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### Oral History Interview: Fred R. Chiles Jr.

Fred R. Chiles Jr.

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**FRED CHILES**  
**June 21, 1997**  
**Camp Washington Carver project**

Mr. Chiles is the director of the Arts Camp at Camp Washington Carver. He talks at length about his growing up years, his years as a 4H camp member, what caused him to become interested as an adult in the camp and their activities. He talks of the different groups that utilized the camp, such as the Girl Scouts and Brownie Troupes. He discusses the fact that the swimming pool at Camp Carver was the first and for some time only swimming pool for blacks, camp rules, the NAACP and their involvement. He also talks about his segregation experiences, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington and Ralph Bunche.

# RELEASE FORM

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I, Fred B. Chiles Jr., do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts of my interview(s) on 6-21-97.

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LAE Lynda Ann Ewen <sup>(gkk)</sup>  
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

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6-21-97  
(Date)

This is Lynda Ann Ewen, Director, of the Marshall University Oral History of Appalachia Program.

And I am here with Mr. Fred ~~Chiles~~ otherwise known as Beecher. And this is June 21st, 1997. We are at Camp Washington Carver in Fayette County, West Virginia. We have just finished a most successful camp season and a showcase. Mr. Chiles is the director of the Arts Camp 1997. And it is your understanding that this interview will be archived at Marshall University. Is that true?

FC: I certainly do.

LAE: And you've agreed to that?

FC: Yes.

LAE: We are interviewing you in two ways today. Both as a staff member and as a camper. Probably it makes the most sense to let you start from the beginning. When were you born and where?

FC: I was born in Montgomery, West Virginia in 1940, November, Thanksgiving, the 25th. And uh, I grew up there in Montgomery.

LAE: Just say what you want to say, and I'll guide you and direct you as you go.

FC: Went to public school there. And as a young camper before integration, I came to the first black 4H camp in West Virginia, or in the United States. George Washington Carver 4H camp. Started when I was ten years old, in 1950.

LAE: Okay. Were you a member of 4H as a regular 4H member, or only for summer camp?

FC: Yes, I was a regular member of the 4H club in Montgomery. And

started it. And then we had

work

LAE: And the 4H club in Montgomery, that was for black kids? (FC: Yes, it was) How did you get to the camp? In that sense, who recruited you

FC: No, there wasn't scholarships back then.

[approx. 5 minutes of tape inaudible] and we were always excited about this bus coming, because it had the Charleston students

on that end of the valley. So, we knew every year, at a certain time, we would all see each other. Sometimes that was good, other times most of the times there were good times. And we really enjoyed the camaraderie of each other. And I remember, I think we left on Saturday mornings to come to camp,... It was Monday when we came to camp.

LAE: Okay, if I could interrupt you, I am going to [interference]

FC: About a hundred, 199 [static]

[Lynda Ann and Mr. Childs conducting a mic check]

LAE: All right, we are recording again. Back to the story. Okay, so...

FC: So, anyway, it was uh, actually Monday that the bus came through. On Monday mornings we were always excited, so excited on Sunday night that we could hardly

sleep. It was almost like waiting on Christmas. Because we knew what wonderful experiences we would have at camp. Camp was very structured. A lot like we did this year.

LAE: Okay, now let me ask now, how long did you go to camp?

FC: We went to camp from Monday through Saturday.

LAE: It was a week. (FC: Yes) And had other children went other weeks that ran all summer, so it would be kids from different areas of West Virginia, would be all brought to this one camp. (FC: Mmm-hmm) All right. Did you ever go with the kids from other parts of West Virginia? Did you ever have a chance to do that? Or was it always with the same...?

FC: With kids from other parts. We had the \_\_\_\_\_ County camp that came with us, which I was from Montgomery. Then we had Raleigh County camp, and McDowell County. So, those were the three camps that came together.

one camp went longer of the years, they started bringing in the Mercer County students. Because I think the 4H clubs may have been dropping in size, and mines, mining areas were dropping somewhat, because miners \_\_\_\_\_ came to the camp, also.

LAE: All right. Were children like from the panhandles? (FC: Yes) Did they come at some point?

FC: That was at a different time.

LAE: At a different time. Okay.

FC: Children from all over the state came, but they came at different times, not like it is

today.

LAE: And I'm interested in your comment about the mining companies. To your knowledge, did some of the areas of mining companies pay for the kids to come?

FC: Yes. Yeah, they paid for them to come. And they were necessarily 4H'ers. That was just different mining kids.

LAE: So, it was like a chance to go to summer camp? (FC: Mmm-hmm) And so for those children, their only exposure to 4H would have been that week in the camp?

