:28:21] Yeah, yeah, yeah, it makes an owl noise. It's really goofy. Sorry about this.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:28:51] Ok. Alright. Ok. Sorry about that. We still got you on these two other things, so we're good.

**Patsy Battle** [00:29:11] That's a relief.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:29:13] So I'm finished now.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:29:14] Now you're finished?

**Patsy Battle** [00:29:14] That's a relief.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:29:18] Yeah. How about you? What are your memories of the physical buildings that you either work that they either worked in or if you were a student in West Virginia?

**Betty Overton** [00:29:29] In West Virginia? Well, I only worked in, it wasn't like you had jobs or something. I wish I did. There was no work, a lot of work there. When I worked there after I finished school there before, I came, I worked at the hospital. And that was just like, you know, you're taking care of the patients. Giving them lunch, dinner, whatever. They were fine, you know, like that.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:30:01] How about the school in Alexandria? What is your memory of like, what the buildings looked like?

**Betty Overton** [00:30:06] Oh, for here?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:30:08] Yeah.

**Betty Overton** [00:30:08] From working at the school, because like I say, I was just working there. But I liked it and there were things that helped me a lot when I've, you know, to work with people and be, and enjoy you know. And, then things that I didn't know how to well, to bake, but it was a lot to me what I was taught by, you know, that one that supervising the other teachers. Yeah. So, I like that. And so this, it just was enjoyable to work, you know. It's the people that you work with, made your day.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:30:51] Which school did you work with?

**Betty Overton** [00:30:53] I worked at Lyles-Crouch. But, all different ones.

[00:30:57] [laughter].

**Betty Overton** [00:30:57] And I came over here, Lyles-Crouch, and I worked at T.C. Williams. I never worked at Patrick Henry.

**Patsy Battle** [00:31:08] No we did not.

**Betty Overton** [00:31:09] And then I worked at Hammond. And when they ended, when I retired, I retired from T.C. Williams. I loved them all because they have given me a good one there. Yes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:31:26] Lyles-Crouch now is totally different, right?

**Betty Overton** [00:31:29] Yes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:31:30] What did it look like when you were working there?

**Betty Overton** [00:31:34] They were, just, like, regular. And then they kind of smartened it up, you know, with things that they did in the school, stuff. Yeah.

**Unidentified** [00:31:43] [inaudible]

**Betty Overton** [00:31:45] Yeah, all the time.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:31:50] How about you? What are your memories of the physical building?

**Patsy Battle** [00:31:55] Here in Alexandria?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:31:56] Yeah, or in Mississippi, too.

**Patsy Battle** [00:31:58] Oh, well, in Mississippi, I didn't work.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:32:00] Not work, but what the school was like.

**Patsy Battle** [00:32:04] It was like she was saying basketball. I mean, there was stuff, you know, rules and regulations. I graduated from elementary, and I went to high school. It was totally different. Everybody went to school together, you know, graduated. They had prom, bands, and all that. When I came here, I started work for the school system in [19]81. It was a challenge; certain things they wouldn't allow us to do I always say I came in--I don't know about her--but it's a lot of prejudice. You know, certain things we weren't allowed to do. But my favorite school was John Adams. I worked in many schools. As a matter of fact, I worked at Lyles-Crouch, John Adams, John Tyler, Hammond, Polk--all the schools, really. I worked as a manager for many years. Then I left and went to Minnie Howard, where I retired from as a manager. It was all good and everything.

Like I said, I met a lot of people, you know. I knew a lot of people, knew a lot of students. They would come back and say, "Thank you for helping us." Where I went, I ran into some kids that didn't have nothing to eat. We always put up [inaudible] for them to eat lunch during the day. Of course, you know that because we all worked together in one school, and it was a challenge. Because when I was going to school in Mississippi, we didn't have proper food, like [inaudible]. But here, you know, a lot of kids here, a kid came here, didn't have no money. I mean, you know, so we always took care of them. And now on the street, I see some kids that I have that have graduated, going to college come back. They remember us, say "Thank you." And that was great.

So, Monday I was at the bank and I was depositing the money from the school system, and this guy walked up to me and said, this young guy works with me, said, "I can help you." I said, "that's okay. I'm fine." You know, I just want to talk to him. Now he's getting out of line help you; I need to help you. But I would. I didn't look at him. He said, ma'am, I told you, "I'll help you." I said, "I'm fine. I'm cool." You know what I'm saying? Just like that. And I looked around. It's the same kid I used to feed in school every day. He became a manager at the branch at Truist. And he remembered me all that time. He's been so good to me and my sister, because we didn't have nothing. And that, you know, that was great. You know.. We helped somebody along the way. Yeah. You know. Yeah.

