Author (Interviewer) Full Name

Young	Morgan	Camille
Last	First	Middle

Date of Birth 12/29/1990

Title of Interview Interview of Betty and Ernie Caraway

Date of Interview 3/28/2012 Place of Interview Caraway residence in Searcy, AR

Audio-cassette (length of time) 43:02 minutes on (number of tapes) 1

Transcription length in number of pages 20

Abstract of the content of the interview: couple describes past work experience, various aspects of daily life, and the Desegregation Crisis of 1957

Person Interviewed: Full Name

Caraway	Betty	L.
Caraway	Earnest	A.
Last	First	Middle

Known by any other names? (list) Ernie

Date of Birth Ernie: 1/11/1943, Betty: 4/30/1941

Geographic Places as Subjects within the interview:

AR	Pulaski	Little Rock	40's and 50's
State	County	City/Community	Time Period/Years

Person as Subjects within the Interview:

Title	Last Name	First	Middle	DOB

Events as Subjects within the Interview:

Central High School Desegregation Crisis	1957
Specific	Date(s)

Other Major Places as Subjects within the Interview:

Illinois			40's and 50's
State	County	City/Community	Time Period/Years

Other Notes:

Interview with Betty and Ernie Caraway

Interviewed by Morgan Young

3/28/2012

Ernie Caraway was born in a rural town in Lawrence county, Arkansas, on January 11, 1943. His father got a job in Illinois, so he lived there with his parents for 8 years before moving back to Arkansas to live with his grandparents on their farm. Ernie was one of four children, him being the only boy. As a teenager, Ernie held various jobs, including a carhopping at a restaurant, working at a turkey processing plant, and working at a cannery. Once out of high school, he went to work for GMAC, and worked with them from 1961 until retirement in 1992. His wife, Betty, was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas. Betty was the second oldest of 7 children, one of four girls and three boys. As a teenager, she attended Central High School during the time of the desegregation crisis of 1957. After high school, Betty worked for General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) for more than twenty years. The interview with Ernie and Betty highlights what life was like for them growing up, with more emphasis on the jobs that they held, as well as the Central High School Desegregation Crisis of 1957.

Morgan: Ok, to start off with, can you tell me your name?

Betty: Betty Caraway

Morgan: Ok

Ernie: I'm Ernie Caraway.

Morgan: Alright. Where were you born?

Betty: I was born in Little Rock

Ernie: I was born in rural Lawrence county.

Morgan: Where is that at?

Ernie: That's up close to Jonesboro, Walnut Ridge.

Morgan: Ok, what town did you grow up in?

Betty: I grew up in Little Rock

Ernie: I didn't, I grew up on a farm. My dad went to Illinois, my parents went to Illinois, he went to work for Caterpillar, so I lived there with them for 8 years, and then I moved back to Arkansas with my grandparents.

Morgan: How long were you in Little Rock for?

Betty: Well, till I about married, well past that time, really. Until I was 26 I lived in about Little Rock.

Morgan: Ok. Where did y'all attend school?

Betty: I attended high, grammar school in Little Rock. I attended high school at Little Rock Central High School. My class was the class the year they closed the school.

Morgan: Really?

Betty: So I didn't graduate from Central, I graduated from a country school, it was just outside town, called Fuller High School, but the rest of my high school years were at Central High School.

Morgan: Ok

Ernie: I graduated from a little school, I went to school and high school in a little school called Egypt, which is, again, it's a country school in Lawrence county, which is about all I can describe.

Betty: How many were in your graduating class, seventeen?

Ernie: Yeah, there were 17 of us in my graduating class.

Betty: There were about 3,000 in mine.

Morgan: (chuckle) A little bit of a difference! What was it like at school for y'all?

Betty: What was it… what?

Morgan: What was it like, yeah, sorry.

