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Interview with

BESSIE HARDEN

April 7, 1988

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Mary Lohr

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Approved: Mrs. Bessie D. Harden
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Bessie Harden

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: April 7, 1988

Interviewer: Mary Allen Lohr

Ms. Lohr: This is Mary Lohr interviewing Bessie Harden for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 7, 1988, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Ms. Harden in order to obtain her recollections concerning the Denton Christian Women's Interracial Fellowship.

Would you tell me your birthday and where you were born?

Ms. Harden: I was born in Honey Grove, Texas. My birth date was 1911, the fifth of February.

Ms. Lohr: Where is Honey Grove?

Ms. Harden: Honey Grove is over in...let's see. What county is that? It's just on the other side of Farmersville--over in that area. I really don't know where it is, myself (laughter). Honey Grove is over there in the area back in where Greenville is or somewhere back over in there. I really don't know because I haven't been there since I was a baby. So I really don't

know.

Lohr: Oh, you moved from there when you were young?

Harden: Yes. My daddy and my mother separated. Well, my daddy just went off and left her. Then he decided--I had a brother--he came back and told her that he wanted to take us to his mother and sister, and he just never took us back. So I was reared in Dallas.

Lohr: So you were brought up in Dallas?

Harden: Yes.

Lohr: What's your educational background?

Harden: Well, I went through the sixth grade. Then I got married. A whole lot of time lapsed before that. After I came to Denton, I went to school. I took some classes here and there and then I got a G.E.D. out at Denton State School. Then I go an associate's degree from Cooke County College. But that was after I was an old lady (laughter).

Lohr: When you were growing up, the schools were segregated. What were they like?

Harden: Well, you were just segregated. We had no relationship with the white schools whatsoever. When I lived in Farmersville, I went through the sixth grade there. That was back in the 1920s. Then I got married and had my family, and, of course, I worked all the time. Then when I came to Denton, I worked out at North Texas. Then, of course, my children were ready to go to school. But back to when I was going to school, I lived in a white

neighborhood all the time, but there was no mixing of the races whatsoever--none whatsoever.

Lohr: You had to go to school outside the neighborhood.

Harden: Yes. I went to school in Dallas. I went through the fourth or fifth grade there. I think it was the fourth grade or maybe the fifth. Then I went back to Farmersville and went to school there. We had a one-room schoolhouse (laughter). As I said, I went on through the sixth grade there. Of course, I went to night school some. I just took a little wherever I could get it, you know, along down through there. Then after my children were grown, I went to night school out at Denton State School, and I got my G.E.D. Then I went on and got an associate's degree from Cooke County College.

Lohr: What is your assessment of the segregated school that you went to?

Harden: Well, we were just all black children when I went. There was no mixing with the whites at all. As I said, when I went to school in Dallas, we had a nice black school there then. Well, there were several. But my auntie lived in what they called "servant's quarters," and we lived there and lived in the white neighborhood. But that was all.

Lohr: Were the black schools good schools?

Harden: Yes, they were good schools--the ones in Dallas. The one that I went to was a good school in Dallas. It was the little country schools that was not much. The one that I

went to in Farmersville was just a one-room schoolhouse. Of course, it wasn't an awful lot of children. Everybody was in the same room. Well, I believe they did have a primary room. There were two rooms--a primary room and then the other children. There was just an elementary school. There was no high school in that part. So maybe it was about five or six in some of the classes. Of course, you'd just go up and stand up at the desk with the teacher and say your lesson--recite your lesson.

Lohr: When did you move to Denton?

Harden: In 1940.

Lohr: What was Denton like when you moved here?

Harden: Well, my assessment of it was that I thought it was a lovely town. Everybody was so friendly. Of course, you knew about segregation then. Now my children never felt it because we never talked about it. The people that I worked for...I worked at North Texas at first. I worked at Oak Street Hall. My mother was the head cook there. When I came, I was the vegetable cook. Of course, the whites and blacks didn't mix that much. You couldn't go to the movies, and, as you know, there were a lot of places you couldn't go to. You couldn't get waited on in the stores. You'd have to stand back--even then in the 1940s. But it never bothered me too much. Then it never bothered my children. My children didn't really think much about segregation until they went to Seattle,

Washington. Then that's when they got it.

Lohr: Howw is that?

Harden: Well, I guess it was like when I came up. My parents never discussed the races. It was just there, and you knew what you were supposed to do and what you wasn't supposed to do. But as far as talking about it, you know, like they do now, we never talked about it. And the people who were ugly to you...I remember I worked for a lady, and I never thought too much about it because that's just the way she was. Otherwise, she was a pretty nice person. Then after things changed, she became much nicer. But she told me one time...she had bought a new car, and she told me I couldn't ride in the front seat with her. But I was nursing her baby; I was taking care of her little baby.

Lohr: Why couldn't you ride in the front seat of the car?

Harden: Oh, she didn't want a black sitting up there beside her. You know, I never thought much about it. But later on, I did think about it--that she would let me take care of her baby and hold her baby in my arms, go off and leave that baby with me; yet she didn't want me to sit beside her. Well, that's just a few of the things that I remember. But somehow or another, I just didn't think much about segregation. People who acted nice, I appreciated; and those that didn't act nice, well, then I ignored them.

Lohr: You didn't resent it?

Harden: Well, not really. The only thing I resented is when I went to go and get waited on. I would resent that when they'd call me "honey" or "girl." I would resent that. But I've always been a kind of even-tempered person. Then I thought, "Well, they are supposed to be superior, but they're really not." Because I felt within myself that you don't have to put anybody down to feel good. Evidently, that's what they were doing. And I taught my girls that. I had five girls, and I taught them the same thing. I worked for the Russells here, and they were all real nice and always treated my girls real nice, and they never felt it until they left here.

Lohr: What did they experience when they left here?

