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Interview with

ANN BARNETT

November 13, 1987

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Jane Harris

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Approved: Ann Barnett
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Ann Barnett

Interviewer: Jane Harris

Date of Interview: November 13, 1987

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Ms. Harris: This is Jane Harris interviewing Ann Barnett for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 13, 1987, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Ms. Barnett in order to obtain her recollections concerning the Denton Christian Women's Interracial Fellowship and its role in desegregating Denton.

I'd like to ask you some biographical questions.

First of all, when were you born?

Ms. Barnett: I was born on March 14, 1934.

Ms. Harris: Where were you born?

Ms. Barnett: In Nacogdoches, Texas.

Ms. Harris: Tell me about your educational background.

Ms. Barnett: Well, I graduated from Nacogdoches High School, and I went to Stephen F. Austin University for one year and one summer. Then I came to North Texas State, where I majored in music, and I got a bachelor's degree--a bachelor of arts degree--with a major in music. Then I got a master's in music education degree at North Texas. I have lived in Denton ever since then.

Harris: So what year did you come to North Texas?

Barnett: I came to North Texas State in the fall of 1952, and I finished my master's in January of 1956.

Harris: In Nacogdoches was your school a segregated one?

Barnett: Oh, definitely. All the schools were segregated then. Nacogdoches is in East Texas, very close to Louisiana line, and it's really very much a part of the Old South culture. There were Mexicans in our school, and I had friends who were Mexican; but there was a separate school for the blacks, always. When I was in school, no one even thought of desegregation.

Harris: Do you know what kind of conditions there were in the black schools?

Barnett: I would only guess they were very poor. I was never in their school. They were in the black section of town. I must confess I never went inside any of them.

Harris: How did you become interested in race relations?

Barnett: Well, first of all, when I was very young, we had a next door neighbor who had a little house behind her house, and her maid and her child and, I believe, a niece lived there. I enjoyed playing with those two little girls. Then, all of the sudden, the neighbor--I believe it was my neighbor more than my mother--just said I couldn't play with them anymore, that it was not right for me to play with them. As I recall, I must not have paid any attention to the color

difference because to me they were just friends to play with. But after that, we were not allowed to really socialize.

After I came to North Texas, I was active in the Presbyterian Student Organization, and that year I went to a conference at Texas A&M for Presbyterian student organizations from colleges in Texas, and there were some black students there. That was really my first contact--to get to know blacks on an equal basis. I believe that that was really sort of my first introduction to that.

Coming away to school was a real eye-opener for me. Leaving that culture in Nacogdoches, which definitely was a different culture--although Denton wasn't desegregated when I came here--just opened my eyes that there was more to Texas than just East Texas. I met people from all over, and it just broadened my view about a lot of things.

Harris: I see. North Texas desegregated, I think, in 1956. Do you have any recollection of that?

Barnett: I vaguely remember that someone was--I believe it was a man--in graduate school, in the College of Education, I believe. I never did know him, but I remember that it made the newspapers. There was quite a "to-do" about the fact that North Texas had admitted this man. Then I believe it wasn't too long after that that Abner Haynes enrolled and made quite a name for himself on the football team.

As I recall there was never any problem. There were never any demonstrations; there never seemed to be anyone complaining about the fact that blacks were enrolled. It seemed to me that it went very smoothly, but I got out of school about the time all that began. Even though I was living in Denton, I wasn't on campus.

Harris: What was your reaction when it desegregated?

Barnett: Well, I just remember thinking that that was okay, you know, that I thought that was good. I was newly married then, and I had one semester to finish after we married. I finished my master's, and then I did a little substitute teaching. Soon after that we had our first child. So I was really kind of removed from the university. I was more involved in our church activities and family and taking care of a new baby.

Harris: Did you ever hear of any black students who lived on campus?

Barnett: No, I remember hearing that the black students always had to live in the homes of black people in town and had to walk to school because by that time there was no public transportation. When I was in school, there was a bus--a public bus--that ran between North Texas and TWU. It went to town and out to TWU and then back. But that had stopped, and I do recall that the black students had to live in the homes of black families and walk to school.

Harris: Do you recall ever hearing anything about the Joe Adkins case?

Barnett: Refresh my memory.

Harris: He was a black student who wanted to enroll at North Texas State as an undergraduate, and North Texas State barred his enrollment. He brought suit against the school, and North Texas was forced to admit him.

Barnett: I don't remember that for some reason. Was that before Abner Haynes enrolled? It must have been, because Abner would have enrolled as an undergraduate.

Harris: It would have been about 1956 or 1957, yes. After that case he would have been allowed to enroll. Do you think Abner Haynes helped the desegregation process?

Barnett: Yes. By virtue of the fact that he was such a good football player, I really do because people are always interested in the football team and how well it does. I guess people began to see him as a person and not just as...often black people were thought of as just "things." A lot of people didn't look at them as individuals. I think he helped pave the way probably for a lot of other blacks to attend school here.

Harris: Do you recall the reaction of people to his coming at first?

