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Interview with
PAT CHEEK
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Richard Byrd
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Oral History Collection

Pat Cheek

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: April 12, 1988

Interviewer: Richard Byrd

Mr. Byrd: This is Richard Byrd interviewing Mrs. Pat Cheek for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 12, 1988, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mrs. Cheek in order to obtain her recollections concerning the Denton Christian Women's Interracial Fellowship.

In order to get underway, Ms. Cheek, I'd like to get a little background information on you--your childhood, where you were born and raised, school, and your earlier career.

Ms. Cheek: I was born in Houston, and I lived there until I was seventeen. My parents didn't think I should go to college; but my best friend left to go to college in Denton, and when she came home at Christmas break, she told my parents all the exciting things about Texas Woman's University and that I just must go. They said they couldn't afford it, but mother had a friend who had a little bit of money who said, "I'll pay for her

tuition the first year." So she did, and I came.

I met my husband while I was here that first year and quit school, thinking that I'd chosen my career. That's what my mother always said: "You've chosen your career-- wife and motherhood." I had a baby the next year and didn't think I'd ever go back to school. I decided to have another baby after we stayed in Denton. Of course, my husband got a job here. Since we had a baby, we had to have a job. I had a second baby.

Then I all of a sudden realized that I needed to go back to school. But I didn't want to go back to TWU. He had graduated from North Texas, and I had this romantic idea that I should go to the same school he did. That's what I did. I enrolled at North Texas. I got back in in 1962 and graduated in 1965. What other kinds of things do you want about my childhood?

Byrd: When did you start at TWU rather?

Cheek: In 1957.

Byrd: 1957.

Cheek: Yes.

Byrd: Where did you go to high school in Houston?

Cheek: It's a ghetto school now, they tell me. But it was a good ol' middle class post-World War II neighborhood--Melby High School. One of my friends lives in Houston--she's kind of hoity-toity these days--and whenever she meets some of her friends and they make a tour of some of the ghetto schools,

our school is on the list (laughter).

Byrd: So when did you start high school?

Cheek: When did I start high school?

Byrd: Yes, at this particular school?

Cheek: Well, I guess in 1954.

Byrd: 1954.

Cheek: Yes.

Byrd: Was it a segregated school or integrated school at that time?

Cheek: Oh, it was segregated. We had lots of Hispanics, which we called...let's see...we called them Spanish. That was the vernacular of the day. They were separate, really, from us. But we were very friendly with them. At least I was. But they didn't come in our homes, and we didn't go in theirs. It was sort of understood.

I remember the first black family that ever came up the front door of our school. It was probably in 1955, after the Little Rock incident. They walked up to the front of the school, and we were all at the windows peering out and watching these people walk up the front. It was a mother, a father, and a daughter. Our eyes were as big as saucers in watching them come up, and it wasn't any time before they turned around and went back out because evidently they refused them, which you could still get away with for a while there. I was puzzled, but nosy like everybody else.

Byrd: So were there blacks in the neighborhood where you grew up?

Cheek: No. The only black persons I knew were Edna, who did our ironing, and a girl whose name I've forgotten but who worked with me in a downtown store in Houston. I worked in a little ladies dress shop. It was called the Roxie Shop, and it was a hole-in-the-wall. It was down in the deep east side of Houston. I recall that the boss always told me to sell my product to the blacks. They didn't use the word "black" back then. I think they said "nigra"; I believe that was the term. So they told me, "Be sure and sell them the product no matter what the size. Lie to them." I was in particular selling ladies hose, and there were two shades that the black ladies liked. It was "red fox," and I forget the other name. But I recall that one day they overheard me telling one lady, "I'm sorry, ma'am. We don't have size ten in 'red fox,'" and she left. And, oh, they chewed me out unmercifully: "You will not do that ever again, or you will be fired!" So I always made sure that I mumbled under my breath, "Listen, I can sell you these hose, but we don't have size ten. We just have...." I couldn't do it. I was not that kind of person. I would not do it. I would never sell them size eight-and-a-half and tell them it was a ten, which is what the other people were doing or what they were instructed to do.

But the girl that worked there...the reason I mentioned that here was that I remember inviting her to go

to lunch with me one day. She said, "Well, honey, you know I can't go to lunch with you. We don't eat where you people eat." I said, "Why not?" It just didn't dawn on me. I guess I wasn't using the sense that I...I should have seen that. Of course, I did, but I couldn't see why she couldn't go to lunch with me. My parents had never raised me to be prejudiced, but I had prejudices. You know, like, I didn't have the Hispanics in my house, and I kind of understood that we didn't do that. But it wasn't my mother and father that taught that to me. It was my peers.

Byrd: Concerning the luncheon situation, I guess it was because she couldn't get served.