Harden: Well, you know, in Seattle it's a melting pot. There was this little pocket of Japanese here and this little pocket of Jews here and this pocket of Chinese over here, you know. And they just showed it more then they did here. Denton to me was one of the nicest towns that I've ever been in--the friendliest. Everybody was friendly and nice to you. They were friendly to me. I said a lot of times that the white men that I came in contact with always opened the door for me and closed it and were just as nice as they could be. I never came up against hard-core segregation.

Now I know what it was like because you had to go around to the back to eat. I remember I went with Mrs.

Russell to Cotulla and spent some time down there, and she would always have to bring my food out if we stopped to eat. Then even later than that, Mrs. Russell was sick, and the nurse and I drove to Arizona. She would always talk about...the nurse was white, and she said, "Now if me and my girlfriend can't stay together, then I won't stay." But it was still a lot of tension. I guess that was in the early 1960s then.

Lohr: In Denton you couldn't go in places to eat?

Harden: Oh, no.

Lohr: What would people have done if you had tried?

Harden: Well, you remember the sit-ins, don't you (laughter)? Well, that's what would have happened, so we just never did do it here. We never did do anything about the schools being integrated. They just decided to do it. In fact, the black people didn't want it because they were afraid of losing their jobs. Of course, they didn't. Well, the principal lost his, and they just kind of made him a flunky. Of course, he drew his salary, but he really didn't have a job. My brother came here and tried to get a job as principal, and they weren't ready for a black principal even though the schools were integrated. He was an assistant dean out at North Texas. You might have known Harve King.

Lohr: I've heard the name.

Harden: That's my brother.

Lohr: When was he assistant dean?

Harden: He retired the year before last. He came in 1968 and was assistant dean of students until he retired. I think he's going on his second year because he retired after I did, and I'm going on my third year.

Lohr: You said you were at North Texas working. What was it like there when North Texas integrated? Were you there during that time?

Harden: Yes, yes. My mother and I worked at Oak Street Hall, which was a girl's dorm. Of course, my mother was such an outgoing, loving person, and all the girls just loved her. It wasn't bad with the girls, but, I mean, it was the older people that gave you such a hard time and wanted you to stay in your place.

Lohr: What would they do?

Harden: Well, like, if I was working for you and maybe I came and said something that didn't sound so good to you, you'd say I was impertinent. Maybe if I was older than you were, I'd think, "Well, if anybody's sassing anybody, you're sassing me." (laughter) But, you know, they resented it, and they would kind of tell you off: "You don't do that! Go around to the back door!"

Lohr: You think they would tell you off in a situation like that where they wouldn't have told a white person off?

Harden: Right, right. Say, for instance, after the integration began and they started changing the names around, instead

of being a janitor, you were a custodian. Then when you were in the kitchen, you were a technician, you know, and all this. Fred Moore had been here for years and years, and they named the school after him. But my boss lady would never call him "Mr. Moore" or "Professor Moore." She would just say "Moore." She had a yard man which she didn't think nearly as much of him as she did me (because she said it all the time), but she called him "Mr. Scott." She called me "Bessie D." But I wouldn't dare call her by her name. So that's the way it was. I was so surprised when I quit the Russells and went back to North Texas. I went to Clark Hall, and everybody was "Mrs. So-and-so" and Mrs. This." I thought, "Well, what's going on?" Then after I quit and I went out to the Denton State School to start working, everybody was called by their first name.

Lohr: When was this?

Harden: I went to work out there in 1968. They had changed that quick from everybody, you know...usually, we used to say that to be up on your ethics, if you didn't know a person real well, you didn't call them by their name. It was "Mrs." and "Miss." I can remember that some of the girls would say...when we called them by their names, they'd say, "Well, you know, when I came to college, I thought I was going to be Miss So-and-so, and here I'm just plain ol'...." (laughter) That was some of the girls who would come from the fancy homes, I guess, who would say things

like that. Then some were just sweet and nice. But some of them resented being called by their names, but yet still they called my mother "Minnie," by her name, you know, her first name. Then all of a sudden, that changed. My daughter, when she went to Seattle, she said her doctor was always calling her "Katherine." She said she told him, "I don't call you So-and-so. Why do you call me Katherine? I'm Mrs. Franklin."

But segregation was really bad, and a lot of people resented it so much until a lot of times it caused a lot of friction. A lot of black people are very sensitive even today. But as I said, it never bothered me one bit. I'm not like these young people who say, "Well, I'm trying to find out who I am." I already know who I am, and consequently it doesn't bother me.

I remember when on Saturday the people from the country would come to town from all the areas around. I remember one Saturday particularly. I was coming from work and going home. I lived on this side of town because black folks always live on this side of the tracks. This lady was changing her baby's diaper right there on the square in the car. The baby was just squalling; she was just squalling. So she looked up and saw me passing, and she said, "Look there! Look there! There goes that nigger, and she's gonna get yuh." I just walked on; I just didn't say a word. She'd never get the satisfaction

of making me angry and saying something back to her. So I didn't. I just walked on like she didn't say it.

Lohr: Have you always lived in southeast Denton since you've been in Denton?

Harden: Yes, yes, I've lived on this side of the tracks. I used to live over on Cook Street and a couple of other places, but I've lived here twenty years right here in this spot.

Lohr: What was southeast Denton like back then before the streets were paved?

Harden: Oh, I wish Mr. Ivey was living so he could tell you what it was like when my mother died. It was horrible. It was muddy. You couldn't keep anything clean. When it was dry, it was dusty, and you couldn't keep anything clean. When my mother died, it had rained. She belonged to that church right down there, and it was so muddy and sloppy. My son-in-law came from Seattle to the funeral, and he went up there and begged them for some material throw out. I didn't have rugs on the floors then. I just had some throw rugs. And my girls and my nephews would pick them up and run up to the laundry and wash them and bring them back and put them in front of the door. It was horrible. It was just like a loblolly. Mr. Ivey said to me, "Bessie, I can't understand why we let you people live like that." I said, "Do you know why? It's because y'all never come over there and look and see what's going on over in the black neighborhood. We pay our taxes, too,

but we don't get anything for it."