Betty: Well in high school it was kind of interesting because that was when the integration thing was goin on and the first year, my first year before it really got started too much, it was, it was just like, Central High is you know so big. You go from a junior high of 8 or 900 kids into something that's like 3,000 and you're just overwhelmed. If you've ever seen the school, it's a good two blocks long, and it was the only high school in Little Rock at the time. It was a real melting pot, so to say. It was a lot of fun. It was real exciting, good times.

Morgan: Yeah, I've done the switch from little school to big school, so I can understand that.

Ernie: Yeah it's a pla.. have you ever seen Central?

Morgan: No, I haven't.

Ernie: It's something to go see, even today. I mean, It's hard to figure that, back in, I don't know how old it is, back there they built a school like that. I mean, even today, it's just, it's phenomenal. Anyway, our school was a, it was a small, I'm gonna say there might have been, might have been 150, 200 kids there because it went from first grade to 12th grade, and there probably wasn't a couple hundred kids there, but today it would be closed, in fact today it is consolidated with two other small towns called West Side and Jonesboro. But, being in a small class in a small school, you, you know you really were close, and there wasn't a whole lot of secrets, everyone knew everything that went on kind of like a family. You just knew that there were some good things about that, too. And truthfully, for the time, in a small school, we had some pretty good teachers that obviously were dedicated, otherwise we would have turned out slower than we are.

Morgan: What did your parents do for a living?

Betty: My dad, my mother was a stay at home mom, and my dad worked for Craft Foods Company, he would, distribution warehouse in Little Rock.

Morgan: Ok, and your parents?

Ernie: My dad worked for Caterpillar, he went to work for them in 1948, 1947, and we moved then to Illinois in '48, that's where my sister, youngest sister was born, and he retired as an accounting supervisor for 'em in 1970… late 70's, maybe, and mother, she just worked part time for a company that bottled liquor, and what her job was when she worked, was, she put the stamps, the revenue stamps on the bottle and, I know you're not familiar with those things, but bottles of liquor have stamps over the, the lids so you can, when you twist 'em off on the stamps you destroyed 'em things. But that's all, that's all she did was put stamps on 'em things. And that's about all, she didn't, she didn't want a career, but with four kids after the second world war they needed the money and she worked part time doin' that.

Betty: His mother was a welder, though, she learned how to weld during the second world war.

Morgan: Really?

Betty: I always thought that was interesting. Not many women were welders during world war two.

Morgan: No, that is interesting!

Ernie: Yeah, she was, my dad said she was a better welder than him, he was a welder, too, but she was a better welder than him and it, it may be she just had that lighter touch or something where men, ya know, they just force that thing where she was very happy to kind of… She was a neat lady she, she died young, but she was pretty neat.

Morgan: That's really interesting.

Betty: Mhm, yeah

Morgan: I, I like that you brought that up. Do you have any siblings?

Betty: I have, I was the oldest of 7, so I have three sisters and three, one brother died, but there were three girls, I mean four girls and three boys, still six of us left.

Morgan: I couldn't imagine being in a family that large!

Betty: Are you from a small family, I take it?

Morgan: Well, I mean, there's five of us.

Betty: That's still pretty big!

Morgan: Well, three kids, five total.

Betty: Oh, ok

Morgan: Yeah, it, it's a little different

Betty: Yeah, it's real different, real different.

Morgan: (laugh) Yeah, I can imagine!

Betty: There were eleven years between me and my youngest sister, who was the youngest one of us. We were all pretty close, all in school at the same time.

Morgan: Wow! I bet your parents had a handful.

Ernie: (laugh) One bathroom!

Betty: One bathroom, yeah! We got four and a half baths, now, we'd have more if we could have 'em! You know, there's certain things you just don't want.

Morgan: Yeah, yeah, for sure! What about you?

Ernie: There were four of us, I had three sisters, and you know, you don't miss what you don't have. Sometimes, it would have been neat to have a brother, I think. That would have been a different kind of competition, too, but I had, I had one older sister and two younger ones, my oldest sister and my younger sister passed away. Now it's just my, my sister a year younger than me.