Cheek: Oh, yes, they were not allowed to go in those places. Now they were allowed, from what I gathered, to go in the back door some places, but I don't think they could be served. My friends and I used to go to the "colored" water fountain--you know, it would say "white" and "colored"--and we'd drink out of the "colored" water fountain and just look around and dare anybody to say anything to us. And we'd go to the "colored" restrooms, and then we'd ride in the back of the bus with the "coloreds." I guess we'd say "colored" back then, but I've really forgotten. But I remember thinking that that was just so stupid that they rode in the back of the bus. So we had a lot of friends, I guess, but we didn't know their names or who they were,

really. We were trying to break...and we weren't daring or brave. I don't mean to misinterpret that. We just thought it was stupid, so we went and sat with them.

I had one other black friend--a guy named Chester, who was a bartender. I don't remember exactly where we met him, except that he did bartend around at different weddings that we'd gone to in high school. Friends of our parents had hired him (not my parents because they didn't have any kind of money for that). We'd met him, and he owned a little barbecue and bar not far from our neighborhood. So there was a black neighborhood probably not far from us. I hadn't thought about that. But we'd sneak down there and go in his bar--young teenage girls, aged fourteen and fifteen--and stay all afternoon listening to cool, cool black music. I mean, we loved it. There was a record called...well, I don't know what it was called but "doodyroo" was one of the words that I learned (laughter). We'd go down there and sit with Chester for an hour. You know, they probably wondered why in the world were these young white girls were in there being so--I don't know what we were--daring. We thought Chester just hung the moon. He was nice to us. He gave us Cokes. He wasn't rude or licentious or anything. He really liked our company, and we liked his. We'd play the records, and when the records in the jukebox would get old, he'd give us some of the records. We thought that was really neat.

That's all that's coming to me at the moment.

Byrd: So your experiences with blacks in Houston was limited, I guess.

Cheek: Oh, yes. I didn't, like I say, really have any knowledge except for the things I told you.

Byrd: So when did you come to Denton, Texas?

Cheek: In 1957.

Byrd: In 1957.

Cheek: Yes.

Byrd: How was the situation, say, in Denton in terms of those kinds of relationships as compared to Houston?

Cheek: Oh, it was all-white. I didn't know any blacks here at all at first, not in school. If there were blacks at TWU, I don't know about it. I don't remember it at all. I think there weren't. There were when I went to North Texas in 1962. I only went from 1957 through the spring of 1958.

Byrd: What about in the town itself? Was there any perceptible codes?

Cheek: I had no car, so my town visits were quite limited. I walked. There were two restaurants--the Hickory House and the Ju-cy Pig--and they were within about eight blocks of the school, and we walked to them. That's kind of how I met my husband. He had a car. We made it as far as the square on occasions to go shopping, and he gave me a ride home a time or two.

Byrd: Now did they have similar policies in these restaurants?

You said something about Houston, that they wouldn't serve blacks or that blacks maybe had to come through the back door.

Cheek: I don't think I thought about it here. I just remember the colored water fountain in either Woolworth's or McCrory's--the dime store on the square. I remember that. But I don't remember anything else. I don't remember the colored restrooms like I did in downtown Houston. We used to go downtown every Saturday.

Byrd: How would you say the situation was...if you were a student at TWU, where there were no black students...how would the situation contrast with when you came to North Texas in 1962. By that time North Texas had integrated. In fact, it was integrated when you were at TWU. Was there a different climate?

Cheek: I remember that the few black students that were in my class seemed ignorant to me. The patois bothered me--their accent--because it seemed ignorant. I thought, "Now the blacks I've known didn't sound like that," those few that I told you I knew, like, Chester and the girl I worked with and Edna. Edna was an older lady. I guess she was probably twenty-five at the time, but she did our ironing. They didn't have that; they seemed to speak a better grammar.

Byrd: These were the folks from the North Texas area?

Cheek: Yes, North Texas. I just remember these girls in my

English class. They made their book reports, and they just seemed so ignorant to me. I was a little critical of that and wished that they were smarter because I liked my college classes to be more equal.

Byrd: Do you know if those folks were from this area or from out of state?

Cheek: No, I don't recall. I don't think I know. I may have known at the time, but it's been too long. Now that was the first year. It seems like I recall people being more on the same educational or intellectual level--whatever--the next few years after that. Then I taught school in Denton, starting in 1965, and I had a couple of black students. The one student I remember was very smart, very bright, very polite; and I was delighted to have him.

Byrd: At what level did you start teaching?

Cheek: Eighth grade.

Byrd: You started at the eighth grade level.

Cheek: Well, eighth and ninth. I did have ninth grade the first year I taught--when I did student teaching.

Byrd: Were these students who had transferred from Fred Moore at the time?

Cheek: Yes, I believe so. This one boy's name was Thomas Roth, and I seem to remember that he had come from Fred Moore.

Byrd: So that would have been right about at the first year that they were about to integrate the public schools?