FC: Yeah, that's when

LAE: Okay, but you had an on-going club?

FC: We had a club in Montgomery.

LAE: Because we are interested in the history of the black 4H, also turns out as we are exploring this, (FC: Right) that we don't know a whole lot about the way the black 4H functioned, either. So, we're trying to get some inclination about that.

FC: Right. There were other camps help here, too. Girls state, boys state, uh...and along with....

LAE: Okay, so that would be black Boys State, black Girls State, and then what about the Scouts?

FC: Uh, yes, we did have the Scouts, because my sister was in the Girl Scouts, and Brownies. There was Brownie troupes, the Girl Scouts came, this camp was just for everyone.

LAE: Okay, that's-, okay, that's important. Now, that's as of 1950.

FC: Well, I started in the '50's. (LAE: You started in the '50's...) Yeah, there were

FC: Yes, they did. (LAE: And your sister...) next in line with me, came, like four years later. But my aunt was also the music teacher here. So, she was able to come at the age of eight and stay with my aunt and stay in her room.

LAE: Oh, okay, very good, all right. Your children came here? (FC: Yes) How many...just speak to that briefly.

FC: I have two children, my two girls, Alissa and came as a camper, uhm, one year, and then she became one of the counselors. And grew up in the camp with me. She's now teaching dance.

LAE: Okay, all right. Uh...so, we're gonna talk first about your camp-, as a camper. If I were to say, "What do you remember most about being a camper?" what are some of the activities and things you did that...?

FC: I remember...probably one of the main things that really sticks in my mind, over everything else wonderful that we did, was uh, the directors of the dormitories, Mr. Crawford and Mr. Banks, these were tremendous role models for us. Mr. Crawford was from Hinton, Mr. Banks was from Mount Hope. And their rules, they were very strict with us. And they had good discipline. But the kids still enjoyed the camp. And that really stuck in my mind, I guess, because I relate stories now to my resident directors, what they did if we didn't go to sleep or so forth. And uh, I can remember that. The other highlight of the camp was the swimming pool that was here. This was the only swimming pool from Montgomery uh, that we could go to, except West Virginia State College, where blacks could actually go swimming. And I hope that in the near future that we'll get the swimming pool restored. (LAE: Mmm-hmm) So that the campers can



have that experience. Because now we have to go out of camp to swim, like we did at Babcock last Tuesday, or Monday.

LAE: Activities...what during the day? What do you remember doing?

FC: Oh, I remember singing a lot. We had many, many songs. I remember the arts and crafts with Miss Galation, who was from the West Indies. And uh, I remember that we couldn't say goodbye to her on Saturday, because of her religious beliefs. And she would stay in her room on Saturday and go through her religious rituals and so forth.

LAE: What religion was that?

FC: Uh, I believe she was a Seven Day Adventist, mmm-hmm. But just a tremendous lady, laughed a lot and very strict in her classroom. But we did lots of crafts. And we looked forward to making, making things. The music classes were great. And in this camp, Lynda, we changed disciplines every time the bell rang. And as, did you hear the bell? (LAE: Uh-huh) Yeah, yesterday and the bell today. That's the same bell that was here, mmm-hmm, when I was a camper. And so we knew to change classes. So we went for instructions and the 4H work we went to music classes, we went to craft classes. And we went to daily living classes, which were classes designed to just get morals

LAE: Do you know how the staff was recruited?

FC: The staff was a \_\_\_\_\_ that they kept here every summer to work all summer. Most of them were school teachers, so they were educators. (LAE: Oh, okay) Yes, also.... And favorite people.

people coming before that, though.

LAE: Right. And had it, always had multi-purposes, as far as you know?

FC: Yes...as far as I know.

LAE: All right, okay. Your, you said your mom and dad could pay the \$10, which doesn't sound like much, but back then it was a lot.

FC: Yeah, because we lived on \$20 on groceries a week (LAE: Yes), and with a family of four.

LAE: So, \$10 was a fair amount,. (FC: Mmm-hmm) If a kid could not afford that, do you know, was there-, were there ways that...

FC: There were ways for doing that, different services and organizations donated money, because we had lots organizations in the community. But at the time, Montgomery was a very high-thriving town, and it had the Woman's Club and the Men's Club and the Crown's Club and the black churches, just many ways of sources of funding.

LAE: And at that time, what was your dad's occupation?

FC: My dad was the uh, the mailman, the postman.

LAE: Is that right? Didn't he eventually own a music store?

FC: No, he didn't. Uh...

LAE: How do I have you connected to the music store?

