

Summer 2013

Faulker, Ervena

Ervena Faulker

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Recommended Citation

Faulker, Ervena; Morgan, Portia; and Slutzky, David, "Faulker, Ervena" (2013). *Video Collection*. Paper 120.
https://digital.kenyon.edu/gullah_video/120

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Interviewee: Ervena Faulker
Interviewers: David Slutzky, Portia Morgan
Summer 2013
St. Helena, SC

PM: Hi, I'm Portia Morgan with David Slutzky and today we are interviewing Ms. Ervena Faulker, who is going to talk to us a little bit about Penn Center and education here, on St. Helena island as well as her years teaching here and a little bit about St. Helena.

DS: Welcome, thanks for joining us today.

EF: Thank you for having me.

DS: So you said you've been here for the past 52 years.

EF: I came here in 1959 to teach at the St. Helena high school. St. Helena high school was in one building and the others, across the hall, was the elementary school. It was the only high school on the island for blacks. Whites went to school at Beaufort high, they had a bus that would pick them up. Course, children came to St. Helena high school on the bus too. We had the basic things, chalkboard, chalk, desks, hand-me-down books, old chairs, but one thing at the school that was most important, we had a group of teachers who were sincere and dedicated to the students. And so all we needed was the kids and us.

DS: How have things changed since then?

EF: Well, it's changed a bit culturally as well as educationally. Penn School taught the students here two things, hold onto their land and to buy an education. And the Penn School being directly with South Hampton State College at that time, it's now a university and Hampton-students from here would go to Hampton and then teachers would come from Hampton here to work with the students as well as teachers from State College come here to do practice teaching and learn of the ways of the island and to appreciate- enough to appreciate their culture. So we came to a place where sometimes we could not understand the language and at that time we didn't know a lot about protecting the culture. But now we taught students, so that when they left here they'd be able to go wherever they wanted to go, and they would be self-sufficient, and be able to hold their own, and do well. And so our students did that.

PM: So you had St. Helena high school and Penn Center. Penn Center would be more like a private school because you had to pay?

EF: Penn School was a boarding school until the late 40s when the state of South Carolina took it over. What they were trying to do, as Joe says that the state of South Carolina will never be able to pay their debt, the people of St. Helena island, by not providing them an education. Schools here are one room schools throughout the island. We have schools that go from first through eighth grade and then after eighth grade there was no more schools and if your parents could afford to pay tuition, sometimes two dollars a month, then you came to Penn. If you did not come to Penn your education ceased. There were no, this island and most islands on the coast,

there were no high schools. And in, like in Wadmalaw, Charleston they would leave from Wadmalaw after eighth grade and go into town and stay with someone. So the people here on the island, who did not finish an education, (they would go into job market or go into New York), that was a direct migration route for the people here. But it ceased until 1948 when Penn School ceased to be a boarding school and became a public high school until they could build the school, St. Helena high. So the education was here and after that became St. Helena high.

PM: So what would you say the graduation rate was for St. Helena high? How many of those students went on to college? Do you know?

EF: Oh, going to college from here was probably, might be next to 100%.

PM: Okay.

EF: But we found, you know, those of us who were here, we fought to make sure our kids got on. So we had them get scholarships, we took them on field trips, we exposed them to whatever we were able to expose them to, from when you go off to summer school and find new things to do. We had them participate in all kinds of competitions throughout and we had taught them that, you know, they were able to do what they could do. So they didn't fear in the fifties around that time. Many times we carried children home to do things for us and we also showed them a different way- One girl said she didn't like any other food besides rice and shrimp and rice and crab and rice and fish because she went with one of our teachers who had different kinds of things. So they became our family (can't understand). But I taught sixth grade for one year and there was one girl who was quite unruly and she was difficult at home, so I worked with her and she did well. Her mother asked me if I liked okra and tomatoes and for ten years that lady would can two cases of okra and tomatoes and then said to me, "Thank you", for all I had done for her child. That daughter did not go on to college, but two of her children did. And of course when they got the college, we stayed in touch with them throughout their college years. They come home, we talk to them and encourage them to stay here. So from this area, you know, we've had doctors, judges, attorneys, teachers um... had people now who we have been talking to for many years and so they listen, they did. There's one, I call them my family, they've taken me in as a part of them. One of my students gave me a trip to China for twenty one days just had to get there and after I got there she was in charge. So there's a blending here that education goes beyond the classroom. It goes into the churches and we've learned to, you know, respect them and then somethings, you know, you teach them to do a bit better because that's what education does, it gives you a higher level of doing things, not to degrade the part you've know but to use that part as a stepping stone to do other things, that's what we taught them. And they taught us so much, you know. They taught me how to eat crabs and shrimp because I didn't have that stuff. I had lots of fish. I had oysters because my daddy worked at a company who's family had a place on Pawleys Island, so he bring oysters back on weekends during the oyster season. But uh... I learned so much from them and so they are, these people are my people. I don't know whether when Harriet Tubman left going through the Cumbahee River taking 700 slaves, whether my ancestors were in that group or not, so I don't know if I love the Gullah people because of that or because I love the Gullah people because I feel I am part Gullah. So that's how that goes.