Cheek: I think so. Thomas Roth was in the ninth grade when I did

my student teaching, if I'm remembering correctly, and it seems like he was the only one that year. Then the next year we had another little short black, but I can't remember his name. He was real tiny. Thomas was a real tall boy, and that's why I remember the difference in the two.

Byrd: How did the students adjust to being mingled?

Cheek: They seemed to adjust fine. It didn't seem to bother them.

Byrd: Blacks and whites?

Cheek: Well, Thomas was what I said--an unusual boy. He was brighter than most people and headed to be someone. I understand he became a doctor. I haven't seen or heard from him, but I've had some other people tell me that. They seemed to be fine. I don't remember hearing racial slurs early on. It was after the population grew and they were in Denton High. And I substituted for fourteen years.

Byrd: I was wondering...if you got a group of people who have been to two different schools...I know that sometimes it seems there's some kind of effort to evaluate them if they're both at the same grade level. Was that kind of evaluation made either by the school as a matter of policy?

Cheek: Yes. Teachers often commented that these children were so slow and that they were dragging our teaching down.

Byrd: Did the faculty come along as well--the faculty from Fred Moore?

Cheek: No. I don't know what happened to them. They have come

eventually, but not then at first. Not that I knew of, anyway.

Byrd: How about the administration?

Cheek: No, it stayed really white for a long time.

Byrd: In that period of time when you were a student at TWU, did you perceive--perceive, read, hear, or anything else along in that fashion--about the integration of North Texas? Was that a matter of concern or publicity on TWU's campus?

Cheek: I just remember hearing about Abner Haynes, but kind of more as a football star, and I didn't think about it too much. It seemed like it was kind of exciting that we would get somebody that was a real, real good athlete. Of course, I'm looking at it with a whole different mind now. I'm not sure how I perceived him. I just remember how exciting it was because he was a real good athlete.

Byrd: Did you go to any of the games?

Cheek: Not much. I went on a few dates and probably didn't pay much attention to the game, so I don't have much knowledge of that. And Bill didn't like that sort of things much.

Byrd: I can recall reading, as I was going back through some of the North Texas State...I came across a column that was written by a faculty member then but who is now an administrator--Charldean Newell.

Cheek: I know her.

Byrd: I believe it was in 1964 or 1965, as I recall, that there was a question about the more rapid assimilation of blacks,

particularly in the athletic department. A winning team, which was the thrust of the article, would produce more recognition and possibly draw more money either from contributions or from the state. In your time at North Texas, did you perceive any efforts along that line to be a matter of policy for the university?

Cheek: No, I was completely out of knowing about athletics at all. At that time, I had two young children aged two and six months when I started back to North Texas, and I had planned all my classes so that i could go to school from eight to twelve, three days a week, so that I could pay the babysitter, which cost me a \$1.50 a day. That was \$4.50 a week, and that was big money. So I planned my classes. I even took some course so they would be close to where I could park. I even decided on my minor by what building it was in, because it was near. You know, I look back and think that my whole fate was decided upon where I could park close to the nursery, where I had to leave the girls, and class. So I really knew only my professors in my class, what was going on in my class, and then I left school immediately. I didn't do any socializing. I never ate on the campus until my last year when I had a Tuesday-Thursday schedule. The girls were in school by then. But before that, I went from eight to twelve. I got the girls ready, took them to the nursery, went to class, came home, and that was it. So I was pretty ignorant about what was

going on there.

I remember we had a black family come to our church, and you may have already spoken with her--Linnie McAdams.

Byrd: Now I didn't interview her, but one of the other students did.

Cheek: She worked with a woman who was a member of the church, and that woman evidently made friends with her at work and invited her to come.

Byrd: Which church was this?

Cheek: Trinity Presbyterian Church. That's the inception of the Interracial Fellowship, was the Trinity women. I was in school full-time and had those two little children, so I was just watching this. I'm not sure I was invited to join the Interracial Fellowship right at first because I wasn't really in the flow of the activities of the church that much. I went to church and Sunday school, and I was there a lot; but like I said, I had so much on my mind at the time. But I watched and listened constantly to the activities that were going on and was getting real interested. When the Sunday school planned an event together in the backyard of one of the members over on "Idiot's Hill"...what they call "Idiot's Hill"...you've never heard that term?

Byrd: I don't know it. I'm not familiar with it.

Cheek: That's a neighborhood. It's bounded by University Drive and Nottingham and then back this way (gesture), I guess,

by Sherman Drive. That was just a term it was called back then. Anyway, these people had a Sunday school gathering, and they invited children from the black churches and then some of the children from our church. They were playing together in the backyard, and someone threw rocks at the children from the street. That's when I decided to join the Fellowship. That made me mad. I didn't care how busy I was.

Byrd: Do you know who threw the rocks?