Morgan: What about holidays and birthdays? How did your family celebrate those?

Betty: Well, when ya got seven kids, you do it at home, so, ours were always at home when I was growin' up. And, a lots of presents, a lots of noise. And nobody, it was never just the nine of us, which that's just, somebody always had friends over, so, you know, you had a lot of people around all the time. So that's good and bad.

Morgan: Probably never quiet?

Betty: Never quiet, forget about privacy.

Ernie: Always, always arguments.

Morgan: (laugh) How many girls did you say there were?

Betty: Four girls, three boys.

Morgan: Oh ok, so four girls, that can be a little bit...?

Betty: Well, the, there were two oldest, ya know the two oldest children were my sister and me, and we got along fairly well, and then the babies, the two babies were the girls, the three boys were in the middle, and they were the ones that really caused most of the confusion.

Morgan: (chuckle) I can believe it. What about your family and holidays and birthdays?

Ernie: Well my dad was raised as an only child, his older brother was ten years older than him and he had a brother that died in between, and, and his folks, while they were good people, and loving people, they were really, I mean they they were poor, cause of, you cant feature back in the 1910's and 1920's how difficult it was here in Arkansas, and, so I know they didn't celebrate birthdays and I know by knowing them that they didn't celebrate Christmas, either. Not any reason except they, they just couldn't afford to do it. But we had birthdays and we didn't do anything, I mean, it just, just wasn't something that was important to them. I remember when I was ten they promised me an electric train set, but I didn't get it till I was twelve because they couldn't afford, I think it cost 19 dollars and they couldn't afford that until two years to pay 19 dollars for that electric train, which I still have, stored.

Morgan: Really?!

Ernie: Yeah that thing is, that thing is fifty... seven years old. It still runs. I get it out every once in a while and set it up.

Betty: We set it up sometimes and put the train around the Christmas tree, it's kind of fun. The kids, the grandkids are gettin' too big for it now, but it's kinda fun, when they were little.

Ernie: At Christmas time though we did, we did have some Christmas, but I look on it as the way other people did it, and I guess, it was a treat for my dad to have fruit and nuts at Christmas time. 'Cause he always brought in a bag of oranges, and a bag of nuts, and he always brought in hard candy. I don't like hard candy. It's sweet, but I really don't like it. Anyway, that, that's what Christmas was to him, but for us, ya know, sometimes we had a real tree. As soon as you could get an aluminum tree or one that you didn't have to clean up after we had one of those. It didn't look like anything today, I mean we had lights and bulbs, and then it was loaded down with icicles. The more icicles are better. It was aluminum icicles, I can remember those things today and think oh my, today I look back and think, goodness, what a bunch of country clowns we were. But, anyway, the thing I remember livin' in Illinois, it was always cold and then there was always snow on the ground at Christmas time. And so it had that Christmas setting there. It, it was hard, and again, when you have people coming out of the second world war, with four children, and having to start all over and everything, it's hard to do that. They did a lot better than I would, I'm sure.

Morgan: Let me see… Did you live in Arkansas as an adult, or when did you move back? 'Cause I know that you said you lived in Illinois, right?

Ernie: I moved back when I was thirteen, and I graduated from school, and then I left in '61 again.

Morgan: Ok. What jobs have you worked?

Ernie: Go ahead, babe.

Betty: Well, I started out, most of my early adult life, workin' for a finance company called General Motors Acceptance Corporation division of GM, General Motors, they finance cars, and I worked in the accounting department there for twenty-something years, I guess.

Morgan: Wow

Betty: That was the job I had the longest. And after that, we had Mandy and Cara in college, so we decided I might as well go too. So I started college and got a degree in accounting.

Morgan: Where did you go to school at, then?

Betty: Two, two places really. Kennesaw College in Georgia, and then, then I finished up in Alabama, down in Mobile.

Morgan: Ok, alright. What about you?

