

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER

710

Interview with
ANN BARNETT
November 13, 1987

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Jane Harris

Terms of Use: Open

Approved: Ann Barnett
(Signature)

Date: November 13, 1987

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

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

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

Harris: When did the group stop meeting?

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

Harris: Did you feel like it lost its relevancy?

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

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

dropped from that?

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

Harris: I see.

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

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

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

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Interview with
JEAN KOOKER
February 2, 1988

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Mary Lohr
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Approved: Jean Kooker
(Signature)
Date: Feb. 2, 1988

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- after school help for the Denton public schools.
- Lohr: So you all just tutored for one...at most for one year or one semester?
- Kooker: No, it was two or three-years--over a two or three year period at least.
- Lohr: And was this sponsorship taken up by the women's group or through the church?
- Kooker: No, it was a real informal kind of thing. I suppose our Interracial Fellowship did most of the spearheading of looking for volunteers, but the Methodist church was...and Linnie did lots of work (chuckle).
- Lohr: How did the women's group get its name?
- Kooker: The women who were coming...we talked about it. I remember our talking about it, and we thought of several things. I don't remember whether we officially voted on it or if it was just sort of an agreement, but it did come out of a discussion in the group after a few meetings.
- Lohr: It's such a long name, and we wondered why the word "Christian" was in there. Is it because you wanted to emphasize a religious basis?
- Kooker: Yes. I think some of us wondered why we needed to put that in. Although we did want people to recognize that those who had started it had done it out of a Christian love, we did not necessarily want the group to be only open to Christian people. So some of us said, "Okay, if you feel

- it's important, go ahead and put it in."
- Lohr: Do you remember exactly what the name is? We've had some confusion about what name comes first.
- Kooker: What did you have? Let me think about it.
- Lohr: Denton Women's Christian Interracial...or Interracial Christian?
- Kooker: I don't know; I'm not sure. But I would think that the "Christian" came first because we called it so much the "Interracial Group" that that was what it was known by. We very seldom ever added all the other things to it; it just became known as the "Interracial Group." To us, at least, that's how we identified it.
- Lohr: After you got through with just your social beginnings, you had projects?
- Kooker: We had several. Still, one of our big pushes was to get to know each other and for our families to get to know each other. So one of the things that we did is that we would have a Christmas party and involve all the adults in the family. Then we would have a family get-together. We had it out at Price Camp, which belonged to the Methodist church. All the children...we'd have a picnic and a supper and games arranged and all this. Whole families would come so that our kids would have an opportunity to meet each other once in a while. My son, at least, formed a friendship out of that group, and I know some of the other children did.

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Interview with
EULINE BROCK
October 27, 1987

Place of Interview:

Denton, Texas

Interviewers:

Richard W. Byrd
Jane Harris
Mary Lohr

Terms of Use:

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Approved:

Euline Brock
(Signature)

Date:

Oct. 27, 1987

But we felt we had to do something, and that was something we could do. That wasn't going to change the world, but in this certain small circle, it was going to affect our lives. We felt the benefit very, very strongly. Whether the black women felt a comparable benefit, I really wouldn't be able to say.

Harris: How was the name of your group decided on?

Brock: Well, it's kind of an unwieldy name, and I don't know that we discussed it exclusively. I don't remember the mechanics of how it was, but I do remember that we had to get all of the elements in there--Denton and women and fellowship and Christian. That's just a description of what our group was. We were a fellowship group, and that was very important. We weren't an activist group; we weren't a study group. We were primarily a fellowship.

Lohr: Was the word "Christian" taken off?

Brock: Yes, it was dropped, but I don't know exactly when or why. I know later there were people who were involved in the group--and I think this would be particularly true of some of the black women who were active in the later years--who didn't particularly come out of any church background or affiliation. But at the beginning, this was something that all of us had in common. We were all very active in the churches, and also we felt that what we were trying to do--our general aim and our specific aims--very much had Christian motivation.

Also, including that word helped to kind of give it a little respectability for black women that we were trying to attract because church organizations and church-related organizations were very much at the center of black community life. I don't think there was much calculation in it, but maybe a little bit.