Cheek: Oh, I don't think they ever knew for sure, but they were white. We know that. They may know, but I just didn't know. I just remember hearing that it was white neighbors of these people.

Byrd: And when was this?

Cheek: I wish I could tell you. I think I was already out of school, so it was probably 1965. I don't know...I remember whose house it was at...I can remember the house, but I don't remember the name right this minute. It was a minister who was at the synod office. Euline Brock would probably remember.

Anyway, I started going to the meetings, and I was so excited. To me that was just the goal of my life--to learn to know other people because I had led such a sheltered life for so long. But I've always been curious, and I've always been appalled, like, at that girl who couldn't go to lunch with me. So when I joined I got really excited and

real active and became a co-chair one year. We always had one black chair and one white chair.

Byrd: Fill me in more on what your impression of the group was when you first joined.

Cheek: Oh, I just loved them. I thought, "Those are the nicest people I'd ever want to know--whites and blacks." By that time white women from other churches in town were members. When I was the co-chair with Evelyn Ebron, who is now dead--she died rather young--one of the nicest, sweetest ladies I've ever known in my life, we just became fast friends. We just loved each other. I just saw her grandson at the mall, and he stopped to see my new granddaughter. We visited. He went to school with my daughter, and she and he always have been friends. And I attribute a lot of that to the fact that whenever my kids would meet blacks at school, they would kind of know each other's last names from the Fellowship. You know, they'd kind of know each other. But, anyway, when I was chair, I decided that we needed to do some fun things, like, we had a fashion show at the president's home over at North Texas. We had the members of our club as the models. Then my most favorite program that I thought up was when I had them start out one evening and narrow ourselves down to try to find a person of the other race in the room who was most like us. We started out with number of children, age of ourselves, how long we'd been married, what was our main

interest, like, perhaps art or painting or sewing or reading and different things. And I found my soulmate, so to speak. We each had four children. We may have only had three at the time. I think we did. We only had three at the time. But we eventually had another one, so we're more alike. And we were nearly the same age, and we liked the same things, and we always called each other "Twin" after that. We really enjoyed one another's friendship. To me that was the neatest evening I ever spent with that group of people because everybody really got into it and got excited about it. Before the evening was up, we were paired off, and it was just a fun thing. This woman and I have always had a special friendship, I think, because of that evening. I don't get to see her much anymore because the Fellowship dissolved from...well, lack of necessity, I guess. We were all busy doing other things. A lot of us went to work who hadn't been working at the time.

Byrd: Who was your soulmate?

Cheek: Billie Mohair.

Byrd: I just interviewed her.

Cheek: Did you? That was very exciting to me. Does she still work at the library?

Byrd: Yes.

Cheek: Our oldest children went to high school together. They were the same age. I think my baby is younger than her baby--I forget--or maybe it may be the other way.

Byrd: At the time you joined the group, were they involved in projects?

Cheek: Yes, but I can't think of what they were in the early days. Getting the quick claim deeds for the streets is the first thing that comes to my mind. My husband worked for a paving company--the ones who ended up doing the job, I think. Anyway, he was as excited as I was about the group, and whenever we had socials with husbands and wives, he always went with me. He had the time to walk the streets. I can't remember why I didn't, but I probably was pregnant again or something. I guess that's why I didn't go walking the streets. He walked the streets in southeast Denton and got the people to sign their deeds to get the streets paved.

Byrd: I'm not too cognizant of legal matters. How does that work with the quick claim deed?

Cheek: Oh, I'm not really, either. I just remember they had to get those people to agree to give up their half of the property and the street's half in order to pave it. I think they had to pay half of it, if I'm not incorrect. Bill would probably know better than I...well, he would know better than I. I'm sure there was a legal deal where they had to sign it over, and they had to pay part of it to get it paved. But the city really was willing to do it...or maybe they weren't willing. Maybe they were forced by law. I don't even remember that.

Byrd: To your recollection, was that a difficult process to get those folks to sign?

Cheek: Yes, it was. A lot of them were absentee landlords, and they were white. I just remember how exciting it was to see these paved streets. Those people had lived on the crummiest ol' shell or whatever that stuff is...caliche or something. Anyway, it was that ol' sandy shell kind of dirt road. When you drove on it and it wasn't wet, it made lots of dust. I think I've got dust in my house now, but you had that dust in your house all the time and probably got terrible allergies from the dust.

But I don't know whose idea that was to get the streets paved. I wasn't in on the idea part. It seems like Trudy Foster had a lot to do with the beginning of that.

Byrd: That seems to be a pretty common recollection. You said something about absentee landlords. Do you have any idea what percentage or what part of the absentee landlords...it was my understanding that there were quite a few black absentee landlords as well.

Cheek: Right. There were.

Byrd: They were out-of-state or in Dallas.