FC: I was involved in it. (LAE: Oh, okay, right, he was the mailman) Right.

LAE: Okay. And you had brothers and sisters? (FC: I had sisters) Did they come, also? Yes, you said...

But uh, yeah, they were all educators. And so they supplemented their income (LAE: right) by working here. And they were hired back every summer, so they knew they were gonna work from the time school was out until the fall came. I think they got off maybe mid-August, was the last camp.

LAE: Mmm-hmm. Did you stay in touch with people that you met at the camp who you might not have otherwise stayed in contact with? And I'll tell you...I'm asking the question to assess the extent to which the camp was a networking process.

FC: Yes, I stayed in contact with a lot of the people that came to the camp. And it was just a real pleasant group. And now, it will be nice to see the people in next year's reunion. And I've been talking to Karen a lot about people that were here and people that-, the extended campers.... And

information

LAE: You started at the age of 10, and you stopped coming as a camper when?

FC: When I was a senior in high school.

LAE: And you would have been 17, 18. (FC: 17) Did you start in as a counselor right away, or was there a break?

FC: I was never a counselor.

LAE: Okay. When did you come back, then, as staff?

FC: I came back as staff in, let's see...this is the 14th year now. We have to do math. So, it must have been '86. Let's see...probably around 1983, I believe.

LAE: And at that point, it was no longer the 4H camp? (FC: No) It...

FC: I came back as after it was the American Heritage & Arts camp. And that was a

one day camp

**LAE:** All right. So, did you go....at any point did you go to the integrated 4H camp?

Help me. You started in '50 (FC: No).... Did they not integrate un '54?

**FC:** No, the integration took place in 1956.

**LAE:** All right. And you were still coming here? (FC: Mmm-hmm) And they did not integrate the camp?

**FC:** No, we-, it was still black, still a black camp. Schools were integrated. But uh...

**LAE:** They maintained the black camp.

**FC:** Yeah, I don't know if that was by choice or if we just didn't-, maybe had white students who didn't want to come.

**LAE:** All right. Or-, but could you have had the option to go to a white camp, or just preferred to come back here?

**FC:** Well, I preferred to come back here. Due to circumstances, we had a smooth transition in integration in Montgomery. But not all areas did.

**LAE:** Right, right. Do you-, okay, let's.... See you are in that generation that straddles segregation and the tradition. And it's real important that we record people's perceptions of that process. So, there was a point in your life where you moved from a (FC: Segregated school...) to an integrated school. (FC: Mmm-hmm) What year?

**FC:** I moved from Simmons High School in 1956 to Montgomery High School in 1956.

(LAE: Fall of '56) Fall of '56.

**LAE:** And what year....that would have made you....?

**FC:** I was a junior.

LAE: A junior. (FC: Mmm-hmm) Talk a little about that.

FC: Well, as we say in Montgomery, we had a very smooth transition. In Montgomery we played together, fought together. Uh...we did everything, except go to school and church together. And uh, just had a tremendous time in that town. Montgomery was very unique. We didn't feel the prejudice issue in town. And when we integrated schools, we did not have one fight. And Mr. Bragg is still living, lives in Anstead, was principal of Montgomery High School at the time. And uh, we just made a real smooth transition. I wish all schools could have been like that. But unfortunately...

LAE: Okay. So, Murphy's was not typical?

FC: G.C. Murphy's?

LAE: My understanding was that Murphy resisted integration

FC: Oh, yeah, I'm sure they did. We could eat on one side of Murphy's, the hot dog counter side. But we could not eat on th restaurant side. Now, as far as the segregation in town, we knew our boundaries and where we-, you know, where we couldn't go. So, sometimes if some of our white friends wanted us to go into the Smokhouse, that was one that was real...segregated. They had black cooks, but you couldn't eat there. Coney Island we could go on one side at one door, sit right across and talk to your friends across the counter on the other side. They had two counters. It was like a counter here and a counter here, and we'd just sit like I'm talking to you right now, so we could sit together. And then there were other things businesses, lots of businesses and uh, they had their clubs and so forth, and the churches.

LAE: You know, it's interested me and I look back myself....when I was I high school, they told me I could only run half a court, and I was a guard. So I never got to shoot.

(FC: Oh) So, my whole life I dribbled three times and passed it over the center line.

The kids, they told me I wasn't capable of running a court. And what baffles me is that I accepted that. And one of the things that interests me is how these rules get put in place and become the way you live and you really-, it's not true accepting, but you just live with them. And I asked, have you fought back? You know, you say there were these boundaries and you lived within them. Have you looked back now and wondered why you accepted it? Or did you really accept it, and how did you push on them? See what I'm saying?