Barnett: I recall going to football games and people cheering and glad that he was making touchdowns (laughter). I definitely remember that!

Harris: I ran across one thing in, I believe, the Denton paper, and it mentioned a cross burning incident on the North Texas State campus in about 1956. Do you recall anything about that?

Barnett: I'm sure I would have known about it at the time, but I don't recall. Was it in front of the dorm?

Harris: No, it was near the library, it said.

Barnett: No, I don't recall that. I really was thinking that the desegregation had gone very smoothly, but I guess there were some problems.

Harris: Why do you think black students chose North Texas State then?

Barnett: You mean once the schools desegregated? Why they chose North Texas?

Harris: Yes.

Barnett: Well, if I'm not mistaken, it was one of the first schools in the state to desegregate. Isn't that correct?

Harris: Yes.

Barnett: I'm sure it was the availability, plus the fact that it had a good reputation as a school, academically. That would be my guess--the fact that it was available to them as a choice between a segregated school and a desegregated school. They probably felt they had more opportunities at a larger university.

Harris: Do you know anything about TWU desegregating?

Barnett: Not specifically about when they did. I have a very good black friend to this day who was enrolled at TWU probably pretty early in the desegregation. I'm trying to think when she first came here. She was probably here in the 1960s. But I don't recall about when they first desegregated or if they had any problems.

Harris: You think it was much later than at North Texas State?

Barnett: My mind is blank on that. I don't even recall. I didn't ever see anything about TWU desegregating. Even though I have lived in Denton all these years, it's strange to say that I really never knew that much about TWU until I started working there because I was a graduate of North Texas. When I did get involved in things, like, going to plays and concerts and so forth, I usually went to North Texas. But I did get to know some people, and it was partly through Dianne, this black friend. I took my children to a play over there--Hansel and Gretel--and she was in it. She was the witch, and she was wonderful. She started coming to our church and sang in our choir. As I say, to this day we are good friends. She lives in New York now, but we keep up with her. That was probably in the late 1960s, I would guess.

Harris: Can you recall one incident that happened in 1961 at the Campus Theatre in Denton when some students were conducting a stand-in at the ticket booth and some people driving by

apparently shot at them. Do you recall this incident?

Barnett: No. The Campus Theatre was not on the North Texas campus, though. It was in downtown Denton. It's on Hickory, just a block west of the square. But at that time...I started to say that that was the only movie in town, but there was one on the square. There were those two.

But I think I do recall that they were trying to let blacks be admitted to the theaters. But I do not recall about someone being shot at. Did they hit anyone?

Harris: No.

Barnett: Just trying to frighten them, I guess.

Harris: I think so. Let's move to something else. At the time the group formed, what was your perception of what life was like in southeast Denton?

Barnett: Well, let me back up a minute. In the fall of 1963, when the Denton schools desegregated, we were not living there. We left for a semester and went to Princeton, New Jersey. Prentice, my husband, had a semester for study there. So from late August in 1963 until about the first of February 1964, we were gone.

But I kept in touch with friends. Euline Brock was one of them, and there were others that I wrote to and kept up with what was going on in Denton. They were telling me about the schools having been integrated and that there were very few black students who chose to go to the white

school that year. Euline at that time was teaching a young adult church group at Trinity, and she got some of those people involved in tutoring the black students--to help them--because they were so far behind.

When I came back, I had just been back from New Jersey a short time when they told me they were going to organize this Interracial Fellowship. Some of the white women had gotten to know some of the black women by virtue of the fact that their children were now in the schools, and they thought it would be helpful if they formed a social group to get to know one another and try to work on some things together. So they invited me to come and just sort of gave me a little background about what was going on.

Up until that time, I had never been in the home of someone in southeast Denton. I guess I had known someone from southeast Denton prior to that time. Paul Young, who was our minister at that time, lived right across the street here from our driveway, and Catherine Bell worked for him. Paul's wife was not well. I don't know how he met Catherine, but Catherine came to their house--I don't know--once or twice a week and helped them. I met Catherine, and we became friends. In fact, she taught me how to make plum jelly. We have a wild plum tree, and I didn't even know what these things were that were falling off the tree. Catherine says, "Oh, these are wild plums, and they make

wonderful jelly." So she asked me if she could have some, and I said, "Well, certainly." She brought me the recipe and showed me how to make them. For years I gave her plums, and we both made jelly. But I think that Catherine was probably the first black resident of southeast Denton that I met. It may have been about that same time that I met Linnie McAdams. I can't remember when Linnie first started coming to Trinity church. I don't know if Linnie was in our church when this group formed or not; I'm just not sure. So probably Linnie and Catherine were the first blacks that I met. But I really had never been in the home of a black person in southeast Denton at that time.

Harris: What did you think it was like in southeast Denton?

Barnett: Well, I knew that the streets were unpaved and that the houses were in pretty bad shape and that it was not a very desirable place to live. At that time, however, that was all that was available to blacks in Denton.

Harris: What was your husband's attitude like when you became a member of the group?