Cheek: They were probably just as guilty as the whites, if I remember correctly. I don't remember any percentages, though. I'm sorry. Bill would probably know that more than I, also.

Byrd: What other kinds of activities did you become involved in with the group or whatever? It sounds to me like your husband in particular was very supportive of your participation.

Cheek: Oh, yes, he was.

Byrd: Were the majority of the husbands as supportive?

Cheek: Yes, the white husbands that I met were. Let's see...Evelyn Ebron's husband, Rufus, was always there, and he was real neat. Billie Mohair's husband was there. As far as I recall, they were there. They were real interested. Now what was interesting to me was that Bill had come from a small West Texas town that was just so full prejudice. It was incredible. And the word n-i-g-g-e-r flew frequently, and it still does. The church in which he was raised was pretty much not ready for integration at all. They said they had their own churches, and they could stay away. He came from that background, but he wasn't like that. Somehow within him, he had become different. And his family raised him that way. I know because I heard it. They would make comments to me about my black friends. He just was never that way, and, like I said, my parents weren't that way. They didn't raise me to be that way. But occasionally I would go back home, and my parents would use the word "nigra," which I considered just awful, and I would correct them. But when they came to visit me, they were always anxious to participate in anything I did

that was interracial, also. When the first black family moved in this neighborhood, we went to call on them because we heard rumors that people were doing mean things, like, throwing rocks at their house and so forth. As a member of the Fellowship, of course, we went to call on them. My parents came to visit the next weekend, and this family invited us to dinner, and my parents, too. My mother and dad were so excited to meet these people because they probably never knew any black families, either, on an equal level. My dad and mother just really liked these people, and we stayed friends with them, especially their son. I see him a lot, and I consider him a personal friend of mine now.

Byrd: In the group itself, I've heard sometimes that there might have been some kind of suspicion maybe in the earlier days.

Cheek: I think so in the earlier days.

Byrd: It was, like, "what do these white women want?"

Cheek: Well, I came in, I think, at the right time. That was dispelled more or less by the time I got there. At least in my sight it was. But I've always been so naive, innocent, whatever, about that sort of thing that I probably would burst right into the situation just assured that these people would like me and I'd like them. So I guess I thought, "I'm not going to see it." The few women that I've known well in the group, I never hesitated to just go right to them and talk with them and carry on

conversation and talk about the children or school or whatever. So I never saw that suspicion.

Byrd: That seems to be a pretty common statement, that the children were a kind of catalyst or icebreaker-type of thing among the women.

Cheek: That was probably true in a lot of situations back then, white or black.

Byrd: How about the support of black husbands? Were they as supportive in your perception?

Cheek: They seemed to be--the ones I knew real well.

Byrd: I've heard a couple of folks say that there may have been some possibility that they might have feared some kind of retribution either on the job for mingling or for their wives mingling with white women or whatever.

Cheek: If that were true, I've forgotten it. Like I say, I became so close to some of those people, and that was what I remember the strongest.

Byrd: Do you recall any details of...we talked briefly about the project of paving the streets.

Cheek: Well, we got on a culture kick one time. We decided we were all going to do different things, like, go to the theater, and, like I said, we had the fashion show. I've honestly forgotten the things we did do. It seems like we went to community theater plays together. We probably did some other things like that, but I've forgotten.

Byrd: That fashion show...was Dr. Matthews still president then,

or had that changed?

Cheek: I don't think so. I think it was...I can't think of his name. His wife was a member of the Fellowship--the woman whose husband was president at the time. I want to say it begins with a "K." You heard that name? Maybe it'll come to me. But I planned the fashion show, if I remember correctly. We got the clothes...it seems like we got them from Penney's. We wore different outfits, and we came down the stairs at the president's home.

I felt farther apart from the college professors' white women than I did from the black women because I'm a pretty plain kind of person. Like I said, I felt more estranged from the president's wife because she was less a friend of mine than, say, the few black women that I became pretty close with, like, Evelyn Ebron. She was quite a bit older. She was old enough to be my mother, I think, but we didn't dwell on that. She was such a nice lady.

Byrd: Were most of the white women associated in some way through marriage with the university?

Cheek: Yes. And I was always just a little bit intimidated by that because I was not associated. We were one of the few people at Trinity Presbyterian Church that weren't involved with the university. Kamerick, I think, was the name of the NTSU president.

Byrd: That would have been after the project where they had the tutorial sessions through the auspices of the church?

Cheek: I've forgotten about that. I don't think I did that.

Byrd: The next phase is trying to get some recollection about...if you can tell a little bit about the urban renewal program and address the good and bad points about it. I've had mixed reactions. Some members of the group, as well as some people individually, have positive things or negative things to say about that. Were you working in that direction?

Cheek: I think I was, but my mind is blank about that. I know I was involved, but whether I actually did any physical work in it, I just can't remember. Early senility has set in, or maybe late senility has set in.