FC: Sure. Yeah, I look back on them and I still do. And at the time, my parents were Civil Rights advocates. And they were instrumental in closing the Montgomery swimming pool down, which was a beautiful pool. And it stayed closed for let's see...I was 31 after integration. I think it was closed for around ten years.

people here.

LAE: So, they closed it by trying to swim in it, and to avoid the confrontation, they just closed the whole thing.

FC: They closed the whole thing. They got a court order from the government, from the U.S. government, to shut it down.

federal funds. And it stayed closed. And I think they opened it back up in, around '56, after integration.

LAE: Okay. Your parents were active in civil rights in the NAACP, through church,

what form did it take then?

FC: They were, they were involved in every type of uh...movement to help improve things for blacks.

LAE: But in Montgomery what form did that take? I don't...the NAACP was active, I believe, at that time.

FC: They were very active in that. And then they had a group of people, I don't remember exactly what they were called. I think my mom people that were very active in it. But uh, they just looked out for the rights in the town. And uh, (LAE: Oh, okay) so, uh, they did something with was another place you could go, and not sit in the seats that.... And they had the black kids, youngsters working behind the counter. But they couldn't eat there.

LAE: Okay. Really, I'm gonna bring it back to the camp. But I want to repeat my question, and that was, looking back on your childhood in a segregated society, where you were told you just simply couldn't do certain things. At the time, do you remember questioning that?

FC: Yes, I did. I think that anyone would question it. But I guess I got a lot of answers, because my parents were so actively involved. (LAE: That they could explain it to you) Oh, yeah....

LAE: But at the same time, told you, you had to obey those rules?

FC: Well, we just knew that they were to be obeyed. Sometimes I know, we would walk with our white friends to the other side.

LAE: Oh, you remember breaking them sometimes?

FC: Yeah, we would go there, but they wouldn't serve us, you know. And I guess we were testing the waters.

LAE: Do you remember being angry?

FC: Mm, no, I wasn't angry.

LAE: Do you have any memories of humiliation?

FC: Growing up in Montgomery?

LAE: Yes, I mean, because of the segregated experience.

FC: You know, I really have to think about that. Because...well

when you go through.... We probably....I remember several incidents, where people said, "Boy, you can't come in here," or something like that. Other than.

in Montgomery was pretty neat, too. Because I was the paper boy. So, paper boy can do a lot of things, especially if they

Now, my dad-, I was the paper boy, my dad was the mail man.

LAE: Everybody knew ...

FC: So, everybody knew us. And I would get invited into white homes, sit down and have some food or something (LAE: Okay) when I was collecting on a paper route. So,

I think probably my parents

my dad and him being involved in community

LAE: Now, I interviewed Reverend Davis, who was a

And his argument as to why he thinks he ended up being in the leadership, some of the civil rights things in Charleston, was because as a federal employee he had greater

protection (FC: Mmm-hmm, that's right) than a lot of people did. Do you think that was



also true for your dad?

FC: My dad uh, had that protection, but he was always a fighter.

LAE: So, he would have been...

FC: Yeah, Dad was always a fighter in uh, making sure that everyone had equal rights. He did not mind saying anything to anybody about what-, about how things should be. (LAE: Mmm-hmm)

LAE: I want to bring it back to camp, because what you've explained is that there was a point then where you moved into an integrated high school situation, but continued to come to an all-black camp. (FC Mmm-hmm) Was there a certain kind of freedom for you that you could experience at the all-black situation that was not available to you in the integrated situation?

FC: Well, I think anybody feels comfortable around all the people that's the same as them, especially it being as it was then. I know in high school now, we had to break down some barriers because they wouldn't let us in the Hi-Y Club, and a couple friends and I, we wanted to know why. (LAE: Mmm-hmm) And we did work on that. That's when I became very active, and also, growing up in

But uh, it was nice to come to camp where we just had friends. I don't think that they color was, you know, stood out as much as just having people...

LAE: It was just comfortable, you knew everybody.

FC: Sure. (LAE: Okay, okay) And uh, although we went to a black church, I don't know that we all felt comfortable in that environment with everyone there, too.

LAE: What church did you attend? Could I ask?

**FC:** Yes, I attended....[interruption to answer phone]...

**LAE:** All right, uh...one of the other things now that is interesting to look at the experience that children are having, going to a completely integrated school system, in terms of history and identity. And looking at the kids today as they come up here, where they're in an environment that is very supportive of an African-American identity, compared to what they may experience in their high schools, and compared to what you experienced, would you talk a little bit about that?