PM: You just used the term Gullah, what does Gullah mean to you?

EF: Gullah is a term that denotes those people who are direct descendants of Africa from the coast, the Western coast of Africa who, their language pattern, is what denotes them as Gullah. Now, in this area, it's Gullah. You go to Charleston you hear more Geechee. You go to Georgia you hear more Geechee. You go further South in Florida, you don't even hear that language at all, you just hear African-Americans who came here. You go to the coast past Myrtle beach to North Carolina, you don't hear the term, but from Bloomington, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida and some parts of Saint Augustine is the Gullah Geechee quarter. And that quarter, those are people who can trace their ancestry back to Africa and their ways and some of the things they do (are told by their parents that they learned that they tell them to hold onto). Reason they were able to hold onto is because, for years there was no bridges. The bridges you crossed leading from Ladys Island going to Beaufort is the new bridge was built in 1960. The first bridge ever built connecting Ladys Island to Beaufort, built in 1937. Prior to that time there was no way they could get over by roads. And see, when they had the emancipation proclamation celebration in 1863 and the people left from Penn for the big celebration, they left by boat from this landing went across the river to Naval hospital. They was letting people across at that time. They had a big celebration with everybody there and everybody being so happy because this place was one of the first places they could live free. And somebody who was there said to them after they did all the reading of everything and said that, you know, this is, you know, you're free! And so they asked one of the not free slaves if they'd, "Sing a spiritual for us", and then look because spiritual was there, that's their culture, and here you are, free person now. So they waited for a while and a person sang, my country tis' of thee, sweet land of liberty, of the I sing, and, you know, now I'm truly an American. So that's how they did it.

DS: That's the first thing that struck so many of us for our trip down here is knowing you're walking, literally on the grounds of the first freed slaves a year before the emancipation proclamation and you're like, "Wow", this is, you know, how does it not touch you in the heart?

EF: Oh, it touched me, yeah. And then, see when Laurie Towne came here and uh- she was not the only abolitionist who came to start, people started all along the coast. But somehow or another she was able to get more help than the other people. There was a school in Edisto which is just across the border from here. Edisto tried to start a school and that didn't work out as well, so when the people at Edisto, when the free slaves of Edisto found out about Penn, they came by boat and came to this side and found people here, they found land. And one place was in Scott plantation and that's where they started and they stayed because there were more opportunities on St. Helena island then there were on some other islands.

PM: You have such a strong love for the history of St. Helena. I guess my concern especially working with the young people today, how do you think young people on St. Helena grasp their history today?

EF: Okay, students now are not into the history as much as we would love them to be. There's a eight year grant that the Beaufort county school district had to teach about the culture and I end up being the last four years of that. The schools were the lower achieving schools and (bad they say- those of us who taught at St. Helena know enough about that St. Helena school is a failing school because you know about the debt.)

PM: Right.

EF: But people have the love in their hearts for kids and show them determination that you can do it. And if you do that the kids know you're sincere and you'll do and they'll learn. We had a group out at Burbatch Middle and I asked them how many of them were Gullah and they said "Those people who are Gullah goes on the Island". And I said, "Those of you who live on Seabrook, Beaufort, you're just as Gullah as they are". "Oh, no ma'am". You know, Beaufort people never use the word Gullah. Oh no, they never say the word Gullah. They say it's all right here. Hiltonhead Island people say Gullah. Lots of people are beginning to say they're Gullah because it's the "in thing" now. But they could still just not say they're Gullah, they're, you know, they're here but they don't claim to be Gullah. So our kids really almost- at school to teach our kids the appreciation of our culture and that's hard. That's not hard to do but it's time consuming to do because most of us who taught here now are doing other things and, you know, we'll come and do some part but we wish there'd be a generation that's behind us that would come and do this and let us come help. They had a Gullah institute one time for three summers, it was outstanding teaching people about the culture, the language and the foods. The festivals they have now are a little Gullah but mostly entertaining. Not a lot of educational stuff. And it's just so much to do to keep charge from laying plants, to the foods, to the people that once were here, that doesn't happen. Sometime it's too much bickering between the halves. People in power need to get things done so the whole spectrum could be done.

