

**Oral History Interview of
Clarence Priestly**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
November 10, 2017
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*African American Interview Series***

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Interview Series Background:

The African-American Oral History Collection documents the diverse perspectives of the African-American people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, segregation, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Clarence Priestly as he discusses his career in education. In this interview, Clarence describes how he got involved in education, facing discrimination in the classroom and school district, and his advice for future educators.

Length of Interview: 00:49:03

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Introduction and background information	05	00:00:00
Education, interest in teaching	10	00:04:44
Getting drafted: GI bill	13	00:08:42
Teaching; how education changed	16	00:12:41
Encouraging respect; classroom	20	00:18:36
How discrimination in the school system is changing	22	00:26:13
Enforcing discipline	26	00:32:07
Favorite subject to teach; other activities he was involved in	27	00:34:49
Relationship between the community and church	29	00:40:50
Advice for future educators	32	00:45:58

Keywords

Education, Discrimination, Teaching, Administration, Principal

Margaret Randal (MR):

Housekeeper either.

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Good. Neither am I.

MR:

You turn on the power first?

AW:

Um-hm.

MR:

Okay. I hope I got this right. How do I know—okay, I see it.

AW:

Yeah. And once it comes up fully, then you can—

MR:

Start recording.

AW:

Yeah.

MR:

All right, it's going.

AW:

We'll set this close enough so that they both do a good job of picking up.

MR:

I have one of the—I have the form. Mrs. Priestly, do you remember seeing this form when it came in the mail, giving us permission to record?

Ruth Priestly (RP):

Wait, let me—yeah, uh-huh.

MR:

Well, here's another one.

RP:

It's still here.

MR:

Okay. Then this is one that you all can keep for your records. Because I think—

RP:

Okay. I think it is the second one. That's your handwriting.

MR:

You can keep that letter there.

RP:

Okay. Keep this? Clarence do you want to turn a little or are you all right?

Clarence Priestly (CP):

Hm?

RP:

Are you all right? You're going to have your head if you look right at him.

MR:

Do you have a clipboard or something that we can put under this so he can sign?

RP:

Yeah. Let me—

AW:

Or you can do that later.

MR:

Oh okay. All right. Okay.

AW:

Remember to push that button one more time.

MR:

Thank you. We want to record, don't we? [Laughs]

AW:

I can't tell you how many times I've gotten halfway through and realized I hadn't done that.

MR:

The one at the top?

RP:

Oh really?

AW:

No, right in the middle.

MR:

Oh, "record." Okay, good. That's good. Thank you.

AW:

If I hadn't made that mistake myself, I wouldn't know. [laughter]

MR:

I had been wondering, Why don't I hear anything?

AW:

So, for our recording, I want to say this is Andy Wilkinson. It's the tenth of November, 2017.

I'm at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Priestly—2801 Vanda—and Margaret Randal is with us today.

We want to get you to tell us about your career as an educator.

RP:

He's very hard of hearing.

AW:

All right. If you have difficulty hearing me, just tell me to repeat and I'll try—

CP:

You need to be a little louder.

AW:

Okay. What we're wanting to do is get you to talk about your history as an educator. But I would like to begin by asking you when you were born and where.

CP:

When I did what?

AW:

Where you were born and when, what year.

CP:

Born March 1, 1930. Eighty-seven big ones.

AW:

That is. [laughs] That's eighty-seven big ones. Where were you born?

CP:

In Lubbock.

AW:

In Lubbock?

CP:

Yeah.

RP:

Tell him, "I heard 19th Street."

AW:

Where on—in Lubbock?

CP:

I was born between 18th and 19th Street on Avenue L.

AW:

On Avenue L?

CP:

Uh-huh. In Lubbock.

AW:

Yeah. That's great. Was that where your parents lived?

CP:

Was that what?

AW:

Were you born in the home of your parents or was that a hospital?

CP:

Back then, they didn't have hospitals for us. You had to go to the basement. No. I was—a midwife.

AW:

A midwife. So in your home?

CP:

Yeah.

AW:

What did your folks do? What was their work when—

CP:

My mother was a person that took of care of homes; homebody. She did some work in housekeeping homes on the weekends. Then my daddy shined shoes probably about fourteen years downtown at Collier's [?] [0:04:14] Barber Shop. I don't know if you remember where that is. On Texas Avenue.

AW:

Texas Avenue? Yes.