**FC:** Mmm-hmm. I don't think I was quite as exposed as much to the experience of the African culture in school coming up kids are certainly exposed to a lot of black history, and that's what students are not getting now in school. So, George Washington Carver and Booker T., and Ralph Bunche, that was really, those figures were really impressed or drilled into us in school. So, we were far more up on the things that were taking place and that had taken place in those times. Uh...the black infantry soldier and the they would get first people in the air force and the flyers and just all that, we learned. These kids don't get that now. But we're giving them an experience from the past as we today. And then the present is taking place. And the future uh, I think they are getting a tremendous education when they come to this camp...black history. Not only black history, but just world cultures. Interrelation...how the drum started and worked through all the cultures.

**LAE:** Should that kind of thing not be in the high schools, though?

LAE: Okay. But your memory, there was at least as many women as men (FC: Oh, yeah) and maybe more.

FC: Mmm-hmm. (LAE: Okay) Yes, Miss \_\_\_\_\_ was the cook, and uh...then let's see, Juliet Childs, my aunt, as an instructor, Mrs. Banks was 4H coordinator, was here \_\_\_\_\_ Let's see, Mrs. Jones was actively involved. Uh, let's see, Mrs. Galatian taught art. Let's see...the life guard was Mr. Mitchell--he eventually worked into the director of the camp. Uh, it was pretty balanced then.

LAE: Okay. Because oftentimes, this 4H activities tend to be very gender-rolled, you know, the women are baking the pies and the boys are out raising the cows, whatever. Did they do a lot of agricultural, agricultural emphasis as well?

FC: They had some pigs up here. They didn't have any cows, it was mainly pigs.

LAE: And you fed the pigs or you studied the pigs?

FC: Yeah, we fed them. But uh, they had people that took care of them.

LAE: So you didn't have like classes like how to be good farmers?

FC: Animal husbandry. (LAE: You did?) Uh...

LAE: And the girls went through those as well as the boys?

FC: Yeah, they went through that. And as far as the cooking classes, we didn't really have cooking classes, you know.

LAE: There wasn't a big emphasis on home ec or.... (FC: No) I have heard that 4H in West Virginia was somewhat different than the rest of the country anyway. Do you have any sense of that?

FC: At the time I didn't know about what was taking place that much, because we weren't \_\_\_\_\_ as we are today. And uh, so I think we just thought about our own communities and we would talk to the kids that came to camp about what they were doing in their 4H clubs. (LAE: Right) We weren't involved with a lot of animals, though, I don't think...most of the kids were not involved with them. Just crafts and that type of thing.

LAE: All right. And how long did you stay in 4H? All the way through high school as well?

FC: No, I think, let's see, I stayed in 4H probably from 10 to it must have been until about the 9th or 10th grade.

LAE: Okay. Was your mother in 4H?

FC: No, she was a girl scout, brownie leader.

LAE: Okay, she was in scouting. How about your dad?

FC: My dad was the scout master. (LAE: Oh, okay) I grew up in uh...

LAE: Were you also in scouting?

FC: Yes.

LAE: You were in both? (FC: Yes) Oh, okay.

FC: I went on scouting trips.

LAE: . \_\_\_\_\_ with the scouts.

FC: Yeah, we did it all.

LAE: All right.

FC: Dad was an outdoorsman.

LAE: Uh...going back now to your reentering the camp as a staff member, what were your perceptions with the kind of shifts? I mean, obviously it's more focused, it's not 4H. But it had undergone a profound change by the time you came back in the '80's.

(FC: Mmm-hmm) Do you have any observations about those changes?

FC: Well, we went through some changes because we turned it into the arts camp, we put on the arts. But we carried over a lot of the traditions that we had in the 4H camp.

LAE: When did they start the arts camp? Do you remember?

FC: 1993, I think.

LAE: So, you were involved from the very beginning of the arts camp? (FC: Mmm-hmm) Oh, okay. So, it had sort of laid dormant.

FC: Well, see, this camp, the Carver Camp, was closed down for awhile. (LAE: Right) That's when things were deteriorating. Then, when it was turned over to the Cultural Center, then the Cultural Center started bringing it back to life.

LAE: Right. And how did you see, then, the mission of the camp at this point? In terms of the black community? By '83, much of the civil rights stuff had been battled through. Did you have a sense at that point that the high schools were not going to do the kind of thing they needed to do, in terms of diversity?

FC: Uh, yes. When we first started the camp, I knew that we had to send out a person named Tango. And he went around the schools and communities and black churches recruiting students. (LAE: Okay) Mmm-hmm.

LAE: And were people aware at that point that the public school system was failing, in

terms of bringing in black history in the way they should?