So then after that, after we got the Interracial Fellowship going, Christian Women's Fellowship going, we walked these streets and persuaded the black people to give the few feet of their land so we could get our streets paved. We just really...I guess we lobbied (laughter). We kept on at it until we got it all done. And I guess some of the white people began to see the light then because they didn't charge us any extra interest for the paving. We got the asphalt put down first--some of the people who were able to do it. Of course, you had to pay a third of the cost. Then after that, we just went on out, and we just stayed on them all the time with the help of the white women. That's what got it done. Those white women helped us to get it done.

Lohr: How did the Women's Fellowship begin?

Harden: Somebody else is going to have to tell you that because I wasn't in on the first meeting. I joined later. Did you talk to Irene Price?

Lohr: No.

Harden: I think who you need to talk to--who really knows how it got started--is Norvell Reed.

Lohr: I think someone has talked to her.

Harden: Well, she knows exactly how it got started. I joined later. It started at her mother's house.

Lohr: How did you come to join?

Harden: Well, we were all trying to do things, and we thought it was a good thing. And everybody was talking it up. It started out as the white women wanting to get to know the black women and the black women wanting to get to know the white women and see how they felt about things--to see if we had the same feelings about the same issues and see whether we wanted the same things they wanted and that sort of thing. That's the way it really began. Then we started these projects, and we were really good. Of course, the reason it broke up was because we ran out of projects. As long as we were working and doing something, we had it made. You don't know Trudy Foster. She's a real estate woman now.

Lohr: I interviewed her.

Harden: Oh, you did? She and I used to work together. Everytime you looked, you saw us. We were almost like Eleanor Roosevelt and Miss Bethune (laughter). We used to laugh about it all the time. We were real good friends down there. Elsie Hampleman and Carol Riddlesperger, we're real good friends still. There are just so many.

Lohr: Did the group start as a social group at first?

Harden: Well, sort of. It got to be a social group. I don't know whether it was really social, but I suppose you could say it was a social group because we really weren't doing anything. We didn't have any projects going. It was just that we wanted to get to know each other.

Lohr: What did you do at your meetings?

Harden: Oh, we talked and we did the buddy system. Two or three or four would get together and go out to eat. We'd go to plays and different entertainment. Then everybody would talk about what books they read and all that.

Lohr: Where were your meetings?

Harden: From house to house.

Lohr: Did you plan each time that you'd go to the next person's house next time?

Harden: Yes, yes. Then we always had a big Christmas party and dinner, and Thanksgiving. We'd always get together and have something going at somebody's church. Then if an issue came up that we needed to go the city council or whatever, then we'd all get together. If something was happening over here that we didn't want to happen, then all the women would get together. When they integrated, they were beautiful. Our friends were just beautiful because they were afraid our children would drop out. Their children were walking, but they were coming and picking ours up (laughter). That's right. They were coming and picking ours up. I've always loved Denton because on a whole this as been a pretty decent town. There were some people that were hard-core--so bitter against integration--but then there were those who...like I said, when I went to Denton State School, the people who are out there are discriminatory, but they are not allowed

to show it because they'll lose their job if they do. But it's out there. I always said that I always looked at my friends who were nice and sweet, and since there were so many nice people out there, I didn't have time to fool with those who was being ugly. And I didn't. And that's just the way I've always felt. I don't have time to fool with those people who are going to be ugly and nasty (chuckle).

Lohr: Were there any people who were asked to belong to the fellowship who maybe were afraid of joining because of ostracism in the neighborhood or among their friends?

Harden: I don't think so; I don't think so. I remember one time particularly that we were...where were we going? A bunch of us women were all in a car--black and white--and this woman was from Mississippi, and it scared her to death. She wanted to be with us--and she was with us--but she knew how she had to act in Mississippi, and so she was scared to death. She was dodging all down in the car. We said, "They're not going to bother you." She was really afraid. Of course, I'd never been to Mississippi, but my son-in-law is an architect, and he went to work for Boeing Aircraft. They sent him to Mississippi and to Alabama, and it was horrible. That was, I guess, in the middle 1950 or late 1950s or early 1960s possibly. They had to have a certain way to go. Ben told me, "Mom, do you know what? I feel sorry for them because they really

think they're right." They wanted him to get off the sidewalk and walk in the street. That's right.

Lohr: And nothing like that ever happened in Denton?

Harden: No, not to my knowledge.

Lohr: Of course, Denton doesn't have many sidewalks, does it (laughter)?

Harden: No, not now. They had a few then. Our street was so pretty. We had trees on this street. It was the prettiest street in the black neighborhood. But when they widened the streets...they were looking toward the future, and so they widened the streets, and we had to give two or three feet of your land. Of course, the streets were real narrow then. They're not too wide now, but they're a lot better. So we did. Mother had three big oaks across there. This was my mother's house, and when she died I took it. Then I planted the mulberry trees to have some shade. They're non-bearing. They make a mess, but at least birds don't come and help them.

Lohr: Well, what was the first project that the women's group took on? Do you remember?

Harden: I guess getting the streets paved. I think that was our biggest project. Then when they built what they called Dreamland Apartments...it's housing over here--apartment complex. It was so bad. Of course, the owner did a number on it to get it inspected and get it through. Then he wanted to put a washateria over there. Of course, that

street over there was not open. You could go down in there, but you couldn't get out on the other end. Of course, my church is right down there, and we really didn't want to have a washateria over there for the public Now they have a place for them to wash, but it's for the people who live over there. But, you see, it made the traffic so bad. Then we said, "Well, if they put a commercial washateria over there, then they'll want a store, and then they'll want something else, and it'll just be worse." So we all went down and stayed on that city council. So they never did do it.

Lohr: How did Dreamland come to be built?