DS: Can imagine that.

PM: We certainly understand that. Are the textbooks going better?

EF: Oh yeah.

PM: You had said earlier the textbooks they didn't have this year, are they adding some of the history of this island and Gullah history here?

EF: Yeah, they're doing that much, much better. I'm working on researching at the Gullah Geechee corridor. There's so much to do. My goal was to go past July 1st. I want to make it August 1st but I'm working on that. There's a lot to do, a lot to teach. It's a time consuming thing and people are into other things besides the history sometimes and the time is being used to get this done. So they're doing a little bit more with foods. There seems to be an appreciation of the rice dishes and people eating properly and getting the healthcare they need, that seems to be on the up scale. But there are still people who need so much and it takes all of us to kind of teach everybody how to do. Then there comes a part of time in your life you have to appreciate yourself too, so it's a whole mixture of things to be done.

PM: I think our biggest fear was that we wanted to get these interviews down, so that they're out there for teachers around the world, really, to use them because we're afraid that it becomes a dying culture if we don't keep it alive and we don't teach it to young people and that they don't build a respect. And what I find sometimes is young people don't respect it until they get into

their twenties and thirties and then they want to learn as much as they can and it's just a lot more difficult to learn from those people that they can talk to are no longer with us.

EF: It's a lot to do and there are more books out here that talk about it even down to sweetgrass baskets hold. Everybody should know, every child here should know what grass is going into a basket. Every child here should know the kinds of crabs in the river. Every child should know about the marine life. Every child should know that Spanish moss is the first cousin to the pineapple family and that high grows is epiphyte. Every child should know the growing seasons. How the tomatoes got here and stuff where that come from. Those kind of things children should know and they wait till the last part to become apart of this. So even down to the spirituals, we were talking about planning and I said, you know, "We want to sing in spirituals, we don't do gospels". And one woman said, "But isn't that". And I said, "No no no, there's a difference between a gospel song and a spiritual song". There's a difference between a spiritual here and a spiritual in (someplace).

PM: Oh, really.

EF: Yeah, so, you know, you need to make sure that there's a book somewhere these spirituals are there that these kids can, you know, learn. And when I first came here they said, "Ma'am, we have devotions first", assuming that in the school where I came from we had a P.A. system, so the devotions were piped in every morning, you know, we didn't say em, we listened! And so I said, "Oh, okay". And he said, "Lets start devotions". I said, "Okay, show me how you do it". They start off singing, the first was Work Together Children, Don't You Get Weary. Then, after that, they say, "Now, we're going to pray and then you'll do the allegiance. And alright now, ma'am, you can start teaching". I said, "Okay, thank you", so I did how you do it and so I learned we have devotion first. So my kids taught me so much. I have two separate kids, those that I have birthed and those that I have taught and they're so very, very dear to me. They taught me just things, how things were and how you turn so much. And they're still very much apart of my life.

PM: Could you tell us a little bit about your work here at Penn and the Gullah quarter?

EF: The Gullah Geechee corridor. The Gullah Geechee corridor has been in a corridor now, I think, over five years. They have commissioners from the states Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. I received a grant to study the Gullah Geechee corridor from the South Carolina to end. So I've been doing some work with that. Clemson extension services has a promo called Your Day, it's a months video program. So in February I spoke and some , it's through the state, a lady heard me talk about the um...praise houses. She lives in Colleton county and she called, and on her property is a praise house.

PM: Oh.

EF: yeah, so I went there to see the praise house but aside from that she had a- Ashley Hall is a private high school for girls in Charleston and basically it's a all white school. So her granddaughter is a student there, so that teeny class, 'bout eighteen girls came down, did a story

about the praise house. But this lady stayed in touch with me. Have you read the book, *A Seed From Madagascar*? You read that book? You know about the book?

DS: Know about it, I have not read it.

EF: She finally got me a copy because I haven't read it yet. But Madagascar was on *60 minutes*, Sunday, about the animals. So I went up there and talked about the praise house and brought one my friends and we sang spirits just from them, had this beautiful view. And so she called me just last week because her son-in-law, who was in Charleston, has bought the Comingtee plantation and on that plantation is an old African-American church and a graveyard. The children come up there and already set the date in October, and another classroom come and these are students who are from (Germany) who attend school there and they want them to have the experience of seeing it by the praise house and the history there. And, you know, this is the 150th year for Harriet Tubman, so then I said, "Well, I'll tell about that". So she said, "I need to hear that because I don't know that story". So then I'm gonna talk a little bit about that story. But there's so much history here these people need to learn. Our kids need to be taught. So each one teacher then has to learn what we have to do.