Barnett: Oh, he was very supportive, yes.

Harris: Was there any pressure put on him because you were a member of the the group?

Barnett: Not that I know of. He had dealings with black ministers throughout the denomination, also. During that time or in the early 1960s, I remember that on one or two occasions

some of the black ministers that he knew would be in Denton for meetings, and they came to our home for dinner. We didn't think this was anything unusual. They were friends, so their color didn't make any difference.

I do remember one thing. This isn't about the Interracial Fellowship per se, but one kind of outgrowth from that was that the youth in our church and the youth in one of the black churches met together a few times. One of the men who worked in the synod office with Prentice lived right down the street here on Locksley, and they had this interracial group in their home one Sunday evening for supper and a meeting and so forth. Some of the neighbors--the immediate neighbors around them--really complained and really let them know about it.

Harris: And was this in this neighborhood?

Barnett: Right down this street on Locksley, yes. It was the people next door and across the street, I think. This family was named Nead--Don and Ginnie Nead. Ginnie was very active in the group. They were from the North originally, and they had very liberal attitudes and really were interested in working for desegregation. They caught some flak from their neighbors.

Harris: What did their neighbors say?

Barnett: I don't remember specifically, but they didn't like the fact that there were blacks in this neighborhood, you know,

socializing. It did not deter them at all from doing what they felt was right, but they did get some flak from it.

Harris: Describe for me the attitude of the white power structure in Denton--how they felt toward the blacks at that time.

Barnett: Well, I was not really into politics and paying that much attention to the power structure. But my guess would be that they very much felt that blacks should not have a say about things, you know, should be very much receptive to whatever the white power structure said. But I personally didn't know people on the city council or have any dealings ...I was awfully young then, myself, and in some instances I was shy about speaking out about things. I was not shy about being a part of this group, but, I mean, I would never have called a city council person and talked to him about it, I don't think.

Harris: Did many restaurant owners then refuse service to blacks?

Barnett: I don't remember exactly when all of that began to open up. I remember that Linnie was the first black person to be hired by Moore Business Forms in a staff position. She was hired as a secretary. Now they had blacks working in the plant; but in an office staff position, she was the first person to be hired, and that was quite a step forward and a really courageous thing for her to do, to put herself on the line like that. Then a little bit later, she was hired at the Federal Center here, and I believe she was the first black

to be hired out there, also, as a secretary. I don't recall exactly when the restaurants began to be desegregated.

Harris: Do you recall certain owners who refused service?

Barnett: No, I don't. There weren't very many restaurants in Denton then.

Harris: We read about one, the Ju-cy Pig. I think that's one.

Barnett: The Ju-cy Pig was a very popular restaurant with college students. They refused blacks?

Harris: Yes.

Barnett: Well, that doesn't surprise me, you know, because that was a locally-owned restaurant, and I'm sure that would have been their stance at that time.

Harris: You mentioned that Linnie got a job at the Moore Business Forms. What types of jobs did other blacks hold?

Barnett: Well, I think most black women cleaned people's houses. The first time I really met Linnie or knew about Linnie occurred when I had a very good friend who later lived in this house right behind us. But when she lived in another house, soon after they came to Denton, she had met Linnie. Her husband was a doctor, and he had delivered Linnie's children. Linnie worked for her as a maid, and she realized what a bright person Linnie was and encouraged her to go to school and to get some skills and get better jobs and not to spend her life cleaning other people's houses. But of the black women that I knew at that time, it seemed to me that

that was mainly what they did, was clean other people's houses.

Harris: Tell me about what the men did. What types of jobs did they hold?

Barnett: Well, I'm trying to think of specific men. I really don't know. I guess a lot of them had yard work. Mr. Hill, the husband of Othella Hill, who was in the group...I really often used to wonder what he did--I wasn't really sure--and one day I saw him at a party of some sort running the bar, and he was all dressed up, you know, appropriately dressed for that. People seemed to know him quite well, and I thought, "Well, this must be what he does a lot. He hires out for private parties and operates the bar." I'm sure he probably did something else, and I probably knew what that was, but I don't remember at the moment. Mrs. Hill, I believe, worked in someone's home. I know Linnie's husband worked--it seems as long as I knew him; I don't know at what point he got this job--but he has worked for General Motors in Dallas. He's her former husband. He seemed to have a job that was not as menial a task.

Harris: Tell me about the kind of relationship a black cleaning woman would have with her employer--what kind of job relationship.

Barnett: Well, the few that I knew, such as Catherine, who worked for Paul across the street, and Linnie, seemed to have a

very good relationship. I think Paul and his family treated Catherine as an equal. The ones that I witnessed in Nacogdoches, where I grew up...it's interesting. I still go back there to visit sometimes and occasionally visit a friend who has a woman who worked for her for years and years, and to me they still treat them like they did in the 1950s. They're not cruel to them, but it's still very condescending and very definitely "you are my servant." I'm sure that there were people here in Denton who had maids that they had for years that probably treated them that way. I never had a maid. Once in a while Catherine would help me if I needed help with something, but I really felt like Catherine was a friend. She had a child the age of one of mine, and they knew each other in school. They knew each other pretty well in school, you know, as friends. I certainly never felt that I was any better than Catherine.