Harden: Well, as the first thing, they wanted to put in urban renewal. Of course, that was going to take everybody's house. Of course, people just were not able to build another house. So we fought it. So then after that, somehow or another...I didn't pay too much attention to city politics like I do now. Well, my pastor was on the city council for six years, so he kept us up-to-date on what was going on. I never thought too much about it, but I didn't object to the project. I said, "You know, I might have to live over there." I said, "I don't want to live over there, but I might have to." So, anyway, they got this man--whatever his name was, I can't even think of it--and someway they got the money going, and they built it. They fell down before they got them up good. They

just fell down before they got them up good, so then they had to redo them. Then they named them the Phoenix Apartments now. So that's how it came into being, because we rejected urban renewal.

Lohr: Why did you reject urban renewal?

Harden: Well, because we all would have had to give up our houses.

Lohr: The city was quite divided over that, was it not?

Harden: I guess they were; I guess they were. As I said, I wasn't paying too much attention. I was so busy trying to make a living along about that time that I didn't have time to see what else was going on (chuckle). But we rejected it. That was before our interracial group started. Yes, that was before. I didn't own a house at that particular time. I lived over on the other side of town. Of course, everybody would have had to give up their houses, you see, and they just weren't going to do that.

Lohr: Has the black neighborhood always been here?

Harden: No. No, before I came to Denton--just before I came--the black people was over there in the white part of town--across the tracks over here. They called it Quaker. I guess Norvell could tell you about that, or some of the others who were living here then. That had already happened when I came to Denton--when they moved. Of course, for a long time over there on Congress, a few people still lived over there even, oh, up into the 1970s. They still had their house over there on Congress.

Lohr: Why did they call it Quaker?

Harden: I don't know (laughter). I don't know. I don't know why they called it Quaker over there. But that's what's been told to me. Then another thing that we did, we started getting the neighborhoods integrated.

Lohr: How did you do that?

Harden: We had our maps. Well, there was one or two real estate people that would sell you a house. I remember one particularly, and I never shall forget him--Mr. Raposa, who helped me to get my house. You know, you had to be making a certain amount. I had tried and tried, and I couldn't. They had started this new development where my daughter lived--over there on Park Lane, you know, next to the highway over there. Of course, came along the tight money, and, of course, everything fell through. My children were all grown then, and, of course, I could put all my money into one thing, and I was going to have me a new little house--not very big, but it would have been new. I wanted it so bad, and I was really working hard My son-in-law drew me some plans, and I think I still got them somewhere around here. Anyway, they cried "tight money," and the government shut-up their hands, so the project fell through for a while. I got my money back.

In the meantime my mother died, so then I bought my brother and sister out, and I took this house. I said, "Well, it's a roof over my head." It wasn't what I

wanted, but it's a roof over my head. Then those houses over there were pretty cheap. I think they were about $12,000, and so people was just buying them up. My daughter said that she and her husband started buying that house, and they were making $97 a month together. They bought it and got it paid for.

Of course, in the meantime, my other girls were coming up, and they were wanting to go to college. I've sent two to college. Then one, after she married, went to college; and the other one went to beauty school.

Lohr: Was it difficult getting the neighborhoods integrated?

Harden: Oh, yes, it was real difficult. There was resistance.

Lohr: What happened?

Harden: Well, what would happen, they couldn't keep them from moving in there, but a lot of the white people would move. As I started to say awhile ago, it was a couple who moved in here around Christmastime one year. Mr. Raposa had sold them the house, and he stayed and watched them the whole time, and so did Trudy Foster and her husband. They took food over at Christmastime and made them just have a lovely time. A couple of people moved out. There was a man across the street, and he wanted to move, but he finally stayed. After that, it wasn't too much resistance, and it wasn't hard at all.

Lohr: What year was that? Do you remember?

Harden: No. It was back in the late 1950s, I guess, or early

1960s. It was back then. Of course, now it's no problem at all. Some of the blacks have gotten to living pretty good, and they're even over in Southridge (laughter). Of course, I have to live over here because keeping up the utilities and stuff would be more that I could do.

Lohr: What about school integration? How did that go?

Harden: Well, my children wasn't in school, and I understand it went pretty badly. Even now there are some problems.

Lohr: Did the high school integrate first and then the grade schools later?

Harden: No, I think they all integrated about the same time. But there's still some problems.

Lohr: Even today?

Harden: Even today, yes.

Lohr: What happened to Fred Moore School?

Harden: It's being used as a workshop for the mentally retarded.

Lohr: Was it a good school back when it was the only black school?

Harden: Well, it was fair, but it really wasn't a really good school. There was a lot of things lacking, but it was so much better than what they'd ever had before that everybody thought it was pretty doggone good. Of course, there were those who tried to make us think it was better than what they had up there [Denton High], but we knew better. Our kids always had to wear the old band uniforms, the pep squad uniforms; and they used the old

used books. They never got new books.

Lohr: You mean the uniforms were secondhand?

Harden: Yes, that's right. They sure were. They never got new things. But they had some pretty doggone good teachers there. They had a school reunion last year, and it was just beautiful. It was just lovely. Everybody got pretty upset with the Record-Chronicle--I did, too--because they didn't even cover it. They didn't cover it.

Lohr: This was just a general school reunion for anyone who had gone there?

Harden: Well, you see, it was Fred Douglass before it was Fred Moore. So what they did, they asked everybody that had ever gone to Fred Moore or Fred Douglass to come. It wasn't just like a class reunion; it was a whole school from years and years back--everybody that had ever gone there. Now I didn't go to Fred Moore. But they came from everywhere.

Lohr: They had a pretty good turnout?

Harden: Oh, they had a lovely turnout. It was carried off really, really nice. They had the nicest banquet and dance.

Lohr: Where was it held?

Harden: At the Sheraton. My brother helped to get it going from Oklahoma City. I had two brothers and a sister that graduated from Fred Moore. That was their background. We've had a lawyer; we had a couple of doctors; we've had architects; and we've, you know, had just different

categories that have come out of Fred Moore. We've got one boy, whose mother just died, they used to live right down there, Tommy, and he's a judge now in Dallas. Is it Dallas or Fort Worth? One of those places.