CP:

He shined shoes there. Of course, I came along and shined shoes, too—

AW:

Did you? At the same—

CP:

—a few years in high school.

AW:

Same barber shop?

CP:
Yeah.

AW:
You shined shoes at the same barber shop?

CP:
Yeah.

RP:
Later he became his own.

AW:
Where did you go to school? Where did you start your education?

CP:
What?

AW:
Where did you start your education? Where did you go to school in Lubbock?

CP:
The service?

AW:
No. School. Where did you go to school in Lubbock?

CP:
I went to Dunbar. It was—I went to Ella Iles, which was a primary, and then Dunbar. Finished in 1946.

AW:
Nineteen forty-six?

CP:
At Dunbar.

RP:
[Pause] Tell them about your elementary.

AW:

Yeah. He said Ella Iles. Was there a junior high or was Dunbar all—was Dunbar junior high and high school?

CP:

It was all together.

AW:

All together?

CP:

Yeah.

AW:

We were talking earlier today—Margaret and I—about Dunbar. I remark that I always enjoyed going to that school to visit. It always seemed like a really good school. What was it like when you were young and going to Dunbar?

CP:

Everything was good because we all knew each other, knew parents, and we got along real good. Didn't have a lot of fights and all that kind of things.

AW:

There was a community, a sense of community. Is that right? Did you become interested in teaching when you were in school?

CP:

Well, I had some suggestions from a couple of the teachers at Dunbar. They asked what was I going to do as far as what courses I was going to take. I went to the University of Colorado.

AW:

You did? In Boulder?

CP:

In Boulder. That's where I got my master's degree. A guy—well, he's passed on now, but his son is still living—Damon Hill.

AW:

Yes. Damon Hill?

CP:

Um-hm. His daddy told me that if I was going to be in the school business, I'm not going to be able to be at the top. And I despised him [?]. So he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to the University of Colorado at Boulder," because I had the GI bill. You know how they advertise, "Cool, colorful Colorado?"

AW:

[Laughs] Yeah.

CP:

That's where I go to get cool. [AW laughs]

MR:

So, Mr. Priestly, where did you do your undergraduate work?

CP:

At Huston-Tillotson.

MR:

At Huston-Tillotson.

CP:

It was Samuel Houston then.

MR:

It was Samuel Houston then. Oh okay.

CP:

Now I finished in 1950. Two years later, they merged Huston and Tillotson, so it's Huston-Tillotson. And that's spelled S-u—H-u-s-t-o-n.

MR:

Yes, right. It's spelled H-u-s-t-o-n. Was it in Austin or was it in—where was it?

CP:

It was in Austin.

MR:

It was in Austin, okay.

CP:

See, we couldn't go to school here at Tech. We had to go at least three hundred miles to go to school because you couldn't go here. They wouldn't let you go.

AW:

Because you were black?

CP:

Right.

AW:

So at Huston, did you study education at Huston?

CP:

I took education courses.

RP:

And biology.

CP:

I minored in biology.

AW:

Biology. [Pause] You mentioned that the University of Colorado, you were on the GI Bill. Did you go into the service after your undergraduate?

CP:

Well, I went in the service in 1951, and came out—I only spent two years, but I got three years credit.

MR:

So you graduated from Dunbar then went to Sam Huston, then went—

CP:

To Colorado.

MR:

—to Colorado, then to the military? Or to the military before you went to Colorado?

CP:
Yes.

RP:
No, he went to New Mexico State a little while.

MR:
Okay. What year did you graduate from Dunbar?

CP:
In '46.

MR:
Nineteen forty-six you graduated from Dunbar.

RP:
He went to New—

MR:
And then after Dunbar you went—

CP:
To Austin at Samuel Huston.

MR:
Okay. And you graduated from there in—

CP:
I graduated from Samuel Huston. It's Huston-Tillotson now.

MR:
So you graduated in what year?

CP:
Nineteen fifty.

MR:
Okay. Sam Huston. So then you went to the military? Or did you go to the University of Colorado next?

RP:
Military.

CP:
I went to the military first.

MR:
Went to the military. So were you in the Army? The Air Force?

CP:
Army.

MR:
Did you get drafted.

CP:
I was in artillery.

MR:
Artillery. Oh okay. Were you drafted?

CP:
Oh yeah. I didn't volunteer. [laughter] I learned a long time ago don't ever volunteer.