Byrd: I recall some of the activities that we talked of earlier about the paving thing and about Trudy Foster. She went out and found who owned the property, and if she knew them and if they were members of the church, she took photographs and had those photographs posted out in front of the sanctuary, saying "these properties are owned by members of this church and it's a shame" or something or other "that the streets aren't paved" or whatever. Billie Mohair was talking about going out to secure those signatures and flopping through the mud if it rained or through the dust, as you described, when it wasn't raining and whatnot.

Urban renewal was one of the efforts. It seems to me a lot of the black women were suspicious, or they knew that

other people in the black community were suspicious because of misunderstanding or not fully understanding that their property wasn't going to be taken from them.

Cheek: Right. I know they were frightened. I remember that.

Byrd: In fact, on the street paving, some folks resisted so much that they wouldn't have their streets paved, so their part of the street would have big gaps and what-have-you.

Cheek: Yes, right. I can understand fear because everywhere you read or looked there was something awful happening. I know that when some friends of ours in the church drove up to Princeton to go to school, they told us about people at washaterias, at motels, and along the road who had shotguns lying in their laps. That was to keep blacks from coming in because they weren't allowed to come in.

Byrd: Was that toward Princeton or in Princeton?

Cheek: Between here and Princeton.

Byrd: In the later 1960s, I've heard it stated that there was a program that was developed or was pursued to try to get more women involved, especially most of the blacks in the group, in kind of a jobs program. It was network of...I don't know...kind of reminiscent of an ol' boy-type network for providing jobs, references, or bringing in prospective employers to the group's meetings, for instance. Could you speak to that?

Cheek: No, I don't remember that. I remember when Harve King spoke to our group one time. He riled us all. He was at

North Texas, and he was one of the first black administrators, I believe. And he came. He was a young boy growing up here, and he told some stories about when he was a young boy. This was a program for our Interracial Group. He'd walk down to the square, and a white store owner sometimes would sick their dogs on him; and he'd have to run all the way home when he'd come to town to pick up something. He said to our group, "Well, you white women sitting out there, I know who you are. You go to your bridge clubs, and you just sit there mute while those nigger jokes are told, and you don't do a thing about it!" Well, he was talking to the wrong group of folks because several of us said, "No, we don't! We never allow those things to be said in our presence. We always say, 'Excuse me. I don't want to hear that word,' or 'you are speaking to the wrong person.'" He was speaking to women who had made strides, who were bold, and he didn't know it. He hadn't evidently checked out to whom he was speaking. He's the brother of one of the women who was in the group, and I've forgotten who it was now. But I remember she evidently didn't brief him, or maybe she didn't believe it herself, for all I know. But we tried to set him straight, that he was talking to the wrong women, that we were the ones who had made the effort on behalf of any particular race. I know I've established my reputation at the school where I teach. I don't allow that word in my room. I

don't allow any racial slurs, and they know it. When I was first there, the first few years, I would hear kids whisper, "That's Ms. Cheek! You can't say 'nigger' in her room!"

Byrd: They would whisper that?

Cheek: Yes. I would hear them out in the hall saying that. The school in which I teach is almost completely white. There are six to eight--however you count it--small towns that feed into one consolidated school district, and there are very few blacks that live in our area.

Byrd: What school district is this?

Cheek: Northwest.

Byrd: Northwest?

Cheek: Yes. It's between here and Fort Worth. The few blacks that we've had over the last few years have lived in Trophy Club, and they've come from somewhere else, and they're pretty integrated. They don't have the accent of the southern black, and they've lived in integrated neighborhoods all their lives.

Byrd: These would be folks from...

Cheek: They're from up North usually.

Byrd: Kind of northern or out-of-state or whatever.

Cheek: And people with money. Trophy Club is no an inexpensive place to live. Well, they look real wealthy to me, anyway.

Byrd: Let me ask you this question. What kind of membership requirements were there for...it's been told to me that

there was a little bit of an effort made to try to keep it balanced between blacks and whites.

Cheek: Yes.

Byrd: Well, beyond that were there other criteria?

Cheek: They were just always friend of friends. I remember that if somebody new joined our church, we would always invite them to come with us, and we'd bring them. We'd pick them up and bring them with us because hardly anybody would go to someplace new across on the other side of town. We would meet first in a black home or a white home. We would move around.

Byrd: Just alternating?