Lohr: Did he come to the reunion?

Harden: Oh, yes, he came. We've got ministers. Of course, everybody looked down on the school and that black teachers couldn't teach. But they all got their start there. My brother was able to come and get a job up here at North Texas. Both of them went to the service. Well, I had three brothers who went to the service. My oldest brother died, but these two came back. Those two brothers went to Texas College, which was a poor black school. They thumbed from here to Tyler; they didn't know what it was to ride or catch the bus. They thumbed there, and they thumbed back.

Lohr: Not everyday.

Harden: No, whenever they do to go. They would go and stay, but they might come home on holidays. But what I mean, no, they didn't do it everyday; but what I'm talking about is everytime they had to go. That's a good little ways down in East Texas. But they wanted to go, and they went.

Lohr: Well, did the community hate to see Fred Moore close in a way?

Harden: The black people did. I don't know how the white people felt. But the black people hated it, and they hate it

today.

Lohr: They still wish that Fred Moore was open?

Harden: Yes.

Lohr: Why is that?

Harden: Well, for one thing our little kids have been bused all their lives. They have to bus them over here and bus them all across the highway. There are no schools over in this area. There is no school close to this area.

Lohr: Where is the closest elementary school?

Harden: It's up here on the other side of McKinney. Robert E. Lee is up there on...not on Woodrow. I forget what the name of that street is. It's on up there behind Mack Park--around there. Well, of course, it could be integrated, but more white people live over there than do blacks, and that's where the school is.

Lohr: When Fred Moore was closed, did the black community have any say about that, or was it just closed?

Harden: They had no say. They didn't ask them; they just integrated.

Lohr: Did anyone protest its being closed?

Harden: Well, not out loud (chuckle). Not out loud.

Lohr: Why is that?

Harden: I don't know. I don't know why they didn't. I guess it's been so much marching and going on and everything that I guess the black people were tired. Those black leaders then, I guess that they just gave in.

Lohr: Did Fred Moore have a high school?

Harden: Yes, they did have a high school. The black kids were bused in from all areas--from as far away as Decatur, Pilot Point, Lewisville.

Lohr: To go to Fred Moore?

Harden: To go to Fred Moore so they could finish high school.

Lohr: What became of them when Fred Moore closed?

Harden: Well, I think in the smaller towns now they have high schools, I guess. I really don´t know.

Lohr: So all the little areas had to integrate at the same time?

Harden: Yes, for those that were going to high school. I remember my floor, like, if they were having a game or something going on, kids would come and spend the night with my girls, and they would be sleeping on the floor. My daughter says the same thing about her son, that there are legs everywhere over the floor. They had no way to get up there, so they´d have to come and spend the night so they could be here, especially if they had a tournament or they were going out of town for a game or something.

Lohr: Where did they play their football games?

Harden: Oh, they played with other black schools when Fred Moore was here.

Lohr: Well, they didn´t have a stadium, so where did they play?

Harden: They were allowed to play the games out at the high school--at the Bronco Stadium. Yes, they were allowed to play there--their football games.

Lohr: Did they ever play white teams?

Harden: No, not until it was integrated. No, they played all-black teams. They played Pilot Point and Gainesville, Fort Worth and Dallas, and whatever schools that were in their district. I guess Fred Moore must have been 2-A or something. They played the same schools.

Lohr: What became of the teachers at Fred Moore when the school closed?

Harden: They were all integrated into the schools here.

Lohr: No one lost any jobs.

Harden: No one lost their job. No, they sure didn't. No one lost their job.

Lohr: How did the black teachers like teaching at the white high school?

Harden: Well, I didn't hear a whole lot of complaining? I hear more complaints now than I did then.

Lohr: Why is that, do you suppose?

Harden: Well, I can't actually say how it is here in Denton. Where my daughter teaches in Denver, now they were supposed to be more liberal, and they desegregated a long time ago. But they are really hard. They're putting so much pressure on the black teachers, trying to get them all out of the school because they don't treat the black children right, and they don't want the black teachers there to say nothing. Of course, they've given my daughter a leave of absence. She's a fighter, and she's

taking a leave of absence now because they're putting so much pressure on her. Of course, she taught in Chicago, and she is a real good teacher. She fought them tooth-and-nail because several years ago, when the audio-visual skills came out, well, she was in Chicago then, and she taught it. I've got write-ups where they cited her in the paper, and Chicago is a hard place. They've got a picture of her and everything. So they found out that she had an English major, so, of course, she had taught remedial reading and all that. But she didn't have her master's in it, so they told her that they thought she ought to get her master's in this remedial reading. Of course, sure enough, she did. Then they wanted her to set up this program to teach somebody that she knew, and then that person was going to be her boss. She said, "I'll never do it." I said, "Honey, you've got to." She said, "But, Mother, I'd cry all the way to the bank." She said, "I'll never teach somebody that I know, and then let them be my boss." She said, "I'll never do that." And she didn't. You know, they abolished that program. They certainly did--which the black students really needed that, especially. Of course, I'm sure a lot of the white kids did, too. But just imagine abolishing a fruitful program, a productive program, just because they didn't want a black to be the director of it.

Lohr: Do you think they do things like that down here?

Harden: I don't know. I really don't know. I want to believe that everybody's pretty fair. But I do hear that they're getting a lot of pressure.

Lohr: In Denton?

Harden: Yes, so I don't know.

Lohr: Did the women's group have any kind of job programs?

Harden: No, we didn't. But the thing about them, if there was anything that needed to be done, if they could they would help.

Lohr: How did they help?

Harden: Well, if they knew somebody that they could put in a good word. They'd help just like they did about picking up our kids and taking them to school so they wouldn't be dropouts.

Lohr: Did they also tutor the children--some of them?