**Michael Horton** [00:35:25] I remember the old T.C. Williams and, of course, they knocked it down and rebuilt the Alexandria City Public Schools [Alexandria City High School]. And I worked as a custodian, slash building engineer at Hammond for about 25 years. And then I worked for George Mason Elementary School, I guess about 5 to 10 years. Then I ended up at Charles Barrett Elementary School as building engineer. And, you know, really, those are my only memories.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:36:17] Just really quick. I don't know if everyone explained it, but could you explain what jobs you held in the school system and where was it? And also, what years? Some of you already did that, but you haven't had a chance to.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:36:34] I started working in [19]73 at Alexandria City schools and I worked in what was then called special education. After then it became student services because it was kind of offensive to say special ed and I worked in the same office for 36 years, but I started out as an executive assistant to the director there. Over time, I became a special ed coordinator. Met mostly with parents, didn't really work with students. Never had an opportunity to go out to the schools unless I was going to see a special ed teacher. So therefore, I didn't know any regular ed teachers except my child's or my grandchildren's, teacher. I didn't know Betty at all, or Michael, because I never went to these schools to see them, to know them. And like Patsy said, we were in church together, so we always knew each other. But I did, mostly just working with parents, trying to help them to make peace in some cases with the fact that their children were special ed, because you wouldn't believe the parents who fight against that, even though it's right in their face all the time. And, so that's what I did until I graduated from special ed at 36 years. But until I retired, I did pretty much the same thing. It changed a lot over 36 years, a lot. But that was mostly what I did.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:38:08] Betty, you've said a little bit, but could you explain like what you did in the schools and, and what years you worked?

**Betty Overton** [00:38:18] Well, mostly what I was doing was work as cashier. And then we had to learn, you know, how because it was something new. But it seemed like to me--I'm not going to say it is prejudice or whatever it was--but seemed like, you know, they were teaching you like you couldn't do this. The days you sat down and you watched and see them do it. So I felt then, you know, I said, "Well, maybe you're not going to ever get to learn," but later on we got hired, you know, to [be] a cashier, which I enjoyed and I learned a lot with that--what you did with the purchasing stuff and I learned that. So that was good for me. And then after that, I retired. Yeah; gosh, 26 [years].

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:39:28] Right. You're saying you're a manager, right?

**Patsy Battle** [00:39:37] Yeah. At work. I saw that like she did, like she said. Yeah. I was really a cashier. I basically worked a line, food service. You know. I became a manager. I worked there for a long time and then I transferred to Minnie Howard. I also worked at T.C. Williams as a system manager there. And then I moved to Minnie Howard. That's where I retired in 2014. It was a challenge, you know. You go there, you have to. It's like she says things so different now. Yeah, it was a little easier back then, but I enjoyed it. I'm glad I did it. I got a nice income, trust me.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:40:47] Yeah you mentioned it, but maybe just repeat.

**Michael Horton** [00:40:51] I had to oversee the building, you know; make sure the repairs and everything—the heat and the air conditioning and things are running and oversee the night crew, making sure that they were doing their jobs. I came into the system in 1984. When I started in the system, I started on special force. They called it special force, where I was serving, going from building, when people are out, I'll fill in in the daytime. And from there I became the custodian. And then I became the maintenance at those three schools.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:41:39] Could you describe what were the challenges of your job? What were some hard things or issues and challenges that you had faced?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:41:52] Let me see. You know, they didn't have any Black people working special. I think that's how I got the job. I think that most of the challenges I had were with parents. Parent, first of all, didn't want to talk to me. white parents who didn't want to talk to me, and parents who didn't want their

children to be special ed, because I never had an issue with the work. I never had an issue with the people I worked with. I think I was lucky in that regard, and that's why I could work in that one office for 36 years.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:42:25] Is there a specific instance with a parent that comes to mind?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:42:37] Like, yeah, this is like a phone call thing. We eat lunch all the time with this group that I worked with. Every month we go to lunch. But I remember when a lady came up and she wanted to talk, and the lady next to me said, "Oh, it's her you have to talk to." And she wouldn't talk to me, so she left. And then the phone rang, and I just happened to answer the phone because I don't know where the secretary was. And she said, "Well, I want to talk to anybody except that colored woman." I said, "This is that colored woman." And she slammed the phone down. But I just had to laugh at it because you needed me, you know? You needed me. You had to come through me, unfortunately. But, no, I never had any issues. There was never anybody who filed any grievance. There would be like, men from other countries who refused to talk to a woman. It wasn't just against me. They wouldn't talk to any woman in there. So, they would come back the next day and bring a child with them and let the child do the talking or something. But you know, that that was their issue. So. Yeah, but no, no big deals; nothing that ever made me think I need another job.