FC: Meeting the needs of the students, yes. (LAE: yes, okay) Very aware. I think that's where the move started, in the schools about changing the textbooks. (LAE: Yes, yes) You remember when we went through all that.

LAE: Well, they integrated the camp mechanistically, in my opinion. It was like scatter a few people here, and shove people in, but don't re-examine.... So, that what was, what was the goal when you set this camp up? Because you're a real important person in the sense of having this thread of continuity. I think maybe you're the only person who's this thread. Do you remember how people talked about it, or envisioned it?

FC: Envisioned? This year's camp? (LAE: The arts camp as it started out) Okay. They envisioned it as a camp that would bring our black students back together, teach them more about the arts, give them more intensive study. And uh, help them go about self-improvement.

LAE: So, black history...

FC: To develop their talents.

LAE: Okay. Black history per se, was not a major concern. It was more the focus on arts.

FC: Arts and history.

LAE: So, there was some ..... Now, then, as the camp, from '83 on, has been through some ups and downs and some political twists and turns. (FC: Mmm-hmm) And no so much who did what to whom, but could you describe what perhaps might be different philosophies that were being debated about the camp as we got up to 1977? Issues.

We've had different personalities involved. Obviously, politics have played a role. Could you define it in different points of view? If you want to talk about people, that's okay. I think it's most useful if you talk about people, to try to describe their point of view.

**FC:** Well, I think different philosophies and what they wanted the students to actually learn. (LAE: Okay) When we started out, it was a strict, a real big emphasis totally on black, black culture, black history, black everything. And that evolved to becoming a little bit more multicultural. And then, as we got we became more multicultural. And philosophies have changed. But we're trying, I think, with my camp this year, what I tried to do was pull together all of-, all of the things that had been worked on in the past. And by pulling it together, I gave the camp a new life this year, a new lift. And everyone before me has done a great job. And uh, you know, the next person after me will probably have different philosophies.

But I see the camp moving forward.

**LAE:** Now, were you involved every...from '83 on, (FC: Yes), every single year? So, you've served under different directors? (FC: Mmm-hmm) Okay, so you've actually participated in these shifts? (FC: Sure) Okay

**FC:** I've seen shifts, I've seen staff changes. I saw this split in staff, that had been here for years, when they branched into another camp, a black camp. And then, trying to pull people back into this limited structure that remains still here with the camp. And...but, it's all worked out to where it...I don't think that it's affected the students over the years. Just with the staff and administrative changes. They've had to get used to

FC: No, I think that we should have that in high school, also. Yeah, it's just as important as learning American history. Like in the American history books

LAE: It's not American history

FC: Yeah, it's not. Yeah, part of American history. I think that all students need to know about their cultures, too, from all over the world. When they say World History, ahh, it's touched upon.

LAE:

FC:

LAE: Okay, let me back up and uh, go back to your experiences as a camper in the 4H camp. How did they do men and women? Was it back in those days when the girls did home economics and the boys did wood working? Do you remember how gender differences were dealt with? (FC: at the camp?) Yes.

FC: We all went through the same program here.

LAE: All the same program? (FC: Mmm-hmm) So, there was no differentiation between girls activities and boys activities?

FC: No, the structure of the camp was all the same.

LAE: And the staff, were they mostly women? Or did you have a mix of men and women? Or....?

FC: We probably had more women than men.

LAE: Okay, all right.

FC: It might have been equal...we'll have to take a look at some of the pictures.



doing with the ideas.

**LAE:** Now had...from '83 on, have there always been some white students present, or is that relatively new?

**FC:** No. I brought the first three white students to this camp. And that was in...I brought them in '90, I believe. (LAE: In '90, okay) Yeah, the summer or yeah, spring and summer of '90.

**LAE:** Okay. So, that would obviously reflect an opening, in terms of diversity and multicultural.

**FC:** Yeah, I remember when those first three students came, they were from my school-I teach at Dupont High School. And they were all instrumental students. Mr. Otis Hughes, Senior, was teaching instrumental music. I said, "Guys, would you like to go to a good camp?" And I said, "It's going to be different for you because you're gonna be in an environment that's different from what you've been used to here at school. I talked to the parents and they said, "yes, they, can go." They played in my show choir group at school. So, they got here. And there must have been ah, probably 70 or 80 kids here. And they went...I could see them looking around. And...