Harden: No, no, not that I know of. But then a lot of people didn't have a car. You know, everybody was so poor. At our church we had a little ol' church bus, and we let them use it to take some of the little ones to school until they got it all straightened out. They just did it, it looks like to me, overnight. As I said, I wasn't paying too much attention to what was going on. I was too busy trying to make a living (chuckle).

Lohr: What about the churches in Denton? What place have they played in integration?

Harden: None.

Lohr: Neither the white nor the black?

Harden: No. There are a few people who go to white churches. But a couple of ministers lost their church here because they invited black people to join. They lost their church.

Lohr: Do you remember which ones?

Harden: I'm not sure. I'd be afraid to say because I'm not sure.

Lohr: When was this? How long ago?

Harden: Well, this was about along in that same time. Everything was kind of happening at once. Until people really got used to what was going on...because I know when the hospital started integrating, they would say...I remember one woman who said, "Well, I'm just not ready for this." When a black person would be in the room with them. She would say, "I'm just not ready for this." I used to be a pink lady, and I would hear this going on.

Lohr: Where did the black people go to a hospital if it wasn't integrated?

Harden: Well, you could go. The thing was, you could go to the hospital, but you weren't put in a room with a white person. Flow Hospital was supposed to be a non-profit hospital. It was supposed to take care of the indigent, which they never have, really. Well, I guess they have to a certain extent. But when a lot of people would be sick, then a lot of times it wouldn't be no other place. Of course, they just started doing it, anyway, because it was going to integrated. So they just started doing it, and

a lot of people just really objected.

Lohr: Did they raise a fuss?

Harden: Well, they just didn't make a great big stink of it, but they made it be known that they didn't approve of that and didn't want to be a part of it.

Lohr: Were black doctors allowed to practice at the hospital?

Harden: Well, in fact, we didn't have any then, but there are now.

Lohr: You didn't have any black doctors?

Harden: NO.

Lohr: Did you go to white doctors?

Harden: Yes, I went to white doctors all my life (laughter).

Lohr: So there wasn't any problem with that, huh?

Harden: No, it wasn't any problem with that. There were plenty of black doctors around, but there wasn't any in this small town. You know, back then Denton was very small. You have no idea...how long have you been in Denton?

Lohr: Eleven years. It's mushroomed since I've been here.

Harden: Well, I'm telling you that this is before that. This is 1988, so that was, like, 1977 when you came?

Lohr: Yes.

Harden: Well, it has really grown. It has really grown over the last few years since you've been here. As you say, it has really grown. But it was very small. I walked all over Denton everyday to work, and I could walk all over Denton in an hour (laughter)--in an hour then.

Lohr: But that seems very strange that there would be all this

segregation in other places, but yet you went to white doctors.

Harden: Well, it's just that no doctors came here because I'm sure they wouldn't have let them practice in Denton--not then. But it's two or three black doctors that's practicing here now.

Lohr: I guess that just points out the insanity of segregation. Some things are so totally segregated, but then when it came to other things, it was perfectly open.

Harden: Well, now here it was a different story. I had some like Dr. Adami and Dr. Miller. Of course, I fell out with Dr. Miller and Dr. Adami, too, but especially Dr. Miller. After he got to making real good money, like most of them, he didn't have time for you. But he used to be the most sympathetic person, and he had time to talk to you. My girls, when they were little, they just loved him. And Dr. Patterson, the pediatrician, of course, he was always sweet. When I first met him, he was always very nice. Of course, I don't mean that they...they just seemed not to have time for you. I had pneumonia, and Dr. Adami had always looked after me real good, but he just let me go. When I left I still had pneumonia, and he didn't tell me. I was coughing, and I went to Dr. Kelly. Now he's a honey. He's the doctor over dialysis, but he's the sweetest thing. I went to him, and he looked at me; and he said, "Mrs. Harden, when did you get so sick?" I

said, "Well, I'm not sick. I'm just coughing." And everybody was getting back in the office (chuckle). He said, "I'm going to send you to a specialist." And he did. I was walking around with pneumonia again. Of course, I had all these allergies and sinusitis, some asthma--just all sorts of things wrong with me (chuckle).

Lohr: Well, when did the first black doctor come to Denton?

Harden: I really don't know that, but it's been several years. I've never met him. I think it's a couple doctors, and they've been here awhile. But I can remember, before I left Farmersville, when you had to stand out in the hall. You couldn't even go in the office where the white people were. You had to stand back outside.

Lohr: And did someone just come and call you?

Harden: Yes, after the white patients had gone.

Lohr: You had to wait until <u>all</u> the white patients were gone?

Harden: Yes.

Lohr: Even though you had an appointment?

Harden: Yes, even if you had an appointment. It didn't make any difference; you had to wait. There's something that always surprises me, and it really rubs me the wrong way, but I try not to say anything because I think, "Well, maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm thinking wrong." You walk in a place, and they'll walk away from you and go wait on a white person and don't wait on me.

Lohr: Today?

Harden: Yes, in this day and time, I have that happen occasionally. Once, I guess the year before last, in Sears I went to take something back, and some lady came in there; and she was waited on, and somebody else was waiting. I was standing there. This white woman was asking for directions. She´d already been waited on. So the lady that was helping her, and this other lady, when she got free, she went over there to help her. And I´m standing here now and had been standing there about ten minutes. So I looked at her, and I said, "Miss, I´ve been standing here a long time. Are you not going to wait on me? It doesn´t take both of you to help her, to give her directions where to go. I´ve been here a long time." She said, " Well, I just thought...." I said, "But that´s not your job. I need to be waited on just like she is." I said, "I´m in a hurry, too. It´s nice to be helpful, but it doesn´t take but one of you to help her and tell her where to go." She looked so funny at me, but she apologized. I was fixing to say, "I want to know where your manager is right now!" That burned me up because I had been standing there so long, and she got through waiting on her customer, and then she runs and gets something and goes over here with this woman and leaves me standing there (laughter).