Ernie: Well my, my first job was as a carhop, at a little restaurant there in Illinois where my folks lived up. Because I was fourteen, you know, you just couldn't get, you couldn't get a real job, so, and I don't regret, I did that for a couple months. And, let me back up. Back at that time, in Arkansas, rural schools had what they called split sessions. You went to school in the summertime, you started usually in July, and you went July and August and maybe part of September, and then you were out for a month or so because the kids had to help harvest the crops. And then you went back and finished up from, probably, November till, till the following May. So, during that break, I would go back to Illinois and be with my folks and they insisted that I go back up here although, I just never, that's neither here nor there. So when all the other kids in Illinois were in school, I was available to try to find a job up there, so, at fourteen, I got a wonderful career started as a carhop at a, at a drive through restaurant in, and then I left that and got the ideal job for a teenager. I'd wash cars for a car dealer for, you know, I'd think probably 50-60 cents an hour, or somethin' like that, which is ok for a kid back then.

Betty: I worked when I was in high school, too, and I made 50 cents an hour plus commissions selling dresses at a little dress shop called Mangle's Dress Shop. Downtown Little Rock was really active back then, and, so I worked down there on Friday nights and all day Saturday.

Morgan: How much did your carhop job pay?

Ernie: Well, it, it was like $8.75 a week plus tips. So, I might have made, might have made 15 dollars a week, I think. I, I don't remember having a lot of money. But it kept me off the street, and it was somethin' to do. And the plus of the thing was, it kinda set the tone that you know, you're not gonna sit around the house, you're gonna go do somethin', and, then that was ok. I didn't, didn't mind doin' that. I liked having my own money. And the car dealership was great, I loved that. The guy, at the car dealership, he'd took cars to the auction and he'd let me drive, I had no license, I didn't have anything but he'd let me drive the cars over to the auction, which was about twenty miles away, you know, that'd be great. My next job after that, I, I went to work for a, a turkey processing plant the next year, and what they did they brought the turkeys in from the farms around there in central Illinois, and they processed there for Thanksgiving. Process means they cut 'em, or killed 'em, and defeather 'em and so forth. And I had the, I really had a glory job there, when a truck rolled in there those turkeys were in crates and I, my job was to reach in those crates and pull those turkeys out and hang 'em on a conveyor so they'd go ahead and cut the throat. But, those turkeys, their idea wasn't I wanna come out of here, so they'd, I mean they'd claw ya and, and I did, I wound up with claw marks all over my arms and turkey dung in my face and everything else. When that job ran out, one of the farmers that would bring turkeys in offered me a job pulling pumpkins out of fence rows that they were gonna take to a cannery, and, so I did that until we got through with that. Then, they suggested I go over to the cannery, so I went over to the cannery and I went to work for them and I worked the rest of that year, when I was out of school, for them, and I made a dollar an hour plus bonus for shift. So, as a, I guess I was sixteen then, maybe, maybe, yeah. I'd make over a hundred hours a week 'cause we'd work twelve hours a day seven days a week, because, when you're canning, you gotta get it before it freezes, because once those pumpkins freeze, you know, you're done, they, they're ruined. So, that was pretty good money, I mean, 100 dollars a week for a sixteen year old kid, back then, would have probably been equivalent to, I don't know, 5, 6, 700 dollars a week here.

Morgan: That's really good.

Betty: Yeah cause there's a real difference in, minimum wage was a dollar an hour, so, you know, and that really didn't even apply to kids.

Ernie: No, not for seasonal workers. But I worked in the pressure, well actually canning thing. My job was, when these cans were sealed, they were stacked on baskets about the size of that, that footstool there and they went to probably ten rows in that thing, and you had to roll them from the canning side to the pressure cooker and there leave them for the pressure cooker. And its twelve hours a day, seven days a week, I'd go work five in the afternoon and work until five in the morning. That comes out to be 84 hours a week, so I made a little better than a dollar an hour in that time. Anyways, next year I went back to, they said come back so I came back. This year I got a great job outside in, when they would bring the pumpkins in, they would elevate the front of the trucks and them pumpkins would fall down into a washer, and all kinds of stuff would fall out of the truck bed and my job was to keep that cleaned away from, from the washer are of them things. So I got to stay outside, and you know you'd stand around outside and wait until another truck came in. It was, it was a good job.