**Betty Overton** [00:43:55] And this is for the children. And of course, they come in. If they were for lunch or whenever, they can't have it, and you'd explain it to them. Well, okay then. The best thing for me to do is go get supervisor or a teacher. That way, they explained it all. The more I talked, the worse it got. I did feel like they didn't believe me. what I was saying, but there were rules that had to be followed, you know, for them to eat. And so, I was only trying to help them to eat.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:44:38] Well, what were the challenges?

**Patsy Battle** [00:44:42] You really want to know? Some of the kids were rough. You have just got to be with them, you know? I ran into some tough kids, throwing trays at you and everything. "It's okay," I told them. "I get you back; I get you back." That's what I did to them. And I wasn't being harsh. I had 12 people worked under me. And this one lady, they treated her so bad. I stood in there every day and he harassed her every day. Five days a week. She come to me. I said, "Okay, we'll get it. We'll get it." So, one day he came in the cafeteria, in the line to get lunch. He said something to her, and I was standing there. I didn't say anything to him at all. When he went to sit down with his lunch, I went and got his lunch off the table in front of him and threw it in trash can. So, he went and told the principal that I did that. And I told him, "Yes, I did," because I'm not going to let him talk to my staff any way he pleased. But, first of all, we came in early in the morning and make sure he had lunch. But you know what? He still never did it again. He became my best friend. [unintelligible] And he became my best friend. And the best friend I'm telling you about, the one I told you about the bank. Because he had a problem. Issue of being mean, you know, and hateful. It's okay. I told her like, like I told my manager, "We'll get him; I know exactly how to treat him." So that was a big challenge. And now it's different. Everything, it's like; I'm glad I retired in 2014. But I had some good years here. Good friends. Yes. Good teachers. But I liked them all. They like me. They had to. They gave me a nice party. It was good. I enjoyed it.

**Michael Horton** [00:47:20] For me it was the kids, especially at Hammond. And the reason why is those kids talk back. And then when I moved on to the elementary school, they don't talk back. You know that that was the challenge trying to deal with the children.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:47:43] So was it mainly talking back?

**Michael Horton** [00:47:48] Yeah; trying to hold your peace so you don't hit him or put your hands on them. You know, some kids managed...

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:48:01] Are there specific staff or students that you can select? Each of these places you worked with, are there any specific like you would you might like talking about any sort of staff or

colleagues you had? Or students? The ones that didn't talk back, maybe. What specific individuals that you remember that stand out during your 30 plus years working?

**Lucille Elizabeth Harris** [00:48:27] I guess the most, the one that I would think of the most—his name is Jimmy. He was autistic, but he was a savant. You could draw 15 numbers and he can tell you what the total was. And he today works at Truist Bank. He will not talk to you and will not, you know, look eye yo eye, but he does their accounting kind of stuff. And his parents were very, very nice. They owned the, import rug place on Duke Street. So, they were always bringing us food and gifts and, that kind of stuff. But he's the one who stands out the most of all the children in the 36 years. And maybe another little boy who, just was always in trouble. He didn't want to go to school. And so, he would just fight a teacher or fight anybody, just so he wouldn't have to go. And today that boy is in prison for having killed two people. You feel bad about that. I never taught any of the, so I don't feel bad that I was not instrumental in doing this, but I was his coordinator, and, you know, to his mother. But they're like a really good story and a really bad story. But the people I worked with, like I said, every month or every six weeks, we have dinner, we have lunch, and there are 12 of us and we are all Facebook friends, you know, we all have lunch. We still go to each other's children's affairs, weddings, funerals, whatever. And I think we'll always be friends like that, of that group. We just kind of had a lot of respect for one another, and it carried over in our personal life. We were not just colleagues, but we became friends as well.

**Betty Overton** [00:50:28] I have still have some friends, students that I see. Like they'll say, oh, I know you. It's been a long time. So then again, when I see them, just glad to see them and ask them how they're doing. They're doing fine, you know, to grow up. If there's a problem, I think they outgrew it. It would. They come to say, "Hi. It's good to see you."

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:50:52] Are there any specific students that come to mind?

**Betty Overton** [00:50:58] One she had was autistic? Then again, I thought to myself, these children need help. And then right now they are learning. And if you just try to help along the way, they get better, you know, at least and, you know, you tried to help them, whatever the problem was.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:51:27] How about you?