**LAE:** They were all boys?

**FC:** All boys, three buddies. And they said, "Well, we're the..." then they looked at their selves and they said, "We're the only [interruption]...we're the only three here." All I said is, "It's different, isn't it?" So, they said, "Yeah." So I said, "Well, how do you think that I may feel when I walk in the school every day?" School at that time was about 850-some students. And I said, "And they're only two of us there." I said, "So, put

yourself in my place here,” and I said, “and you’ll find that you’ll make the adjustment.” Well, that first day they kind of stood around, they said, “Well, maybe we need to call home,” and I said, “that’s fine.” And uh, so, the next day, they stayed together with the guys. And come the next day, I noticed that one of them, or all three of them, sitting with maybe two of the students here. And before dinner that evening, these guys were coming to me and saying, “You know, we don’t want to go home.” They thought about it. They said, “We’re having the time of our lives.” And they, from then on, down at the horseshoe pits, they were pitching horseshoes. And at the end of the camp they had made so many friends, or even before then. Because the kids were very accepted to them. And uh, they were just absorbed right in with the group, in a mix

Now, some of the instructors at that time, kind of said, “Well, Fred, uh, do you think that our kids are comfortable with these kids being in an invironment like this?” I said, “Sure, they’re used to this. They go to school with them every day.” And I said, “You just watch.” So, that broke the....

**LAE:** Was there any resistance by people who wanted to keep it just for black children?

**FC:** Yes, that’s what I’m saying. (LAE: Okay, okay) There were several people that said that this should remain a black camp. And I said, “Well, we work in unsegregated jobs. We work in unsegregated environments. So, what’s the difference now, with our camp? If our students \_\_\_\_\_ and this is an arts camp, then why should we deny that student? civil rights movements. This is the ‘80’s.”

**LAE:** Okay. So...let me see, we’ve got...just checking to make sure we’ve covered as

much as we can. Oh, outside perception. In terms of people in the state the camp. Positive? Negative? As you worked with the camp...first, let's talk about...when you were going as a child, did you have any sense of this camp being looked down upon by people as less than what the white kids had?

**FC:** No, because it was more than. We had better living conditions. (LAE: Is that right?) Yes. This was a first-class camp. And I'd like to see it come back up to...

**LAE:** Why do you suppose West Virginia provided such a nice facility, when in other ways they often failed?

**FC:** Because John W. Davis, the president of WV State College, wanted to see a place built that would be of-, something we could be proud of, where our black students could come, our black kids could come and families.... Not only did this serve as a camp, but it served as the family picnic areas for churches, for organizations. And I remember coming up here on Sunday's with my parents, and them spreading a picnic table, uh, tablecloth, having lunches with the Sunday school, we'd come here. And it was all centered around the swimming pool, which is (LAE: Oh, right) swimming pool, and just a nice place to congregate and be in the park.

**LAE:** And John Davis was able to pull the strings to get it funded and make it happen. (FC: He made it happen) Why do you think he was able to do that? Talk a little bit about the man.

**FC:** Well, I really don't, don't know much about John W. Davis, except that he was the president of the college when my father went there. And I know that he was educator, and a person who was for the betterment of black people here.

LAE: And they actually lived here on campus?

FC: Yes, they lived here year-round, with their families.

LAE: Okay, all right, okay.

FC: Same house that George lives in now.

LAE: Right, right. When we were starting to talk with Meyers, he made an interesting remark. We were talking about perceptions of the camp, that he lived up Cabin Creek, that Cabin Creek kids weren't good enough to go here.

FC: Yeah, let me tell you about that.

LAE: I'm interested in that difference.

FC: They were up the creek, and now when I think back, Lynda, the Charleston kids came. But I don't know if anyone was there in that area. Although, they had lots of mines up there.

LAE: They had a lot-, it was a very large-, Leewood was a very large black community. But I'm wondering if some of it isn't the town hollow contradiction, in that there were opportunities in, you know...I mean, Montgomery's hardly urban, but in West Virginia some of those hollows....

FC: Well, Montgomery was the hub...of this area.

LAE: It was. I mean, at that time. (FC: sure) And whether there was some sort of some sense of the hollow people not-, they may not have been connected into some of the clubs and the kinds of things the black community had. Because as you're speaking about the organizations supporting the kids getting to camp, they may have been missing Although we have some evidence

that coal companies ....

FC: Send their kids to camp, yeah. And maybe he just missed out in that...

LAE: Yeah, his particular coal company...

FC: ...didn't send them. Because Carbon Fuel was up there then.

LAE: Carbon Fuel and U.S. Steel (FC: Right), I don't know-, yeah.

FC: Those were the ones up there. And I don't know if they were affiliated with any of the kids in the camp up here. Oh, heck what was that they used to have, mine safety....something up here. But there were lots of mining events that brought people from those communities here.