MR:
That sounds like Andy. He was drafter. So you were drafted in what year?

CP:
In '51.

MR:
Nineteen fifty-one. Oh okay.

RP:
Then he went to New Mexico State after coming from Boulder, Colorado. After [pause] getting his master's, he went over there.

AW:
When you were in the military, did you—was Korea going by then in '51? Or did you—where was your duty?

CP:

I didn't go across seas. I was stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma the whole two years.

AW:

Artillery, right.

CP:

I did go to CBR [**C**hemical, **B**iological, and **R**adiology] School at Camp Bullis near San Antonio. I did go there for about three weeks.

RP:

When you were in service.

CP:

They called it CBR School, Chemical, Biological, and Radiological warfare.

AW:

So you left the military and went then to the University of Colorado first, right? And got your master's degree there?

CP:

Yeah.

AW:

In Education?

CP:

Yeah. And minor in psychology.

AW:

Mrs. Priestly mentioned that you went to New Mexico State.

CP:

Yeah. I went to New Mexico State to take advantage of the time I had left on the military deal. So I was just taking courses then so I could use up all I needed. I went to New Mexico State and went to Texas Tech to finish out all my deal.

AW:

Yeah. But your degree was from Colorado—

CP:
Right.

AW:
—and not New Mexico State or Texas Tech?

CP:
No.

AW:
Just getting that straight. When did you start teaching? When did you get into the education business?

CP:
Well, I started in 1953. I commuted every day to Shallowater.

MR:
So your first job was in Shallowater?

CP:
Huh?

MR:
So your first teaching job was in Shallowater?

CP:
Yeah, right. It's about eleven miles from city limits, so I commuted every day. I taught the upper grade. It was a two-teacher school. Of course, it was segregated. That's natural. A lady by the name of Rosanna Harriet was the other teacher, and I was the other one. So it was just two of us. Naturally we had more kids than we needed right there in there.

AW:
But that was it? Just the two of you?

CP:
Yeah.

RP:
So he taught every grade. [sighs]

AW:

How long did you teach in Shallowater?

CP:

In Shallowater?

AW:

Um-hm.

CP:

Six years. Then I got on in Lubbock.

AW:

Where did you start in Lubbock? What school?

CP:

What school?

AW:

Yes.

CP:

Ella Iles.

AW:

Where you'd gone to school. [laughs]

CP:

Yeah.

AW:

And you were a teacher? You were not an administrator at this point?

CP:

Well, when I got to Ella Iles, they hired me as a sixth grade teacher. So I taught sixth grade for three years. I was assistant principal for three years, and principal for three years. So I spent a total of nine years at Ella Iles—

MR:

So you were the principal—

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CP:

—before they transferred me. See, I was the first black American—African American, whatever you want to call me. I was the first one that they transferred across town. Of course, you know how they played the game then. It was sixty to forty, the racial mix, at Bozeman Elementary. So they transferred me along with several students. We had naturally—when I moved in as principal, the funniest thing—one angry [?] old lady said, “You know, you’re prejudice.” They said, We love your wife, she’s not prejudice. I said, “I just got here. How do you know I’m prejudice?” I said, “I’m color blind.” They said, No you’re not. They said, We love your wife. I said, “I’m glad you do. I do too.” I said, “I’m not prejudice.” It took me about two weeks for them to realize that I wasn’t prejudice. It was a lot of fun back then.

AW:

How long were you at Bozeman?

CP:

Eighteen years.

AW:

[Pause] Did you retire from Bozeman?

CP:

Yes.

AW:

What—that’s a long career, and an interesting career. Very interesting career. Can you talk a little bit about the changes in education over the time that you were a teacher and a principal?

CP:

Well, things are better now because both sides know how to play the game better. So it’s better than it used to be. There’s still a long way to go, but it’s much better than it used to be. A lot of things have taken place. If all races would just respect each other. A lot of them always said, What do you want me to call you? Black? Mexican American? I said, “I’d rather you call me Clarence Priestly.” If you don’t know my name, just show respect and I don’t have to tell you whether I’m black, Mexican American, or whatever. That should have nothing to do with what happens. Respect is the bottom line.

AW:

I like that.

CP:

She's a prime example. She's not prejudice. I know. She had us up to Wheatley—it was Wheatley Elementary then. I don't know if you remember. You had several of us principals to come up to Wheatley and you recognized all of us by different letters. Do you remember that?

MR:

I do. I remember that.