Betty: It sounds like that, that children were really workin' hard, but we grew up in an era where kids were expected to work, from the time they got to high school. You were expected to have some kind of job, even if you didn't necessarily need the job, your parents felt like you needed the character.

Ernie: They'd talk about ya if you didn't have a job.

Betty: Yeah, and I didn't know anybody who didn't have some kind of job. But I was in high school and everybody did. I mean today, kids' parents seem to work the job if they can work it around the kids' activities, well then they might have a job, but the activities come first. In my family and then in my neighborhood and where I grew up, your job came first. If you could work an activity in, then fine, but the job always came first.

Morgan: Definitely different than how it is today!

Betty: Right, and I think that's because our families were depression era families, and they knew what it was like to do without, and to be without, and they wanted to make sure that that didn't happen to us. So, they were, they were really hard on teaching the work ethic, and, I still managed to be in a cappella choir and do some of the things that I wanted to do, but I missed a lot of football games.

Ernie: When I got out of high school, I got married and moved to Wichita, Kansas and went to work for GMAC, and I worked for them until, from 1961 till 19… when did I retire? '92? '91, '92, somewhere along in there. Anyway, during that time, movin' around, my last assignment was in Portland, Maine, so we moved back to Arkansas from Portland, Maine in '92. Now what Betty was saying about that, our school was so small we didn't have anything but basketball and baseball, we didn't have a football team.

Betty: But you didn't have any chance while you were in school to, to make any money, either.

Ernie: Yeah, I mean, the kids that worked on farms, I was fortunate enough that I could go back to Illinois and work. Kids worked on farms and in harvest that money went to the family, they didn't get to keep it. So, I got to keep my, well I say that, I mean the last year I worked there for the cannery, my mother said well its time you pay rent so I started payin' her rent. Now I don't, I don't see this, but I wasn't gonna argue with her about it. They, and I mean that was only fair, I mean that's just the way they looked at it. If you're gonna live here and make that kind of money then you need to, you need to contribute, and I guess that was ok. But out of what you did, you were expected to buy your clothes and so forth for school and things and whatever else. My folks didn't have any money, they didn't send any money living with my grandparents. They didn't, we didn't have allowances. You know, if you got five dollars, you were five dollars better off than you were. And I'm not talkin' bad about 'em, I mean its just it was hard times. You just didn't, my dad, I saw one of his old paychecks, which, they were very private. I never knew what my dad made or how much money they had or anything else. I saw one of his old paychecks and he made less than a dollar an hour welding for Caterpillar when he first started, and you know that's hot and dirty work and he would work for them from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until 11:30 at night, and then he would come home and lots of times he would get up and go to a second job welding from about 7 o'clock to 11 o'clock in the morning, so, he would just, he just, they just had to do that.

Betty: And Caterpillar is really one of the well-paid jobs now, and you know, as far as factory workers go and that sort of thing. But, jobs just didn't pay well back then.

Ernie: No. But anyway, that, that's my career. Since we've retired from GM and came back here, you know, we've had a couple businesses that we've started.

Betty: We had employment agencies, we had three employment agencies, and, temporary type, and telephone answering service. That was a… mm. We started that out and we thought, it was small, you know Jonesboro is not a big town, at the time about 55,000 I think. And we thought well we, we didn't really have enough clients that had 24 hour service to merit keeping our office opened at night and, and staffing it so we put a switch board in our house and we thought, well, the two or three calls we get at night we'll just answer 'em. Well that two or three ballooned pretty quickly, and wound up, night and day we had that extra switchboard that we, ya know, in our house and it really got to be a problem, so eventually we had to, to get nighttime operators, too. There was a while there where it was really tough, trying to sleep with all the day bed and the living room to answer that switchboard.