Harris: In the Denton Christian Woman's Interracial Forum, were there any black women in that group that were cleaning women?

Barnett: Yes. I think that's what Mrs. Hill did. I think that's probably what her daughter Norvell did. Catherine did it. One of them later worked in the cafeteria at Woodrow Wilson School, and I cannot recall her name at the moment. I'm not sure what all the others did, but I do think that at first--when the group just formed--that was probably the

primary means of employment.

Harris: Do you know of any incidents where these black women's employers placed pressure on them because they were a member of the group?

Barnett: I'm trying to remember. That may very well have happened. I can't think of any at the moment, but it does seem like I heard some of them say that the employers made comments to them about it. It's very vague; I can't say for sure.

Harris: Were they negative comments?

Barnett: Yes.

Harris: Were you here when the group formed? Were you still in New Jersey when it formed?

Barnett: When it had the first meeting, we had just come back, and the first meeting was held in Jean Kooker's house. The second meeting was held at my house here. We decided at that time that we would meet once a month. We came back about the 1st of February, and I'm sure the first meeting was in March. The April meeting was here. It seems that at the first meeting there were about twelve or fourteen people, and I don't recall how many were at the second meeting, but there were more.

Harris: Do you recall who was at the first meeting?

Barnett: I can name quite a few of them. There was Mrs. Hill and Norvell, and Norvell's daughter, who was probably about eighteen then. I believe Betty Kimble was there; I believe

Catherine Bell was there; Dorothy Adkins; Euline Brock. I think Pat Cheek was there, and I believe that Carol Riddlesperger and Katherine McGuire was there. They were both from the Methodist church, and I believe they were there. I think that Bessie Hardin was there. She was a black women who was very active. She wasn't there the first time. She joined the group later. I think Linnie was there at that time, too, because people in the group already knew Linnie. At the second meeting there were, I would say, maybe twenty. There were more than were at the first meeting. It seemed like my living room was full of people.

As I recall, we didn't have a program the first time. We just discussed things. We all sat there for a while and introduced ourselves, and for some of us it was the first time we had met any of the black women and the first time they had met any of us. But it seemed like that when the meeting was over, we had established an unusual trust and a desire to continue this activity. At the second meeting, if I recall correctly, Betty Kimble and another person read something that I believe Jean or Dorothy had come across at a women's Presbyterian meeting or something. But it was a dialogue between a black woman and a white woman. Have you heard about this before?

Harris: Yes.

Barnett: And it was very honest, and it made a real impression on

everybody.

Harris: Tell me about what it said.

Barnett: Well, it seemed to me it had to do with a black woman expressing her feelings at the way she was treated in a store where the clerk would continually ignore her and wait on white ladies even though maybe she had come up to the counter before and ahead of the white ladies. It was that kind of thing--the prejudice subtle and not so subtle--that they met every day of their life. It was a dialogue between the two, but it was very honest and very outspoken on the part of the black woman, and it really made quite an impression on all of us, as I recall, and I think we had some discussion about it afterwards.

Harris: Did black women in the group try to use this to relate stories about what had happened to them?

Barnett: Yes, yes. It was wonderful that they felt enough trust in the group that they would speak up and say these things, especially at just the second meeting, because they would have had every right to feel untrusting toward white people. They might have been afraid of what might happen to them. But it was really good that we had been able to establish a mutual trust so that they could share their feelings honestly.

Harris: Why do you think they felt such trust?

Barnett: Well, I think there had been some groundwork laid while I was still out of town, you know, with the schools being

integrated and the people who had been helping to make that integration go smooth, including those who had tutored the black students who were having trouble. I think that had established a feeling of trust and really wanting to get to know them on an equal basis to work out problems. Like I say, I was not here, but I think there had been a lot of groundwork laid down leading up to the establishment of this group.

Harris: Describe the kinds of things black women mentioned to the group about how they were feeling.

Barnett: I can't recall specifics, but it was just the fact that they were looked down upon; they were not able to be treated equally whether it was at a water fountain or a restaurant or a restroom or being waited on at a store. There were things that I imagine a lot of us never thought about, and we began to see how grossly unfair segregation was.

Harris: At the first meeting, how was the ice broken?

Barnett: Well, I think some of the women already knew each other, you see. In a way, I had been away and was kind of an outsider because I hadn't been here the previous winter. But I think that some of the women already knew one another. I don't remember the specifics, but we all introduced ourselves and told what our families were like and something about our children. My oldest daughter was in the first grade, so I didn't have kids that were in high school, you

know, where the integration was taking place. We just shared some things about our families and so forth.

Harris: Why was it held at Jean Kooker's house for the first time?

Barnett: I don't know. I suppose she offered to be hostess for it.

Harris: Were there any officers elected at the first meeting?