AW:

I know you'll—Margaret, you'll have questions about maybe the more technical aspects of teaching. I love that you talk about respect as the bottom line. How do we help change things further now to get us more toward that respect being the bottom line? What do we have to do?

CP:

Well, I always say you can't legislate love. I don't care what they say in Washington, D.C., they can't legislate you to like me and me to like you. We just have to do it individually. You can't do it on the national level. That's what I feel like.

MR:

Mr. Priestly, now children when they go to school, they have a cell phone, they have a laptop, they have an iPad. Some of them have two cell phones. When you started teaching, what kinds of things did you have in your classroom? You said that you and Ms. Harris were—you were a two-teacher school. So I know you didn't have a cell phone. You didn't have a computer or an overhead projector and all that kind of stuff.

CP:

You had textbooks and yourself, and the kids. Because then, like I said, you had parents who supported you. Whatever it was going to take to get them to learn. The parents respected you enough as a teacher. See, parents, in a lot of cases now, don't respect kids. They don't respect. They don't respect anybody.

MR:

So what was a typical day like? What time did school start and end? So what kinds of things did you do during the day?

CP:

Talking about Shallowater?

MR:

In Shallowater, yes. And then in—when you taught at Ella Iles.

CP:

Well, I always go to work early, I'll put it that was.

MR:

So what's early? What time was that?

CP:

Well, I'd get there between 7:30 and 7:45, and start the day off. Because a lot of their parents had to go to work, so they dropped their kids off, and somebody had to be there. You wouldn't expect teachers to come in early unless you were in administration.

MR:

Okay. And so you had textbooks. Did you do reading, and math, and science, recess?

CP:

If you wanted anything, you had to buy it. The district did not purchase a whole lots of things as they do now, like computers and all. Whatever you've got, you either had it already or you had to go buy it. If you loved the kids, you wanted them to learn. A prime example—you know Floyd Price.

AW:

Yeah, I know Floyd. I used to be a—I was once a policeman in Lubbock, and I worked with Floyd.

CP:

He's a prime example. He always had a lot of respect for everybody, but I always said he would arrest his mother if she did wrong. [AW laughs] He was a prime example of what can happen in a rural area when you have one-on-one instead of—like in Lubbock, one time—an example—we had a combination room at Ella Iles that had twenty-five people in. She knew that we had way too many in a combination room. It's just at the primary level.

MR:

Tell him what a combination room is.

CP:

That's when you have two different classes combined. In other words, a class of second graders with some third graders in the same room.

MR:

So how do you teach in a combination room? How do you teach a second grader while you're teaching a third grader? How do you do that?

CP:

Well, you just group them. You'd have to have groupings. And I always, when I had them, I let the third graders—as an example—help me some with the second graders, gave them responsibility to help instead of just sitting there waiting on me or whatever. That's what I did. I don't know how a lot of them do it.

AW:

When you say "we had to buy," you meant out of your pocket as a teacher?

CP:

Yes, if you were you going to get it. Well let me give you an example. And this was way back when. I retired in 1986 from Bozeman Elementary School. I had been trying for quite a while—I sent in a work order—after-work order—to the central office. She knows what I'm talking about. Had my secretary do it. And they didn't have any money to do what I wanted done. I said, "My goodness." When I retired, I didn't get off the front steps before they revolutionized the whole office complex, and hired an assistant principal, which they said they didn't have any money when I was principal. We had—we trained six and seven hundred students, and they never gave me an assistant principal. They said, You can do it. I said, "Yeah, I guess." It was when I got off the front porch, everything—you would've thought it was Waldorf Astoria when you walked into Bozeman. Some of the teachers called me about a week after I retired and said, You ought to come back over here. I said, "For what?" They said, You wouldn't recognize the school you worked in. I said, "I wouldn't?" They said, No, they've completely redone the whole office complex and so forth.

MR:

What is that for? He's touching his cheek. What is that for?

CP:

Wrong color.

MR:

Okay. I wanted to make sure that was noted.

CP:

That's where it was.

AW:

Do you know—is it changing any? Is it getting any better here?

CP:

Well, overall, yeah. I'd say it's better, but we've still got a long ways to go. They know how to do it, how to play the game [MR coughs] better now.

AW:

When you say, "They know how to play the game better," you mean that they're still doing the same thing, but they're better at getting away with it? Is that right?