Ernie: Anyway, probably more information than you want.

Morgan: No, it's fine, I like it! Alright, we kind of hit on this earlier, but what was the price of some staple items, like milk and gas and soda when you were growing up and how does it differ from what they are today?

Betty: Gas is the thing that really hits ya the most. 'Cause I remember just being shocked when it went to 50 cents a gallon, and planning a vacation and thinking maybe we shouldn't go at 50 cents a gallon. Cars used a lot more gasoline, that was part of it, I mean they really got maybe ten miles to the gallon less. They really didn't get any mileage, but still, gasoline has really, really gone up.

Ernie: Yeah, gas sold back when we were teenagers, you could take a dollar and that would buy your gas for the evening, 'cause it might be 12 or 15 cents a gallon, so you could get 7 gallons for a dollar and do a lot of runnin' around, even at ten or twelve miles to the gallon you could do a lot of running around. And, and one of the things that's really different, that you kids haven't experienced, is that they used to have what was called gas wars, where this station would lower their price and this station would say well I'm gonna be a little two cents lower than them so they'd have these competitions goin' on, well, I think communications today has made it where those things are nonexistent, there, ya know and prices are manipulated based on what the other people are doing on the thing, whether they talk to each other or not, I don't know.

Betty: Well, you don't have to. I worked for an oil company in Jonesboro. Everybody when they were driving in during the day just came in and told the gas prices they saw when they were driving in, and we compared notes and if somebody had a better price than our station did that was close to it, we adjusted. But, you know, you don't really have to price fix, persay. All you have to do is look up on their sign, and we did.

Ernie: But they useta could do that, to, and they didn't. So it, it is being manipulated. The price of other things, you know, I, I'm gonna say a loaf of bread was probably 10 or 12 cents, something like that, but my mother would go buy a week's worth of groceries for six people for maybe 20 dollars, so we ate a lot. It was a lot of difference. People grew there own, now we didn't do that in the city, but my grandparents still, even as, even as things became more commonplace in the markets and cities and so forth, they still grew and canned and froze and so forth, and I can remember as late as 57, maybe, maybe even 58, my great uncle lived down the road from my grandparents and they shared a hog, and they butchered a hog there, and my grandfather, or my grandparents, had a smoke house and they smoked meat to, to cure it. We had a storage place for canned goods that we kept from freezing and so forth. They weren't that dependent on going to the store. In fact they didn't go to the store every week. When they went, they bought things like sugar and flour, and maybe they'd buy a loaf of bread, but for the great extent, they tried to live off the farm.

Betty: Livin' in the city was different, and maybe our families were just different, but my mom sent one of us to the store with a list of what she was gonna, decided to have for dinner that night everyday, and the grocery store was two blocks down the street, and we'd walk down there and either took a wagon or whatever and carried it back. And we did that from the time I was, oh ten or eleven, and the grocery store was different, because they just put it on your bill and my dad settled up with them at the end of the week so you didn't have to exchange money.

Morgan: Really? I haven't ever heard of that before, I didn't know they used to do that.

Ernie: Yeah, yeah my, my grandparents they livin' out in cotton country, they, my granddad was always tryin' somethin' different, so he had what was called a jot-em-down, and the jot-em-down came from people who would come in and they'd buy a few staples, and they'd jot down how much it was and keep the tabs on the things. He did that for a couple years, then it just got so bad that people wouldn't pay him for things so he quit doin' it. I remember seein' those old tickets and the names on them and so forth. Part of that was just how difficult it was, 'cause in the late fifties, in northeast Arkansas, there was, there was a terrible drought. It just, farms just, you know they just didn't make anything so people couldn't pay their bills, and my grandparents weren't the kind of people that would go and knock on your door and say give us your first born or whatever until you pay this bill.

Betty: Irrigation and crop insurance just wasn't heard of back then, so, not at least in those areas that we lived in. So that made it a lot harder.