Barnett: We had officers. I don't know if we elected them at the very first meeting or not. But we must have elected them right away because we always did have officers.

Harris: Do you recall who the first president was?

Barnett: Oddly enough, I don't. I was president one year, but I don't remember who the first one was. It seems like that sometimes we had co-presidents or co-chairmen of the group --a black and a white. We had a lot of social occasions. We had picnics where our families would get together, and we would bring our kids and let them play and get to know one another. The big event of the year was that we always had a really nice dinner party at Christmastime, and we continued to do that for a long time, even after the group didn't meet as regularly. That was always a very nice occasion, and usually it was held in a church, you know, a fellowship hall that was large enough for the group.

Harris: Did you have families come to that?

Barnett: No, it was usually your husband or a guest, but not the children. We would sing Christmas carols, and we would have other people sing the carols.

One event I remember very clearly, and what a real sort of a breakthrough it was. I don't recall what year Dr. Kamerick came here as president of North Texas, but he was only here for two years. He came here from Iowa, and his wife was a member of this group. It was a pretty well-established group by that time. We had a meeting one time in their home on the North Texas campus. It's the building that's now the development office, that big, two-story house that's near the colliseum. That was their home, and we had a mob of people there that night. We had a style show, and Dianne, whom I mentioned was my friend at TWU, sang some numbers. It seems like I played the piano for the models, who were people from the group itself. I don't remember what stores furnished the clothes, but we had a style show. I remember thinking about how unbelievable this was to have an event of this kind in the home of the North Texas president, because the man who had been the president prior to this had been there for about twenty years and that would never have happened during his tenure.

Harris: Was that Matthews?

Barnett: Dr. Matthews, yes. But Dr. Kamerick was a very open person, and he was there himself welcoming the people, and it was a wonderful time. I mean, I loved being in the home of the president; I thought that was a real treat. And I thought it was wonderful that black and white women were together

invited into their home.

Harris: How many people do you think were there?

Barnett: Oh, I think probably fifty people. That was one of the highlights, I think.

Harris: So even though desegregation occurred when Dr. Matthews was there, he was still somewhat of a racist?

Barnett: Well, I hate to say that about someone, you know, because I really didn't know Dr. Matthews. He was the president when I was a student. I didn't see him do anything to encourage integration, and I'm sure at that time he would never have taken the first step. It seems like that Dr. Matthews was president until about 1967, and then Dr. Kamerick came, and it took two or three years. He did a great deal to open up things on campus. He started the Faculty Senate. So that was a highlight of that organization.

Harris: At the first meeting, can you recall whether there was a public announcement that it was to take place?

Barnett: Do you mean the fact that the meeting was to be held?

Harris: Yes.

Barnett: I don't recall that it was. I don't remember if there was, like, an open invitation in a church bulletin, although there may have been. We usually had, or often had, an announcement of the meetings coming up in the church bulletin, saying that, you know, anyone was invited. I don't recall how people were invited to that first meeting--

whether they were telephoned or whether the word was just sent out in general that this meeting was to be held and that those who wanted to attend could show up. I do remember that someone told me about it--about what had gone on--and so I went because I was interested.

Harris: How did blacks get to the meetings?

Barnett: I hadn't thought about that. I don't know if they had cars or if someone picked them up. Some of them had cars, I think.

Harris: Now at the second meeting, you mentioned that that was when the dialogue was presented. Do you recall if any issues were expressed about Denton itself?

Barnett: I think we related through incidents in the dialogue to specific places in Denton. It seems to me that the black women said, "Yes, that's exactly the way I've been treated at such-and-such. This had happened to me." They verified that the dialogue was not misrepresenting their situation. It was a very realistic dialogue.

Harris: Do you recall where the third meeting was held?

Barnett: No, I don't. But we kept meeting.

Harris: Did you rotate from a white person's house to a black's?

Barnett: We met both in southeast Denton and other parts of Denton, yes. I recall being in a number of homes in southeast Denton, but I don't remember where we had the third meeting. It may have been in Mrs. Hill's home.

Harris: What were their houses like in southeast Denton--the ones where meetings were held?

Barnett: Well, some were nicer than others. The one's that we had meetings in were...none of them were falling down. You know, they were older homes, but they had been well-cared-for. Some of them were tiny; you know, the rooms were tiny. But there were a lot of homes--and this was a concern of the people who lived in southeast Denton--in very poor repair and that no one would do anything about. Often the landlord was someone who didn't live in southeast Denton, and the property was an eyesore. These places were eyesores, and they were dangerous. There was a danger in that they were falling down. The ones that we met at were very comfortable places, but some of them were very small. We just sat on the floor because that didn't matter to us (laughter). They always had wonderful food to eat. Everyone was a good cook (chuckle).

Harris: Did the women's group play any role in the urban renewal issue?

Barnett: I remember that that was an issue that came up. I think we had a vote, and it was voted down. I cannot recall specifically what we did about that. I recall some other things we did politically, like, going door to door and giving out campaign leaflets for presidential elections and urging people to register to vote. I don't remember...