Lohr: Was there a feeling that this name lent respectability?

Brock: Perhaps not consciously, but I think that was very much there. We were all respectable people. We were very nicely dressed when we went to our meetings. Of course, this was before the hippie days. I remember going to a civil rights meeting (before Martin Luther King came too much to the forefront) at Pleasant Grove Baptist church on Wood Street, and until Linnie McAdams came in, I was the only woman there without a hat on. I think that black women have tended through the years to dress up more for meetings and for ceremonial things and to generally be better dressed or pay more attention to dress. That was just an outward sign. But we were very much ladies getting dressed up to go to a ladies' meeting when we went. Even though it was never articulated, we were respectable people, and that was a part of the Christian element, and that was a part of our having that in our name. We didn't want any question about what kind of a group we were. None of us would see that as a goal now (laughter). I don't think a single one of us would

care a bean about whether we were respectable or not or whether people thought we were respectable.

Lohr: Why do you think it was more important then?

Brock: Well, women had a much more restricted role. We had to do things a certain way, or we'd lose credibility completely. Also, what we were doing was maybe a little more pioneering. I know this sounds so bizarre to say that going to somebody's house and sitting around having pie and coffee was pioneering, but it was. It really was. So we had to be very much in the mainstream; we weren't to be radical, even though there were certain implications of radicalism in what we were doing.

Later, at the height of the student protest movement, one of the major points of contention between activists and non-activists was dress and hairstyle and that sort of thing. I think now that Linnie McAdams would be concerned with whether she could get a certain measure through the city council rather than whether somebody thinks she is respectable. I'm on the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the only concern I would have for respectability is whether I was able to influence somebody's vote, and I think more in terms of how to do that. At our meeting last week, I got 7-0 votes on two little pieces of sidewalk. I know this sounds very strange, but they were major issues that in the past have been voted down, and it's going to be something important

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Interview with
TRUDY FOSTER
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(Signature)
Date: 11-17-87

schools were not integrated, just the high school. Of course, integrating the elementary was a much more fearful thing for black women because their children were young, and here they were, being bused or taken away. And it was scarier. So because we had the Interracial Fellowship where there was a channel of communication, they felt more comfortable going through that period of integration.

Lohr: What purpose do you think the group served?

Foster: Well, that's one of the purposes, and, of course, all these things that I've mentioned. You know, that's what we've done. I think that it was a positive, healthy tool to help this painful process of integration that still has a long way to go.

Lohr: Were any lasting friendships made between black and white women?

Foster: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Oh, my, yes!

Lohr: What about families? Do families still keep in touch?

Foster: Yes. Right now I'm on the Human Resource Committee, and one of the daughters of a woman on the Interracial Fellowship is the black coordinator for the city. She calls me up and tells me when the meetings are and all. So there's a degree of warmth. She knows what I did and what her mother did, and she feels comfortable with me. Those are all steps in her working with the white community.

Lohr: Do you know why the group decided on the name? It's kind of

- Lohr: a long name.
- Foster: Denton's Women's Interracial Fellowship.
- Lohr: Well, the word "Christian" was in there, and then it was taken out, was it not?
- Foster: Yes, it was taken out at the time that we thought we were going to go on forever, and we thought we might get some Muslims in there (chuckle). Or Jews, you know.
- Lohr: Did you?
- Foster: No. The argument there was, you know, that when we were talking about interracial fellowship, we were talking about all races; we were not just talking about the black race or the Mexican-American race. We were talking about races that were not Christian, and if they happened to be in Denton and were having an uncomfortable time and wanted to join a group that was interested in integration, we should be a tool for them, too. But it didn't turn out to be that way. It strictly was black. We tried Mexican-American, but the Mexican-American element was so small at that time that it didn't...that wasn't what was needed.
- Lohr: Did they just refuse to join or didn't show any interest?
- Foster: I guess it was just that we were so...well, we were just so involved with blacks. The whole country was involved with blacks. The Mexican-Americans that we have in Denton was, as I said, not a big group, and they had an easier time integrating into the white group.