LAE: Right. You're tired and I've covered a lot of the sort of factual things. We're asking people to share stories, as well. You're awfully tired. But just for example, somebody was saying why they never nailed the boards down on the front porch, because they had a coke machine there (FC: Mmm-hmm). And then they would move the coke machine and lift the boards and get the That's a wonderful story, even though it's.... Do you have any stories you want to share?

FC: Yeah (LAE: some crazy things that happened) uh, some crazy things I remember happening in the dormitory, if you were a new camper, and when you came in, the kids would always make sure that during the first day, or probably the second day that you were here, that they uh...would either, would put a frog in your bed. So, when you got ready to go to bed at night, you really didn't...you'd turn the covers back and weren't thinking, you got in the bed and here was a frog crawling all over you. So, that was one of the We had some other little pranks. That was fun. And I'm trying

to think. We had many things that happened here. But like that story.

LAE: Okay, okay. Any final thing you want to add at this point?

FC: Well, yeah, I'd like to say this. It's good to see the camp becoming busy again, becoming an integral part of our state and communities. And people must not forget that this camp is here, and I'm happy to see the reunion coming up. And I think that's going to strike up lots of new interests. It was wonderful today, seeing all the people here. And first newsletter from 1941

I'm happy to see the cultural center putting so much into it. And we probably need support and funding, in order to get new quarters built, housing built up here. So that we can maybe have other camps. I was talking to George Jordan about having other camps in here during the summer and getting programs started again, before kids can come up and really experience a nice camping experience, not far from home. And I understand that we're getting the land grant back, the state is. And that's, that's great. But anything for the improvement of this camp, you know, I'd just really be all for it. In fact, I'm going to help do some fund raising, see about some grants, to help improve the camp myself.

LAE: Okay. Well, thank you very much. [break in tape] Can I keep you recording? You're gonna give me some additional material.

FC: Yeah. Everyone that I can think of that I still stay in contact or any key positions now in leadership roles in the communities, in the schools or businesses or jobs. And Appalachian. (LAE: That's right) And I never thought of it in the

sense that we helped '60's to get to the '70s, that this was a group of us that were working through it. Through college, through college transition. We went through integration in the colleges here. And uh....just lots of things. Thomas Carter, who was at WV State College, who is now retired the Army, did such a tremendous job at WV State College in the integration process

And he's just one of the names that comes up. Because he was from Montgomery.

(LAE: Oh, I didn't know that) My next door neighbor. Yeah. And uh, I think of the kids that lived around me in Montgomery, uh...they...every kid that I could name, was in the block that I lived in. I grew up on they're all in leadership roles. Yeah.

But they were a product of this camp.

LAE: Yes, yes. And that's, see, and as we revive this camp, you know, we have this concern about the black youth of today in high pregnancy rates, drug use, blah, blah, blah, blah. But we are not giving them what other gen...(FC: We're not addressing what they need)...the other generation had these experiences. This is-, and so, I mean, I think...I get so angry when the money is spent for prisons and we can't...

FC: dormitory and classrooms here.

LAE: Yes, that's exactly right. Yes, exactly right, I agree.

FC: Because we would need approximately ten million dollars, to build housing and ample classrooms and facilities...here at this facility.

LAE: Right. How much all costing?

FC: I have no idea. I know it's a lot more than ten million dollars. Because they have air conditioning and we don't have it at Dupont High School. (LAE: Yes, yes)

He did tremendous things for the college. He did...this was an extension of the college and its same excellence was put into this camp.

LAE: Okay, so, this, although it was a 4H camp, it was administered by state as a land grant college? (FC: That's right) And the state, at that time, provided the extension agents for the 4H? (FC: Mmm-hmm, yeah) All right.

### **END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 1**

FC: Now, let me see....Leslie Lynch was an extension agent. And Mrs. Banks, yes, they did service the black community.

LAE: Okay, and they were connected to WVU? (FC: That's right) Okay, all right. Do you know of any other...activities? You've described family activities and youth. We think that there was (FC:Church) in church, there were training classes.

FC: Oh, yeah, mining training classes, mine extension training classes, uh, let's see.... Future Homemakers, I believe, classes, there were lots of different classes down through the....I don't know

LAE: Okay, so it must have been incredibly busy place.

FC: It was. That's why the staff

LAE: They had an ongoing staff. And then, that staff was connected to State. I mean, State...if I wanted to make a reservation for my group to come up here, I would have called State, or I would have called here directly.

FC: You would have called here, then past directors that lived across the street in the house. I think it was Mr. Jones and Carl Harriston, Leslie Lynch and Thomas Childs. So....