I remember that urban renewal was a very hot issue, but I don't remember what this group specifically did about that.

Harris: Were there any in the group that opposed urban renewal? Was there a discussion within the group about that issue?

Barnett: I'm sure there probably was, but, there again, that was so long ago. I am just drawing a blank. As I recall, it seems like that they were in favor of it because they wanted to be able to get some money to do something, you know, like paving the streets and improving southeast Denton. But as far as lobbying efforts or whatever, I just don't remember what we did about that.

Harris: Do you happen to recall how black women in the group felt about the issue?

Barnett: Not specifically. I would assume that they would have been in favor of it because it would definitely have improved the neighborhood. I think a lot of people were afraid of having living accommodations torn down and not having anyplace to move. Of course, they kept hearing from people: "No, this will not happen. You will not be moved until you have a good place to live." But that was one of the fears.

Harris: You mentioned going door to door in political campaigns and distributing leaflets. Who initiated that kind of action by the group?

Barnett: I don't remember who was actually in charge of that, but I guess this was probably in 1964 until sometime in 1968.

It seems like Trudy Foster was very involved in that, and Jean Kooker. I don't remember who actually organized it, but we did take certain streets together. My husband helped with that, I remember. As I recall, we were always welcomed by the people to whose homes we went. But I don't actually recall how that was organized.

Harris: Did the black women participate in that also?

Barnett: Yes.

Harris: Did they go into white areas of town?

Barnett: I think we were mainly concentrating on southeast Denton because we were trying to get people registered to vote and get them out to vote. I think a lot of people had been very intimidated. If I recall, that's one thing that was a really big issue, that blacks had been afraid to vote and had been intimidated, so we were really encouraging them.

Harris: Were you very successful at it?

Barnett: I think we did make a dent in it.

Harris: Do you recall what kinds of things black people said to you when you asked them to register?

Barnett: I don't remember going and asking them to register. They welcomed us. We probably said, "We're from the Interracial Fellowship, and we're handing out literature encouraging you to vote, encouraging you to register." The reputation of the group seemed to spread throughout southeast Denton as a group that was, you know, working for their best interests.

So we didn't really meet any hostility or anything like that when we would knock on people's doors.

Harris: Was the group composed of about half black women and half white women?

Barnett: It was pretty equal, as I recall. I don't know that it was exactly fifty-fifty, but it seems like that it was pretty equal.

Harris: Did you ever set any sort of limit on the membership?

Barnett: No. And we always welcomed new people anytime they wanted to come. We never had a limit. I don't know what the most we had was. I know we reached a peak of membership, and it seems to me at one time we had as many as sixty or eighty members.

Harris: When the group first formed, do you think white women were more eager to join than the black women?

Barnett: Well, at that first meeting I felt like it was a mutual thing between the two groups, a mutual feeling that, you know, "We need to know more about one another as friends. We have children who are in school together, and we have mutual problems to work on. If we get to know one another on an equal basis, then we can do that together."

Harris: What other activities was the group engaged in? You mentioned the voter drive and social activities.

Barnett: This is vague; I can't remember it clearly. I remember that the group wanted to do something about integrating the city

of Denton so that other people moving in wouldn't have to live in southeast Denton at this point. I think that we tried to arrange to talk to some realtors. I seem to remember talking to one of the realtors, myself: "We're in favor of integrated housing, and we'd like to encourage this." But as I recall, we never actually had a meeting with the realtors. They seemed to say, "Well, we don't really need this. It just won't happen in this town. It'll work itself out, and there won't be any need for this. It'll work itself out smoothly."

Harris: Is that what the realtors said?

Barnett: That's what I remember them saying. Actually, for the most part, that was pretty much what happened. Denton for a number of years has been pretty well integrated throughout the city. I can recall one family that lived over on Georgetown that had a problem, I think, at first. But they still live there, so it must not have run them off. I'm sure they were wonderful people, and I'm sure when their neighbors took care of that. Churches began to be integrated (not a whole lot), and black people started joining some of the white churches in town. The schools began to be more and more integrated. So all of those things helped. But I do remember that we wanted to try to get involved with the realtors and show them our support, and if I remember correctly, we never did have a

meeting with the top realtors to let them know that there was a basis of support for open housing.

Harris: Tell me about some other things the group did.

Barnett: Well, I mentioned the parties and the get-togethers and things like that with our children in the summertime. Sometimes some of the families would get a babysitter in the summer. Some of them would bring their child over, and I'd keep them. You know, we'd swap out.

At our meetings we usually had a program that was something relevant, or we had a project we were working on. I wasn't involved in this activity, but I think Trudy Foster was. You can find out more about this by talking to her. But this group had a lot to do with getting the streets of southeast Denton paved. I can't remember exactly how they went about that, whether it was lobbying before the city council or what, but Trudy Foster is one that you could talk to about that.

Harris: Now was this related to the urban renewal?

Barnett: No, this was later. This was several years later.