CP:

Yeah, I'd have to agree. You can walk in a store—for an example—let me give you prime example. Long years ago, we walked into—my wife and myself—walked in Scoggin-Dickey Buick company. The salesman was standing over there looking. They looked over at us and didn't even come over. So they said, Can we help you? I said, "I hope you can." And that's how I bought the first Buick at Scoggin—one thing—after they found out one of their daughters was teaching for me, they got busy then. That's what I mean.

AW:

Yeah. [Pause] So the principal that replaced you at Bozeman was white?

CP:

Yeah. Mr. Mears, M-e-a-r-s. He was the principal before I came.

MR:

He was the principal at Bozeman before you?

CP:

Yes.

MR:

So then who came—okay, so it was Mr. Mears, then Mr. Priestly, then who came next?

CP:

Yeah. Mr. Mears was there first. Then I came.

MR:

Then who came?

CP:

Then Mrs. Solomon took my place.

MR:

Caroline Solomon?

CP:

Caroline Solomon.

MR:

Okay. What—when you—you said that you had been—okay, you were a sixth grade teacher at Iles for three years.

CP:

Yeah. I was at Ella Iles a total of nine years.

MR:

Okay. You were the sixth grade teacher for three years, you were the assistant principal at Iles for three years, and you were the principal at Iles for three years.

CP:

Right.

MR:

How—if you had to compare being the principal at Iles—which was probably predominantly black or African American school—

CP:

Yeah it was.

MR:

—then going to Bozeman that was primarily—

CP:

Well, that's what happened. The kids from Iles went over—a lot of them moved over to the Bozeman area. So they sent me—I was the first black principal to go across town. We had a lot of—we had a whole lot of Anglo students at Bozeman when they transferred me over there.

MR:

Did you go to Bozeman after the tornado or before the tornado?

CP:

It was after the tornado.

MR:

After the tornado. So before the tornado, that area was mostly white.

CP:

It was all white.

MR:

It was all white. So then after the—

CP:

Basically, yeah.

MR:

Basically. So then after the tornado, then white flight, people started moving out.

CP:

They got out pretty quick.

MR:

So if you compared your experiences at Iles with your experiences at Bozeman, how were they the same? Then how were they kind of different?

CP:

Well, overall it was good because a lot of kids from Ella Iles was transferred over into that area after the tornado. I had a niece—and some of the black students were getting out of hand. They were fighting, jumping on some of the Anglo kids, and taking candy from them and so forth. So one of my nieces said, “Y’all better get it straight. My uncle Clarence is coming over here to be the principal.” That settled it.

MR:

What’s your niece’s name?

CP:

Tammy. Tammy Wilkerson. You probably didn’t know her.

MR:

No.

AW:

[Pause] So you must've had a reputation as someone who had discipline?

CP:

Yes. Well, I think that's wrong with—you look at a kid now and—well, you mistreat him. I guess that's why so many of them get shot and killed now. I'm glad I'm not principle now because I'd probably did, because they'll tell you right quick, "I'm going to go home and get my pistol. I'll be back." And they come back. They promise you they'll show back up. Now they show back up. There's no way I was going to be principal now.

AW:

Was it—did you have other tools to be able to enforce discipline when you were a principal that perhaps are lacking today? Were you able to—did you have a greater say in discipline as a principal then than principals do now?

CP:

Yeah. Well, like I said, you look at a kid now, and it's child abuse. You don't have to say anything, just look at them, so to speak, and it's child abuse. A lot of times—way back then, maybe one or two times a year, one of the kids would say, "I'm going to tell my mother." I said, "Good. I'm going to call her and get her up here so you can tell her.", "I'm sorry. Don't call, Mr. Priestly." I said, "That's all right, I can call. No problem", "No, no. No, no. I don't want you to call my mother." I said, "Well, you better straighten up."

MR:

So when kids—when you would say, "You'd better straighten up," and if they didn't, what happened?

CP:

I'd put that boot on them, if they needed it. I didn't believe in that discipline. Just put them out in the hall. I used to walk my halls—and you probably did too. If one of them was sitting outside the classroom in a chair—you've seen it before. I said, "What are you doing out here?", "Well, the teacher told me to come out here." I said, "Why?", "Well, she said I was acting bad in there." I said, "I'll tell you what, I'm going to take you back in there and you better not act up anymore. If I come down this hall any other time this year, you better not be out here."