**Patsy Battle** [00:51:29] I had one student; he would never eat lunch every day. I had to give him his lunch every day. You know, we had, like, we had, like, three lines, like two ladies on a line and a cashier. He would never eat lunch. He wouldn't let them touch him; I know that. He was autistic; but he would never eat lunch until I come out there every day and sit with him. I'd take his lunch to him, me and him walk to the table and we sit down, and he ate. But he would never let nobody touch him. He would always sit there and eat his food. When he finished, he would say, "Thank you, Miss Pat," and he'd go to his class. I can never figure that out. Then I had some that I just had to really get ruthless with, you know. I'm serious. Yeah, I was [00:52:29] [unintelligible] back in the day. I used to tell them that.

My son went to T.C. Williams, too, and I had to go and smack him a couple of times. And that's what I liked about in the school system. My kids went through the school system—from Polk, to Hammond, to Minnie Howard, to T.C. Williams. I followed them all the way through, and I know all their teachers and they know to not do nothing in school. So, I had to go out and set him straight. My son got mean with a teacher, and I told him I didn't send him to school to be a clown; you get your education. So, I hit him in front of the principal. I did. But it's all right. He did good. He didn't do it no more. He's a good kid. A lot of kids, good kids went to the schools. A lot of them. A lot of them had trouble, but a lot of them was good kids. But I'm still glad I retired. Thank you.

**Michael Horton** [00:53:53] Mine's at Charles Barrett, the school nurse. You know, I could go there, you know, and we could talk about things. She could take my blood pressure, kept me up with all the medical things that we discussed. Kind of like had a doctor away from the doctors. I appreciated it.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:54:16] What was her name?

**Michael Horton** [00:54:17] What was her name? I can't think of her name because she came from Jefferson Houston. Perez. Miss Perez.

**Lucille Elizabeth Harris** [00:54:29] Yeah. Yeah, I remember her, Miss Perez.

**Michael Horton** [00:54:32] Nice lady. [Inaudible]. You know it.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:54:40] Is there anything I haven't asked that you want to share?

**Kerry Reed** [00:54:49] I want to ask a question. My name is Kerry, if you forgot. I was very interested, were there any city policies. that were enacted in the school system during your tenure there that you didn't agree with? Like anything that the city did? You thought like, that's really dumb or anything or you thought that was really good. Anything like that.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [00:55:03] Well, you know, there is a lot of prejudice in the system. Yes. I don't ever remember an elementary or high school having a brand-new textbook. Not ever. But my friends who went to GW almost every year, they had brand new textbooks. And like I said, I was in the last graduating class from Parker-Gray. And this guy, unfortunately, the year before us, had embezzled a lot of money. You know, the juniors prepare for the seniors to get their yearbook and all that. This guy embezzled the money, so the yearbook people decided that they would not honor their last class. They wrote letters, and we wrote letters to Doctor Albom, who was the superintendent then; who in the interim, they took his name off a lot of stuff because of his prejudiced behavior. But he said, "No, they didn't deserve it." But had it been GW, he would never have done that. He would never have said, no, they don't deserve it. So, the last graduating class from the only Black high school in the city has no yearbook. We have no yearbook. But that board went to jail and we were all great about that. That's a lot. But, yeah, that was an issue, a big issue.

We used to have a girls' basketball team. But because the white girls didn't want to play basketball, they took the basketball out of Parker-Gray, too. They said it wasn't a girl's sport. Tell that to that girl who just broke that record. Not a girl's, sport. So, yeah, there was some things, but some things since I worked there as well with T.C. Williams. That's why they took his name off of everything, you know? Yeah. They've got video of him saying "n\*\*\*\*\* don't need to do this." You fired the lady in the cafeteria because she wanted to work at the white school and you said "No." Yeah, it's been a lot of stuff.