Harris: We heard that you were involved in a jobs program—trying to obtain jobs for blacks. Can you tell me anything about that?

Barnett: Do you mean where we tried to find jobs for blacks?

Harris: Yes. I think employers came to your meetings and discussed jobs that were available.

Barnett: I do vaguely remember that, yes, but I don't remember too much about it.

Harris: Do you recall any other activities?

Barnett: There is one thing that I remember being involved in slightly and that I think was through the Interracial group. There was a group on the North Texas campus that, I believe, was at the BSU [Baptist Student Union] that started a literacy program to help black people who were illiterate to read. The people in the Interracial Fellowship helped by providing transportation. For instance, I went one time and picked up this student at North Texas and took him or her—I think it was a girl—to Linnie's house. That's where they were meeting that night with the people who... this was the very beginning of the literacy program. One man showed up that night who had never known how to read or write at all, and I stayed there while the student worked with him. Then that program continued for quite some time, I think. Maybe later it was housed in the public library, but I'm not sure. I know it just started out meeting in people's homes, but it was a project of the BSU on the North Texas campus. I think we helped, also, by finding people who needed to take advantage of the program and then by providing transportation for the students to get to southeast Denton and back.

Harris: How did you find people to help?

Barnett: The black women apparently knew people and talked to them about the program that was to be started and found out if they were interested. I can't recall how long it went on, but, as I said, I think that it moved to a permanent location. It seems like maybe it was the public library where they met then or perhaps one of the churches. But it did start out just very small in the homes.

Harris: About what year would that have been?

Barnett: Sometime in the 1960s, middle to late 1960s.

Harris: Could you tell me if this literacy program was related in any way to the beginning of the Denton Christian Preschool?

Barnett: Well, Trudy Foster was one of the persons who was instrumental in helping get the Denton Christian Preschool started, and I was not involved in it the first year. The first year of the Preschool was held at the Catholic church, and then every year since then it was held at Trinity Presbyterian. I had a feeling it probably was an offshoot or an outgrowth of working with people in southeast Denton and knowing the needs for young children to have some training before they got to kindergarten. But whether or not that actually came up as an idea out of the Interracial Fellowship, I can't recall. I think it has been about fifteen or sixteen years, so it would have started...it seems like it would have started about 1970 or 1971. So the Interracial Fellowship would have definitely been in full swing.

Harris: Who ran the Denton Christian Preschool?

Barnett: Well, it had different directors, and Trudy was a director at one time, but she was not the first. I believe Mary Henderson Williams was the first director of it. There are a number of people who worked in it every year. I know Mary is one of them, and I sort of think she was the director of that first year they were at the Catholic church. I believe that when they just first started, Trudy was attending First Presbyterian Church then; she was not a member of Trinity. I believe she got a group of interested people together, and they started talking about this. I'm really not sure as to the details of how they got it going that first year; but after that they moved to our church, and before long it became a United Way agency. It was not a United Way agency at first; it was strictly supported by churches and individuals. I'm not even sure that, when it first started, the directors were paid. The director is now paid, and the teachers are paid, but they're the only ones who are paid.

Harris: Were the families charged for the service?

Barnett: No. Families who want their children to attend have to apply, and there is a screening process with a committee that screens them. Then they put in the children that they think are best suited. I believe that if you've had a child in the program, the siblings later on can always come.

There's been a lot of families that have had two, three, and four children in the school.

Harris: Can you think of any other activities that the group was involved in?

Barnett: Not really. I think we covered a lot.

Harris: When did the group stop meeting?

Barnett: Well, I can't recall exactly when. It seems like we just kind of fizzled out. I can't recall whether we quit meeting because we couldn't get anyone to be officers or if we just didn't feel the push to meet and work on issues like we had in the 1960s. Not that everything was perfect in Denton, but, you know, integration had really progressed a lot in Denton. Some of the pressing issues had been resolved. But even after we quit meeting, I know there were one or two times that we had a Christmas party just to get the group back together again. We always said, "Oh, we really shouldn't just let this drop. We really should keep it going." But then nobody ever did. No one ever took the leadership to try to reorganize it. Of course, our children grew up and were no longer in school, and perhaps younger families coming along didn't feel the urgent need for that.

Harris: Did you feel like it lost its relevancy?

Barnett: In the sense that it had been relevant in the 1960s, yes.

Harris: In the name of the group, was the word "Christian" ever

dropped from that?

Barnett: I don't believe...I noticed that you called it that, but I think the name of it was the Denton Interracial Women's Fellowship.

Harris: I see.

Barnett: Maybe "Christian" was in there, but I seem to remember that it was Denton Interracial Women's Fellowship. It may have started out Denton Christian Interracial Fellowship. But it definitely was a group of persons from various churches. It involved Christians. I just can't remember if that was in the title. We referred to it sort of as the Interracial Women's Fellowship. We even dropped the "Denton." Just in talking about it, we would say Interracial Women's Fellowship.

Harris: What are your feelings and perceptions of the group in looking back from now?