AW:

I would guess from your—what you said that you had support of parents in enforcing discipline. Is that different today?

CP:

[MR coughs] Oh yeah. The parents will come up and shoot you. You cold?

MR:

No. I just have asthma. When you were teaching, what was your favorite subject to teach?

CP:

Science.

MR:

Science.

CP:

Yes, science.

MR:

Mr. Priestly, while you were still working, were you involved in any kinds of activities in addition to being the principal. You said that you had served as an assistant principal. Did the district use you in other capacities like—did you do anything else to serve the district.

CP:

They had—I used go around and do a little speaking at different schools once I was retired, but that got old right quick because a lot of the schools wanted you around to come and speak. So I stopped—and I did that for a little while, then I stopped that because every time I look around, somebody said, “Can you come to our school and speak?” I started off doing it, then it got out of hand so I stopped it.

AW:

[Pause] Is there a—was there a difference in the extracurricular activities for students in elementary schools when you first started and say today, or towards the end of your career?

CP:

Well, we had after school activities, like flag football and so forth. I worked with that for quite a while. Then I spent some time working with the Boy Scouts. Those two things probably.

MR:

Did you ever have to fire a teacher?

CP:

Hm?

MR:

Did you ever have to fire a teacher?

CP:

No, I didn't have to fire anybody. I had some problems, as you may know. There was always one or two on your staff you'd rather not have. I didn't fire them but they got fired, maybe, later on. What would happen back then—and I know you know—or you've heard about it—if a black teacher across town was having trouble, rather than the white principal keeping them, they would transfer that teacher to one of us. I said, "Why are you putting them over here?" They said, You know how to get along with everybody. I said, "Yeah, I know." [MR coughs] In other words, you didn't have a choice as to whoever they transferred from another school to you. When you looked up, they were standing in front of you and you'd say, "Where did you come from?" "Well, they sent me from so-and-so here." We finally, as an Elementary Principal's Organization, got that straightened out and stopped.

MR:

What did you do?

CP:

We went to the central office and some of my people spoke with the powers that be and told them we'd like to interview a person if they were going to be assigned or trying to get to our school. So that cut a lot of that out because we would go to the central office and look through the files. They'd already cleaned out the files of ones they didn't want ending up out of school. So when we got there again, they said, Why don't you—the parents said, Why don't you have some black teachers more than you do? I said, "Because they don't apply." And it was true. You didn't have a whole lot of black teachers that wanted to come to Lubbock, Texas. They'd rather stay down in the Metroplex and all. They didn't want to come to Lubbock. And that's I'd tell parents. "We were just wondering because you don't have—there's so many on the staff." I said, "We're lucky to have those." You know how it goes.

AW:

And I think I know the answer. But why did they—black teachers—not want to come to Lubbock to teach?

CP:

A lot of them weren't white, either. They said that Lubbock doesn't have a lot of the things that they're used to having in the major cities.

AW:

Too poor. School district too poor, not spending money on schools and children?

CP:

Yeah. Like the Dallas-Fort Worth area, San Antonio. They'd rather stay in an area like that. And we're sitting out in here in West Texas, and it's so far between cities: Amarillo, Midland, Odessa, El Paso. So it's so far between districts here.

MR:

Mr. Priestly, can you talk to us some about the relationship between the community where you taught, where you've been the principal, where you live, and the church?

CP:

Well, not really.

MR:

Okay. What church do you attend?

CP:

What was that?

MR:

What church do you belong to?

CP:

Well, Mount Vernon.

MR:

And have you been active in your church? And what kinds of things have you done at your church?

CP:

Well, I did a long time until I—you know, I have—I haven't been up there too much now.

MR:

Right, but in the past, before you became—

CP:

I was active for about forty-five years at Mount Vernon. But I can't do it now.

MR:

Right. And you've served on various committees?

CP:

Do what?

MR:

Have you been on committees at church, in the community, and at school?

CP:

Oh God, yeah. I'll tell you what, if you all don't mind, my wife—wait, Ruth.

RP:

Huh?

CP:

Take them back there and show them all those certificates and stuff. You can go on back there.

MR:

Okay. We can go look at those after we finish this?

RP:

It'll be a while.

MR:

Okay. We'll go after we finish.