**Patsy Battle** [00:57:13] Yeah. It has. We came in, like she was saying it was too prejudice; it was. We came in on the school system, we weren't allowed to count money. Blacks weren't allowed to count money, During the summer, when they had summer school, Blacks were not allowed to work. Only the whites. Every day, cashier only white. We were the dishwashers, the servers. But we did not count money. We weren't allowed to be a manager, because they were saying that you have to have a college degree. But later on, like I said, things changed. [unintelligible] They still get different supervisors in and things start changing. Maybe in the [19]90s you start changing about. But she kept in mind, like I told you, I never was the cashier. She was the cashier. I was a line worker, but I know we had it. We went through a lot of harsh stuff at school system, like during the summer. We didn't have no job. We had to stay home. Summer school every summer. We didn't work, did we? Did you work? No, we did not. So yeah, it was a lot of pressure. Yes. And if you look at it now, it's still in there, but it's hidden. But now it's coming out. Yeah it is. When I came, I really hated it because I never knew what it was to be, you know, like, "you can't count no money," you know what I'm saying? That's the one thing we're taught in school was know how to count money. One, two, three, four, five pennies. You know what I'm saying? You go to the store today; your parents give you five pennies. You know what it is. One, two, three, four, five. But they said we didn't know anything.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:59:32] I'm sorry you experienced that.

**Patsy Battle** [00:59:35] Oh, yeah. I must say, I mean, this is what you want to know. You know what I'm saying? I'm just telling, you know, and they knew it.

**Betty Overton** [00:59:43] And then we were allowed to carry the money to the bank. You know, from the day you take this money and then they trust you there, but, I mean, you can't count money, but then you had people that could count, and they know that.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [01:00:00] You can't count it, but you could take it to the bank? Sorry, I know you said not to interrupt. What kind of sense does that make?

**Betty Overton** [01:00:08] Oh, yeah. It was my job every day. Sometimes, I used to be afraid, you know. [unintelligible] One time, I remember specifically, the bank said the money was wrong and I said, "Okay. But I never had a problem." I took all the money over to the bank, went there, and they counted it out. There was a penny in there and couldn't find it; it was stuck in it [the bag]. He says, "Well, this money is not right until we get everything balanced out." Another thing I did was turn the bag over, just like they had, gave it a shake and that one penny came there, and then I'm all right there. But I mean, these little bitty things, you know, they're just so dumb to me. But you, you trusted me there. But then you say this is not done for a penny and look in there. So, what are you trying to say? You know, I think I'll handle the money. Still nothing. What? It was just for you saying that like that. So. But that's why I tell you. You work, but still, they needed your help, but didn't want to give you the credit for what you were doing. But I've learned a lot from that stuff going on there. But like I say, never again would I want money like that.

**Patsy Battle** [01:01:42] Yeah, that's the way it was. Down south Southern, it wasn't that prejudiced down there. Everybody thought it was so nice up here, but I found out about it. I didn't know what it was until I came here. Where I came from, we were all treated equal, you know. [unintelligible]

**Francesco De Salvatore** [01:02:16] So is there anything you want to say? Do you have any questions before I close out? We'll just close out with one last question. If each of you can talk about if there's a memory that you can hold on to for the rest of your life, what would that memory be?

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [01:02:52] From working?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [01:02:54] Just generally, that would be anything. I know that's a big question.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [01:02:58] My memory would be when my first grandchild was born.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [01:03:02] First grandchild.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [01:03:03] The happiest day. Yeah.

**Betty Overton** [01:03:07] What I really like is my family. And I now it's just me and my sister. But if I could just, you know, say I love them. They're all they're gone. But I love them dearly. And I just like to see if God can allow me to just remember any good time that we had and stuff like that, and to still be happy.

**Patsy Battle** [01:03:46] Where my memories are going was my two, twin grandsons, their graduation from high school. And the joy is I have a 14-year-old at Minnie Howard. He goes to school there. And I have an 18-month-old granddaughter. Oh, Jesus. That'd be a challenge for them. But it was something that we all have to go through. You know, our folks used to say you have to step in the water and come back out and have your shoes dried. It'll be alright.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [01:04:38] Mississippi maybe. They don't say it in Alexandria. We have a lot of water here, too.

**Patsy Battle** [01:04:47] You gotta have fun sometime. You got to say something funny sometime. Anything can be serious in life, right? That's right. Got to either sing or dance. I dance, but don't sing. Thank you.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [01:05:08] How about you? What's your memory?

**Michael Horton** [01:05:09] Mine be my wedding.

**Lillian Elizabeth Harris** [01:05:13] You're getting married?

**Michael Horton** [01:05:13] My marriage, back in 1972. Oh, that would be my fond memory. And, I lost my wife in 2016. Thank God that we were together for 43 years.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [01:05:38] Well, I want to thank each of you for sharing some of your memories and stories today. I think each of you, it's clear, were like a very valuable part of the school system. And I hope you feel that. I know, you know, like, our school system so big, a lot of staff. But I think, like, each of the work that you guys did, was very valuable. And I know it wasn't easy. And I know some of these memories are not easy to remember. Some of the prejudice and racism that you experienced. Thank you so much for sharing.