Ernie: Yeah, well cotton, my grandparents grew cotton and it wasn't irrigated at that time, so. He tried to do that, I remember in the late fifties while I was still there, he got a well driven, and it just wasn't big enough to irrigate his farm, but he tried to irrigate some of it, and did, but he just, he just wasn't big enough. Like I said, my grandfather just tried different things. I mean he, he bought and lost several farms in his lifetime. He lost a farm in the twenties, and went to Michigan and went to work for Chevrolet for a few years, and then the depression came along and came back south, and lived there cause they could live off the farm. My dad talks about one day helpin' some people move, he said I furnished the wagon and I furnished the team of horses, or mules, and I helped them move all day long, and he said they gave me a dollar. And he said on the way home I bought a goat for 50 cents and took it home and dad, my granddad, butchered it and said that's the first fresh meat we'd had in months. But, but back that time, too, they hunted, I mean I grew up, my grandfather would kill a rabbit and my grandmother would fix that for breakfast. And, you wouldn't think anything about it. You just lived, a lot, on the land. That's how people lived back then.

Betty: My mother's family were farmers. And she will not eat any game, because in the depression era, they had rabbits and that kind of thing that people hunted for, and she just won't have anything to do with it anymore.

Morgan: A little burnt out?

Betty: Oh, yeah, lasted a lifetime!

Ernie: Back in, in the depression, they sold rabbits in town in meat markets, and they sold pork and they would skin 'em and they would clean 'em but they'd leave the feet on 'em so that you could see it was a rabbit and not a cat. And, they, they'd always, I mean they'd just wanna know what they were eatin' and they left the feet on that rabbit until you'd bought it, so that you could see what was in it. Different timin.' And, too, it's hard for you to imagine, but the old road we lived on, we were off the main road, about an eighth of a mile, and in the wintertime, you had two choices. You could leave, you could leave your vehicle at the end of the road and walk out, or you could bring it home with you and try to drive over those old muddy roads and get out. You know, you had a 50/50 chance of getting stuck on those roads.

Morgan: Alright, let me see. So, you mentioned earlier you hit a little bit on the desegregation crisis of 1957, could you go into more detail about that or what it was like?

Betty: Well, yeah, you know maybe memories don't serve me well, but as best I can remember it, it was exciting. I mean, that sounds terrible to say, but it was exciting! There were all these people from the press around, and crowds around the school everyday for, it seemed like, and mostly, most of the people who were there were concerned parents. They were afraid somethin' was gonna happen to their kids or whatever, ya know, but as far as the kids, there were seven of them in this big ole school. And, the chance of you even runnin' into one of the kids that integrated the school was really, really small. But I have to say, I cannot imagine the bravery that those kids had to do that, because that was at a time when there really was a lot of racial prejudice, racial fear, I think on both sides, and those kids really were amazing. They didn't, except for one, her name was Minnie Jean Brown, she did kind of fight back, she, she had a mouth on her, I think she was one of those type of kids anyway, and that didn't serve her too well. But, they were just amazing. They went to their classes and didn't say anything. They walked through these mobs of people and, just, you know, kept their head, looked straight ahead and went right on in. They were amazing, they really were. But, once you're inside school, they really had us. I mean, you didn't mess around Central. They would, they would put you in detention in a minute or kick you out, so there wasn't really botherin' those kids that much. I mean they were pretty well left alone. Plus they had the 101st Airborne inside the school of, monitoring the halls. About them, though, they were young, and they were just a little bit older than us. Most of them were late teens, early twenties, and all the girls got crushes on somebody at one station or other, you know. And one of my friends actually was, dated one of the guys, which was strictly forbidden. So, we'd get out ridin' around and he's down on the floorboard of the car so that nobody would see him, ya know. But, I mean, I can see where people would have been really afraid. But as far as anything really happening, it didn't. There were a lot of bomb scares, but that worked because if you didn't have your homework, you could call in a bomb scare from the phones that were in the hall on the first floor. Back then they had banks of phones that you could use, no cell phones of course, so some of them would get in and call in a bomb scare and they would have to haul all of us out and go check all the lockers and all that stuff. By that time that class was gonna be over, so you'd missed that one. So, it coulda been a bomb, though, you know it never was when we were there, but it coulda happened.