RP:

Yeah, he was the first baby that was baptized in the—well, then we—it was not United Methodist Church. We could not belong [MR coughs] it was just the Methodist Church. Then later on the conference accepted him. And it became—we became—they became—because I was—they became United Methodist, like First United and all that after so many years. Um-hm. Yeah, that's the difference. But he was—and our church is ninety-two years old, so he—his mom and him came here right after it was chartered. So it's a lot of history in that—

AW:

Yeah, that would be a good history to do too of that church. That'd be very interesting.

RP:

Yes, because they didn't accept the black in their conference, you know, United Methodist. And his aunt was one of the charter members. She lived to be 102.

AW:

Who would be the best person to start talking to at the church about the history of—[MR coughs]

RP:

I actually—I have it on tape and on—he would know—after he was baptized and grew up a little, he about the—he's the oldest one. He sure is.

AW:

That would be a good interview to do.

RP:

He's still the first and the oldest; eighty-seven. And it was '92. Now out at Caroline—Mom—that's the one that lived a hundred—I don't know if she would really—

MR:

Is this Caroline Gilbert.

RP:

Yeah. I don't know if she would really know that much about it. But her mom was one of the charter members that lived to be 102. But I do have the history of it. And he remembers a lot of the ministers that came. One minister built the beautiful church. You remember that, don't you, Clarence?

CP:

What?

RP:

He built a church, one of the ministers. But it burned. Then we ended up with this one.

MR:

After we do the principals, our next project will be [laughs] black churches.

RP:

Oh yeah. There's not that many.

MR:

Mr. Priestly, can you think of anything else that we haven't—that we haven't asked you about? Or has something else triggered another thought about being a principal, being an educator, any wisdom, anything that you wished you had done, you wished you hadn't done, or just—as you see, and just looking back over your years of service in education, is there anything that you want to add that we haven't covered?

CP:

I think we've covered everything.

MR:

All right. If you had to do it all over again, would you choose to be a teacher again?

CP:

No.

MR:

Really? What would you do?

CP:

Anything but that.

MR:

Why?

CP:

Really too dangerous now. You don't have the same type of parents and kids now that they had when we were working.

MR:

So if there was somebody out there that's getting ready to go to college to become an education major, what would you tell that person? If they say, "I'm determined I want to be a teacher and I want to follow in Mr. Priestly's footsteps," what would you tell them?

CP:

Just tell them to go ahead and do it. I'd also tell them what's going on in the profession. So you're taking chances.

MR:

Okay. I am learning how to do interviews from this wonderful person, from Andy. So every once

in a while if you see me looking at him, I'm looking at him because I'm still learning—well, actually, this is my first interview.

AW:

Actually—and you did Sterling. In fact, you ended with two questions that I always end up with, which is, “What didn't I ask that I should have,” and, “What advice, would you do this again?” So you're way ahead.

MR:

I'm getting there. [laughter]

AW:

Thank you so much for taking time today, and for letting us into your home.

CP:

Thank y'all for having me.

RP:

I'm sorry about his hearing.

MR:

That is not—no. He heard us. And if he didn't, he said, “Ask it again,” and we were comfortable doing that. That has not been a problem for me, and I don't think it's been one for Andy.

AW:

No, not for me because I'm not quite as old as you are but I'm getting there, and my hearing's not as good as it used to be. [Laughter] I would like to—if you don't mind, I would like to look at those certificates before we leave.

RP:

Yes. And that's the only thing that I object to him. He was in so many different—on so many different committees, starting with the library. I mean, just a lot of—but it came a time when they wanted a black face, and they wanted someone on those committees. So they just would place—call him because he was almost—they knew he would get along with the group and everything, and they used him. He has—we have a good write-up about him.

MR:

Where is the write-up? Is that in a newspaper or somewhere? Where is it?

RP:

Yeah. It was—he was Principal of the Year. You didn't tell them about that. They thought enough of you.

CP:

Administrator of the Year.

MR:

What year was that?

CP:

Nineteen seventy-seven.

MR:

Oh you remember that? Great. Was this TESPA [**Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association**]? Or LEA [**Local Education Agency**]? Or TSTA [**Texas State Teachers Association**]? Was what this?

RP:

I think it was TSTA.

CP:

Lubbock Classroom Teachers—

MR:

So it's LCTA [**Lubbock Classroom Teachers Association**]. Oh okay.

RP:

They're the ones that nominated him.

CP:

I told them to look up—

MR:

Look on the wall. So do we stop this?

AW:

Yeah, we'll stop those and walk back. And I'm going to make some notes.

End of Recording