Cheek: Alternate. I don't know that it was actually black then white, then black then white. It may have been, but I know it was as often one place as another. We would invite friends, and we would always, like I said, pick them up and take them with us because there was still a fear of going into the black neighborhood at night. Also, when we would drive into the black neighborhood at night, they still sat on the corner--the youths especially, young men. They still sat around on the corners during those years, and they would really eyeball us. I just knew they were thinking, "What are you white women doing in coming over here in my neighborhood?" But after a while, when I was substitute teaching, I got to know some of these kids at school, and I had a wonderful experience at school with

them. They'd get to recognizing me, and they'd say, "Oh, it's Ms. Cheek," and they'd just go on. At school, if I would begin to have any kind of disciplinary problem with any of the black students, they would always be somebody's son or grandson, and I'd say, "Oh, Charles, aren't you Emma's son?" And they'd sit up straight in that chair, and they'd say, "You know my mama?" I'd say, "Oh, yes, I know her from the Interracial Fellowship," and I want you to know that I'd have a friend. He never misbehaved for me after that. It was just so easy to substitute when I had those kids' attention. And not just the black kids. I treated the white kids the same way. But the black kids seemed to be more pleased that I knew their mother. They still seemed glad back then that we were taking an interest in them as people. I don't see them at my school as different anymore like I did back then in public school. Because they were different. They were still a little bit scared, and they lived apart from the whites. They lived in the black neighborhood, over at what we call southeast Denton. I don't think we refer to it that way anymore, but we used to say southeast Denton, meaning where the blacks lived.

Byrd: What about the reverse? When the blacks would come into the white neighborhood or to a white person's home or whatever, was there possibly confrontation with the neighbors?

Cheek: I don't know of any that ever occurred. But I remember wondering if it would possibly happen that way.

I'll never forget. When I had a baby shower for a woman in our church, my mother-in-law was visiting me from that little town in West Texas that I mentioned. All the women in my fellowship at church were invited to the baby shower. Linnie McAdams, the one black woman at our church at the time, was here in this room. When the shower was over and I went back into the kitchen carrying the dishes, back in the kitchen my mother-in-law said, "I bet that one colored woman was sure uncomfortable around all those whites." I said, "Mom, the most uncomfortable person here was you. She sees those people every week. We go to church together. We are friends. We truly like one another as people." And she just puffed up and couldn't believe it, I guess. She was raised differently, and she's older. Her community has never integrated, not even to this day.

Byrd: How about the other churches? Were there other integrated churches where blacks worshipped as well as whites in the same congregation?

Cheek: I seem to remember the other Presbyterian churches, but I don't think I knew much about anything else.

Byrd: I'm working my way into a question. It's one that we've never had answered by any of the folks we've talked to, and we've talked to about fifteen or sixteen, I think,

collectively. Number one, why was the word "Christian" put in, and then why was it dropped?

Cheek: I don't know for sure. I'm only going to have to make a guess. I think "Christian" indicated that it was started by the churches, and that's what they wanted to get, was women in the churches, because that was an established group. I don't know why it was dropped. Well, it was surely dropped because we wanted to branch out to others, like, if there were any Jewish people in town. We didn't want to exclude them. I don't remember there being any Jewish people offhand, but I think we probably stopped and realized that "Christian" was another limitation. I'm pretty sure they used the word because they were starting out in the churches. Also, "Christian" was very popular with the black women, who were very active and happy in their churches. I suppose they used "Christian" because that would be appealing.

Byrd: Okay. So that tended, then, to give the group maybe a little more validity or legitimacy?

Cheek: Probably.

Byrd: We've heard some stories about possible retribution that may have caused some black women to kind of hang back and not join the group--either retribution directly from their husbands (I don't know if that was a macho thing or whatever) or their husbands fearing retribution from their employers.

Cheek: Yes, I heard some of that comment.

Byrd: We've been trying to gather some information, but I haven't had a whole lot of people to respond to that. I've just had suggestions on that.

Cheek: Perhaps we've forgotten. We probably knew at the time. And I do remember the fears that somebody might throw a bomb in our meeting. We'd seen those things happen all over the South, such as people with shotguns blasting through the windows. I remember that that crossed my mind. But at the time, even though I had young children, I said, "By God, this is what I'm going to do!" And I never really had any sincere fear, even in the back of my mind. I don't think I was ever afraid.

Byrd: Why do you think the group melted away? That's the best word I could think of.

Cheek: Oh, why it stopped meeting? Well, because we had other things to do. We had accomplished our goal, which was to meet black women on an equal basis, to do things with them, to see and to learn that they were people who had love for their children just like we did, who had a caring for their community just like we did. They had a desire to have a nice home, to have nice clothes, to shop in the grocery stores, and to get good bargains. We shared coupons, if I recall correctly, and we talked about sales at this, that, and the other store.

Then, like I said, we went back to work, and some of

us joined the League of Women Voters, and some of us did other things. We just became too busy, and, like I said, it wasn't necessary anymore. We had accomplished our goal. Integration was well on its feet here.

Most of us ran into each other at other functions. I know several of the women in the Fellowship went to work for the public schools or at North Texas. It got smaller and smaller in its participation.

Byrd: Did the group become politicized in the middle phase or whatever?