Lohr: What happened to the group in the 1970s? You said that it ended because it didn´t have anything else working.

Harden: Well, I think that's why we just kind of fell away and didn't start anything else. I said to Trudy Foster and Carol Riddlesperger, too, that we quit meeting, I guess, because we hadn't found another project. As long as we were busy, we were really going to town; but then after we didn't have a project, we just kind of fell by the wayside.

Lohr: How long has that been?

Harden: Oh, it's been a while. It's been quite awhile. Well, I think we found out what we wanted to know--what it was originally started for. It was just to get to know each other as a person.

Lohr: Have the friendships continued?

Harden: Yes! Oh, yes!

Lohr: What about among the families? Husbands and children?

Harden: Well, of course, a lot of the children have moved away. My children have moved away. Of course, some have gone off to college. Jean Kooker's son is a dentist in Dr. Speck's office. Of course, I hadn't seen him since he was a little boy, and when I had my teeth fixed last year, well, he waited on me. We got to talking. Oh, yes, we're still real good friends.

Lohr: Do you think there's anything for the group to do now if it were to get fired up again?

Harden: Well, I don't know. I guess we could find something to do. Of course, Dorothy Adkins is running for some kind of

school position. You've seen her picture in the paper. We were real good friends. Of course, we're all going to vote for her. Karen Abarnathy and Betty called me awhile ago, and we're all going to vote for her (chuckle). Yes, we're still good friends.

Lohr: Did the group do anything about voter registration?

Harden: Oh, yes! Oh, yes, it sure did! We were out there trying to get it done. That's when it got started, because the blacks were kind of lax. Well, I won't say "just the blacks" because I found out a whole lot of my white friends that I worked with didn't vote, either, and they still don't vote. You'd be surprised. You'd just be surprised. Because I know I was. Of course, we used to always have somebody sitting out in Denton Center or somebody sitting over here where they've designated a place where somebody would be trying to get the vote out.

Lohr: Did you have drives? Did you go door-to-door?

Harden: Yes. Oh, yes, we sure did. We sure did. I think Linnie McAdams was the only black one then that belonged to the League of Women Voters. My daughter was pretty interested in it, too. Of course, whenever Jewel stopped, everybody said, "Well, we don't know what to do because we have nobody to tell us what to do." (laughter). But I never did like politics. I did what I could. Like, I would go down and stuff envelopes. We'd go down to the Democratic headquarters, and we'd work for whoever you were voting

for. We'd take cookies and things, and we did all that sort of stuff.

Lohr: Did you find it easy to get people to sign up to vote, or was there resistance?

Harden: Well, they were kind of bashful about it. Some wouldn't; some would. I don't think I ever had anybody to turn me down, though.

Lohr: Did people just think it didn't matter?

Harden: Yes, a lot of people felt like it just didn't matter--they really did--because they had not been convinced that it does matter.

Lohr: So you think it's different today than it was then?

Harden: Oh, yes, much so. Since Jesse Jackson is running, I've never saw so many young people active. We knew they weren't voting for anybody else but him because they would be through so quick (laughter).

Lohr: That was this time?

Harden: Yes, this time. That's right--this time. I said, "I know good and well they didn't go down there and vote for everybody." I was thinking about our young people. It bothers me that they don't take time to find out what's going on. They don't read the paper. Now when my girls were growing up, I made them read something even if they didn't read anything but the funny books. I said, "Now you read something." I would bring magazines home for them to read. Of course, they got in the habit of

reading, and that's what they do all the time. But we have so many children that are out in the streets, and they're not reading. Of course, if you don't read, then you don't know anything.

Lohr: I keep seeing in the paper articles about this part of town where the zoning is not enforced.

Harden: Yes, we're working on it. Yes, we're working on it.

Lohr: Has it changed? Of course, I know the streets are paved, and there's running water. But has it really changed that much as far as the city enforcing ordinances?

Harden: Well, there's a whole lot more conveniences, but they haven't enforced it. Of course, I think some of that was due to us. Because I know an old house was right across there, and it was just an eyesore. But because it belonged to a family and they didn't do anything about it, nobody pushed it. Then one time I think the city had to do some changing because they got sued one time for moving a house over there by the railroad tracks. It wasn't anything to live in, but they got sued. So they've been very careful about it. But they have not made people remove the old dead cars and trash and stuff. So we've been working on that. My pastor has really been working on that.

Lohr: Do you think he can make any progress with it this time?

Harden: I'm pretty sure we will. Yes, I believe we will this time.

Lohr: What are you going to do if you don't? Is there an organization to push it?

Harden: Well, they'll get so much flak. We can get on the telephone and call the city council at home or wherever they are. We know what to do.

Lohr: So it is a lot different in that respect?

Harden: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Then we have a lot of friends on the city council--Ray Stephens, Linnie McAdams, Randy Boyd (of course, he took Reverand Chew's place). We know how to go up there and sit in those chambers and call them on the carpet. Yes, there's plenty we can do if they don't do it.

Lohr: Why haven't they been enforcing those ordinances?

Harden: Well, just because they don't. Blacks, they don't need as much [facetious comment] (laughter). That's some of the thinking. A lot of people dump us all in the same category. We do have some that I don't even like to live by, myself. But the thing is, they'll lump us all in and say, "They're nasty and they're lazy, and they don't want anything." But that's not true. That is not true. Now we have a lot of white people drive down through here and throw their paper out. I remember when I was getting some work done on my house the year before last, Barbara Ross was down here. She's the head of the block grant money. She said, "Did I see what I thought I saw?" I said, "You certainly did!" She was coming in my door, and this

person just went over there and just threw it out there.

Lohr: The garbage?

Harden: Well, it was paper. It wasn't just, say, garbage. But it was litter. Of course, they do that all over town. We'd like to have it cleaned up. I've been after my brother, and I'm going to call him after while. I can't get out and do it by myself. And my yard is just awful. It's just awful right now. The weeds are just...oh, they are just awful. I have some stuff out there I want him to haul off, and he hasn't gotten here yet.