Morgan: Do you remember, or what was it like from your perspective, the crisis?

Ernie: Well, I don't remember a lot about it, but the first desegregation order came from a little school in Hoxie, Arkansas, which is, which is a little town north of our school, a good maybe ten miles, but there the school board said it's the law and that's what we're gonna do. And so the, the head of the school board there really took the brunt of the, of the problem with the desegregation. But Hoxie desegregated and they said that's what we're gonna do cause it's the law, and I think that was '54 or '55 so they were really the first school to do that.

Betty: They were just so small they didn't get the national attention.

Ernie: Yeah they just came down and took a lot of pictures and they went home, but in Little Rock part of the thing that made a lot of difference was they had a governor that was using that as a springboard...

Betty: He absolutely did!

Ernie: ...and he stirred up the people, and it wasn't that the people were bad, but you know traditions are deep, and in the south the tradition was you didn't have anything to do with them socially. They had their place.

Betty: The thing that happened was we went a whole year with these kids in our school, and after a while it got routine. And, you know, there's always the occasional flare up, but it wasn't, it wasn't bad at all. It really wasn't bad at all. And then, because he needed a good weapon, and that was a rallying point that people who were segregationists would get behind him because he's standing up to the government or whatever. Well, he decided to close the school, because it wasn't safe, for the safety he said. So, some of, a bunch of us really, went to the governor's mansion and protested. That was the first protest I was ever in. That was the summer before my senior year. Protested closing the schools, which did absolutely no good because he was getting what he wanted out of it. But, yeah.

Ernie: Yeah, it was not a necessary thing.

Betty: No!

Ernie: But in our area, we, we got, I remember one fellow who, who his folks took him out, well when Central closed his dad moved up in our area and so he came up here with his dad and he and his brother finished school there, rather than have to go to a different school in the Little Rock area. As far as blacks where I lived, there was no blacks, at all, down around the farm. But we used to go up to Hoxie and Walnut Ridge, and we knew blacks up there, and we liked them ok, I mean we thought they were funny and they got along with us and we got along with them, but when you, when you wanna make trouble, you know, you can. And I suppose that's what happened. My feelings about Orval Faubus are about like they are about the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and Iraqi War. I mean, these things aren't necessary. Enough politics.

Betty: This is my yearbook of the year that, the year the kids did come in. This is 1958. Hears some pictures they had of just things that happened during that time. I didn't think, there's not really that much in there. You can tell the size of the school, they really wasn't, 7 kids aren't gonna show up a whole lot.

Morgan: You can see the, what was it, 101st Airborne, you said?

Betty: And, I think the governor called out the National Guard, but I think that was to keep people kind of out, out of the school.

Morgan: (looking at pictures) I think it's kind of funny they're sleeping on, looks like sleeping on the grass. That's cool!

Ernie: And then president Eisenhower nationalized it, so that he was the one giving orders, not the governor, so that's kind of how he kinda diffused the governor's ruling on that thing. Anyways, closing the school, that's his response to that.

Betty: It's really hard, because there really weren't any other provisions made for kids to go to high school that year. I mean, later on, much later on, after the school year started, there was a school opened up called Rainey (?) High, that was opened to all the public school kids. Private people did it, though, really it wasn't, and, for me, my folks didn't want us to, we were two weeks into the school year, and we got an opportunity to go to this little school that was out in a rural area, not far out of town, maybe ten miles. And, so, we went out there, and there were eighty seniors in that class there, and then there were twenty of us from Central High that came in. So, that was kind of hard, cause these kids were, they were goin' to school together all their lives, and then here comes these Central High kids, and I think there was a little resentment, but it's understandable.

Morgan: Alright, well, thank you for your time!