Cheek: I think so. It seems like we were all pretty much leaning in the same direction.

Byrd: I recall voter registration drives.

Cheek: Oh, yes, I was in that. I remember doing that. We went down and sat all day sometimes at the little, small stores, homeowned stores, in the black neighborhood. We had comments from blacks and whites who said, "I'm seventy-five years old, and I ain't never voted, and I ain't never going to." But I do remember registering some people who were excited to be registered to vote.

Byrd: Did you field candidates for office?

Cheek: Yes. Oh, yes, we did. And I'm not sure that it was particularly through the Interracial Fellowship. But we did field black candidates. I remember the first race when a black man ran for the school board. I don't know if you've heard this story, where the vote was exactly a tie

vote. I think it was 842 to 842--the black and the white. There was a recount and everything, and it still stayed exactly a tie. Incredible! But it was exactly that way. But then the whites got out their anti-black campaign, and they stomped him on the runoff.

Byrd: I seem to recall that maybe for the school board or maybe other local offices that were campaigned for, the group actually fielded a candidate. Is that the case?

Cheek: I don't think the group did. I think we just talked about it and got people interested. We would call one another. We used one another as a list, you know, to call and get people to support candidates. We always thought we could depend on one another to support each other's candidates. I was a candidate once about ten years ago for the city council, and the women's Interracial Fellowship was one of the first groups I called besides my church. Then in the same election year, another member of our church and the Fellowship ran for the school board. And we both lost by almost exactly the same vote count. We both lost to two conservative men. It must not have been our day. But we had the support of the Fellowship. There was never any doubt about that. It wasn't a racial issue or anything. We were just too liberal. I never made any bones about that, and that's why I didn't get elected (chuckle). There was no way to hide that.

In my classroom I have the same--if you want to call

it--difficulty. The kids will ask me political questions because I teach social studies, and I teach quite a bit about political parties and things like that. They'll ask me my thoughts, and I'll say, "Well, I'm what you call a knee-jerk liberal." I said, "We do need the conservatives to balance because I'd give all the money away." I make no bones about my feelings about race, so everybody who's there knows how I feel. I've even been called a nigger lover, and I tell them that's just true (laughter). But I also make it quite clear to them that there's some people of both races that I don't like one bit. I try very hard not to look at people as a group, and I try to teach my students to do the same thing. There's even a section of our textbook about stereotyping. But there's no doubt that they know where I stand. I even had a father this year send a message back by his daughter: "You tell that Ms. Cheek that I'll come to school to debate her on any topic anytime." He stands about as opposite from me as you can possible stand. And the little girl is like her daddy, too. She just gets real ruffled when she and I have these discussions in class on occasion. It's a touchy little situation there.

Byrd: One question comes to mind, and I have not asked this before. Do you think the group could be revived?

Cheek: You know, that's a good question. I have suggested in a small groups that we have a reunion. I just went to my

high school reunion last summer. And my kids are starting to go to theirs, which puts me in the age category I'm in. My daughter went to the tenth last year, and I went to my thirtieth. I thought, "We need to have an Interracial Fellowship reunion." So that's in my mind.

I don't think it could go as a group anymore. I just don't think there's...we like each other a whole lot, and whenever we see each other or any of us have a death or a birth or anything, we contact one another. One of our member's son died of a heart attack a few years ago, and the phone chain worked for Catherine Bell.

Byrd: Catherine Bell, yes. She was telling me about that right before Christmas. As misfortune would have it, we talked within a day or so of the anniversary of his death.

Cheek: Bless her heart. Her only child. But that was a friend of mine who lost a child, not a black friend. We went to her house, and we took food, and we sat and held her hand and did all the things that a friend would do. This couple I told you that lived in this neighborhood, the husband died of a heart attack last summer, and I went to her house, and we called around and spread the word that he had died. We are still friends. There's no doubt about it.

Byrd: That seems to be a consensus of everyone I've talked to.

Cheek: Yes. And some of the white people that I've met in that group and that I still consider as friends, I wouldn't have met any other place, really. They were at the university

or in another church from me, and that was the only two connections I had in town.

Byrd: Okay, I'd like to thank you very much for taking your time out and holding up your family's dinner.

Cheek: Well, I'm so sorry I didn't remember any better some of these things. Tonight I'll probably wake up and think, "Oh, why didn't I tell you this!"

Byrd: Well, that's the second part of the "thank you," I guess. I may want to talk to you again at a later time if that would be agreeable.

Cheek: Oh, sure. You have picked my brain and got me remembering some things I'd forgotten because I really am getting so bad. I've begun to forget my students' names. I never had forgotten a student for twenty years. Even when I was substituting in Denton at all three secondary schools, I knew all the kids names. But in the last two or three years, I've begun to forget names, and that's very depressing.

Byrd: I can identify with that. Thank you again, Ms. Cheek. I appreciate it.