Barnett: Well, I think it was a very unique opportunity. I really didn't know of any other group like that in any other town, although I'm sure there probably were. But I know that when I would tell one friend in particular in Nacogdoches about this group, I think it was just beyond her imagination that there could be a group like that. I think she couldn't imagine this. So I think it was a very unique thing to happen in Denton in that particular time. I think it was a very creative thing, and it would be interesting to know

how it would have been different if that group had not existed. I know that I made some wonderful friends that I still have to this day. I don't see them that often, but I still consider them very good friends. I made those friendships through that group. I really think it had an impact on the community, and I remember that at the time that we talked about the fact that it was unique.

There's another meeting that I recall--that just comes to mind. There were two others, actually, that took place in our church. One of them was when we met with the man who wrote the book Black Like Me. He was a friend of Paul Young, our minister. I don't recall how Paul had met him, but Paul knew him and so Paul invited him up one night. He spoke to a group of us at Trinity Church, and that was a very memorable occasion. I remember what a very courageous man he was. This was after his book had come out, and he told us about his experiences and what he had done and how his life had really been in danger.

Then another time we met, and there was a man who had been in prison. He was a poet, and he came here and had a position at North Texas after he had been let out of prison. His name was B.F. Maiz, and he had been in prison, I believe, for drugs. I had forgotten how he came to people's attention, but he was in a federal prison in Fort Worth, which was sort of a minimum security place. When he got out he was

hired at North Texas. He was a delightful person, a wonderful poet, and he spoke to our meeting. I think it was at our church at that time. He just recited a lot of his poetry, and it was wonderful. It was really a special evening. He is no longer in Denton.

Harris: Did he have a certain theme to his poetry?

Barnett: Oh, I don't know that I would say he had a certain theme, but it was so much better to hear him recite it than to read it, which is always true. He was a very warm, outgoing sort of person. It was just a really very nice evening, and it was good for all of us, black and white alike, to hear a person who had been through a lot and still had a very positive view about life. He was born up in Chicago, I think. I remember those two especially. The man who wrote Black Like Me was very interesting.

Harris: Okay, I have one more question.

Barnett: Okay.

Harris: Tell me what your life was like when the group formed--what kinds of things were you doing?

Barnett: Well, I had four little children. I was very busy trying to keep my head above water. My daughter was in the first grade, and I had one in kindergarten; and I had a two-year-old and a three-year-old. I was not working. About the time that it seemed like we organized the group, I did start teaching piano privately. But my life was very much caught up in

taking care of my family, teaching a few students, and being active in church.

I did just think of another incident. I was teaching at a studio. Rather reluctantly on the part of the man who owned it, we helped him integrate that studio. At that time he had a policy that if you bought an organ from him, you received a month's free lessons. One of the black churches bought an organ--a small organ--from him, and so their organist was going to get a month's free lessons. Well, their organist was a woman who had a marvelous ear for playing the piano, but she had never played an organ in her life. She didn't read music, and so I was assigned to be her teacher. I presumed he thought she would take a month's worth of lessons instead. Well, she didn't quit. She wanted to keep taking lessons, and so he told me that if I taught her, she had to come...he had students that came up until eight or nine o'clock in the evening occasionally. But he told me that she had to come after dark so people wouldn't see her come in the store. We had it 'round and 'round about that, and he finally gave in. I just really let him have it and told him that her money was as good as anybody else's money. I felt that if he let her take lessons there when her church bought the organ, why couldn't she take lessons there now?

She was a woman who cleaned homes for a living, and

more than anything in the world she wanted to learn to read music. She had the most fantastic ear. I'd give anything to have an ear the way she had. She could play anything in the world by ear, but she wanted to learn to read music; and she wanted to learn to read organ music and play organ music in church. She worked so hard at that, and I'll never forget that she gave a little program one Sunday afternoon at her church. She actually used music that she had learned to read. She worked so hard at that.

But we had a little time getting him to see, you know, that he needed to offer his services of his studio to anyone. If he was going to sell them pianos and organs, he should be willing to let them take lessons there, no matter whether they were black, brown, white, or whatever.

Harris: Were there other members of the group also who were trying to persuade him?

Barnett: I don't remember that there were. Linnie's daughter took piano lessons there. I believe she took lessons down there. She took from me for a while, and I think she started out down there. So once the ice was broken with this one person, then...but I think that he probably was afraid that people would boycott his business if he did this for blacks. But it didn't happen. I'll never forget how furious I was when he said that she could come in at eight o'clock at night so

people wouldn't be there and wouldn't see her come in the door (chuckle). She paid for a taxi to get there; she had no way to get there. It was costing her dearly to come and take lessons out of her hard-earned money. Fortunately, times have changed drastically since then.

Harris: Well, do you feel like there are any other points we should discuss that we haven't gone over?

Barnett: Well, that's all I can think of, really, at the moment. I hope I've filled in enough to help you.

Harris: Yes, that was very interesting. Thank you very much for the interview. I appreciate it.

Barnett: You're welcome. You are quite welcome.