Lohr: Well, what are your feelings and perceptions of the group in looking back?

Harden: You mean the Interracial Group? You know, really, I'm going to have to talk to Carol Riddlesperger about that when we meet next week or whenever. I don't know. I think we accomplished a lot. When I look back, I think we got an awful lot done. You just have no idea what shape these streets were in. Somebody was talking about that and how they had to get their shoes shined every week. Well, you don't have to worry about getting your shoes shined now (laughter). But you did then. You had to get your shoes shined. You had to keep polish so you could polish them, because they would look so bad on these awful streets.

Lohr: And the rest of the streets in town were not like that?

Harden: Most of them were in pretty good shape. Now in some of

the poor white areas out here, they weren't. And some of them still are not in very good shape. But we got ours in good shape then because we worked on it. And they are keeping them up pretty good.

Lohr: Did you have much resistance among the people when you were trying to get the streets paved?

Harden: We did among the black people because they didn't feel like they ought to have to give up any of their land. So we had to convince them that they weren't going to do it unless they got the streets widened. We could see why it was necessary to widen the streets. I said, "It's just a foot or two, and that won't hurt." I think they took three feet off of ours out there. You see what little yard I have. I'm glad now that I don't have much yard (laughter). I have a lot in the back, but I'm glad I don't have much.

Lohr: What purpose did the group serve?

Harden: Well, as I said, our main purpose at first was to get to know each other. That was really the main purpose of the club when it was first started. Then we saw these other things that needed to be done so we started working to do whatever we could to make things better.

Lohr: What sort of things would you discuss to try to get to know each other?

Harden: Oh, we would just have a general conversation--what our children liked, for example. Then one time we had a

conversation about how we'd feel if our child married into the other race. We had a good discussion about that. Some said, well, they just didn't know, and I said, well, I didn't either. I never thought about it, but I said, well, if they did I'd just have to try to make the best of it I could.

My grandson did marry a white girl--one of my daughter's children. And they weren't kids, either. He was younger than she was. I guess he must have been about twenty, and she was about twenty-four and had been married before. Of course, my daughter and my son-in-law just liked to die (laughter). They just really liked to die. It didn't bother me too much, except that it happened so quick and I knew something was wrong. I was there in October, and they were married in November. And they'd just met. I couldn't see what was going on. It didn't last very long.

But we talked about things like that and how we felt about this. Somebody asked me--I think it was not too long ago--would I prefer to be called black or negro or colored. I said, "I would just rather be called by my name. I'd just rather be called Bessie." (laughter) I had never thought about it until that night. I said that I'd just like to be called by my name, and I'd just like to be thought of as a person.

Lohr: Did you find it easy to get to know each other back then?

Harden: It was pretty easy. As I said, Denton was a friendly town. Most of the white people were friendly. And I said it was because of the intellectuality here because of the two schools. Those that didn't want to be integrated were very discreet about it, and they didn't treat you with disrespect so much so that you noticed it.

I know a man I worked for was really nice. And they had gone to Tahiti. They came back after he fell and hurt his leg or something. So he came back, and, of course, he didn't know I was listening to him when he said, "That nigger doctor doctored me." (laughter) He would have died if he knew I heard him say that (laughter). I'm sure he didn't mean it in a derogatory way, but just saying that, it was just a sensitive word. I'm like President Johnson. He said he's been used to hearing that word "nigger," and he said, "Now, I hear 'honky.'" I had to laugh. That's an ugly word (laughter).

Those people that I worked for were pretty well-to-do. Whenever I'd go on vacation with them, I'd come back and tell them, "Well, I didn't know I was black. I went everywhere they went. I drove the car. I didn't have to make beds or anything. We stayed in the hotel, or we rented an apartment." I said, "The maid came and did all the work. I was just like the mama. I cooked, planned the meals, and did the shopping. That's all I had to do." And I would drive them wherever they wanted to go.

Lohr: Did any of the people you worked for ever join the women's group?

Harden: No. Oh, no (laughter)!

Lohr: Would they not have been asked, or would they not have joined if they had been?

Harden: Nobody would have asked them.

Lohr: Why would they not have asked them?

Harden: Well, they just felt like they would have declined. And they would have. I know this lady that I worked for would have declined.

Lohr: Were there any feminist feelings in the group during that time when feminism was coming in?

Harden: No.

Lohr: That wasn't a concern?

Harden: No, that was not a concern. I believe when our club was so active, I don't believe the feminist movement was very active. At least it hadn't hit Denton.

Lohr: When the group began, were most of the women, both black and white, housewives?

Harden: No, everybody worked--just about everybody. They were teachers or directors of RSVP or something. Of course, I was a cook. When Bea Simmons joined, she was a housewife. She was a black woman, and she was a housewife. But all the other ladies worked. We had a lot of black teachers, and then some of us was just plain ol' maids. We just all worked. All the white women worked. I don't know of any

that was just a plain housewife.

Lohr: And then later on, as the time progressed, did some of the women begin to be professional women?

Harden: Well, no more than just being school teachers. As I said, Carol Riddlesperger became the director of RSVP. I don't know what Trudy was doing. I don't know whether she was teaching. She might have been just a housewife--Trudy Foster. And Elsie Happleman moved away. Her husband died, and she moved away. I think she was just a housewife. Roberta Donsbach was a housewife. They hadn't been here too long when she joined. Her husband's a minister. Most of them, as I said, were schoolteachers.

Lohr: Was the group more for white women or for black women?

Harden: It was for both equally. At first it might have had more white women that joined, but I think it was just about as many of one as it was the other. It wasn't for any special ethnic group. It was just for us as women to get to know each other--for blacks to get to know the whites and the whites to get to know the blacks as a person. That's exactly what it was for.

Lohr: And did it accomplish its purpose?

Harden: It certainly did. We've been friends, friends, friends down through the years.

Lohr: Well, thank you very much.