DS: What's your favorite teaching memory you've had? You familiar with any of them?

EF: Oh... Oh my goodness. I guess um... let me tell you a story one of my students told me. I came here, I was a paddling teacher, so watch your hand. So I paddled and I moved up from paddling to pinching then I moved up from pinching to pulling your ears. So now, anyway, I talked to my kids and they said, "Hey, Mrs. Faulker"! And I said, "Is that paddle, pinch, or pull"? So, one- in that first class, I told you about the student say, "We have devotion". That second day, that same student who told me about devotion brought me "weeds", they were really weeds from off the road. He said, "For you ma'am". I said, "Oh!". He said, "I brought you flowers ma'am", so they're very polite. And I said, "Thank you so much". All that class there were two friends who would not listen, so I had to paddle them. And so one of the girls said, "That's alright, that's alright. Hey, I love you anyway". But just a couple months ago her friend, who's father passed, was telling me how- she said, "Oh, ya'll", she told her daughter, "Mrs. Faulker would beat". She said, "Well, we love her". I said, "I love ya too". So she said she lived with her uncle and so I called because I don't normally call parents because we had to be a team to adjust the kids. So the uncle called the dad and, she just told me this this year, and her dad got in the car from New York and her uncle told her, "Your daddy is coming tonight". So he did come. He got out of that car, took off his belt, he whipped her in that yard, "Now, you give that teacher no more trouble". He got back in that car and went back to New York. I said, "No he didn't. They just burned him a couple weeks ago". She said, "Yes he did". Well, when she came home, I didn't know she was home and I was going to IHOP and somebody honked the horn and I didn't know who they are, they always hungry, so I waved and kept on. And so I was looking, she said she got out of the car, "Mrs. Faulker". I say, "Caranne May". And her dad said, "Please talk to her. She's going to make me wreck because she's so happy to see you". So those people took me into their wings and then the parents, they used to always say um... they know I wanted a big family, "Say, Mrs. Faulker, I heard you want lots of children". I said, "Yeah", we have four children. Said, "But don't go- wait around till you get old having your children now. I did that. My last child is quite a handful". But they did those kind of things. They'd call you and say,

“Come and get this”. Then if you had baby here they’d bring them on the weekends on the island. I guess my most rewarding experience has been my admitting from classroom to family because I’m very much in touch with them. If there’s a wedding that I miss they get upset. They tell me to come to every funeral like, you here him say like, he would die if he did one kind of funeral. He expects that I would be at those funerals. I said, “Man, come on”. He said, “That’s okay”, and I listened. But I guess my most rewarding experience is to have my students be the garbage collector, whether they’re maids, when they are working to be somebody’s supposedly the message workers, to know that I taught them and they’re doing well at a level they could do it effectively. That made me feel good. But everybody can’t be a lawyer, everybody can’t be a doctor, but everybody can do it. You can find your niche and do it. And when I’ve seen me students come back home from being in New York and build these fabulous houses and do that. And I have some students who are millionaires. Then I have some who call my house if our kitchen is okay to make a gravy. They all mine and I claimed them all.

PM: Anything else, David?

DS: I’m just absorbing that because it is a beautiful story that I don’t know how to follow that up. I’m touched and I get emotional sometimes and you touched me on that answer so...

EF: Oh, yeah. My kids are my kids.

DS: I’m not often speechless but you got me on that one I gotta admit. I get thinking of just the timeframe and I know this island has changed and I know there are these development wars, not wars but development debates going on.

EF: There are wars. You know, right by Penn, there’s a gate and then you go down, there’s a house down there, that’s one of my students.

PM: Okay.

EF: And uh... I had her, in fact, they were celebrating her fiftieth class reunion this year. Purley, who works here, I taught her and most of her cousins. There was a time when one cousin was going to Math at Junior College and needed- her mother needed the money to pay for her to take her tests and the mother came to the school and the principle gave me an envelope to go out and get the money. It was like \$167. And she said, “When you get it all then come back to me”. And so I went to one coworker she said, “No, bring me that”. I said, “Well, Mrs. Riles”. “No no, bring it to me last”. And so we quote, “educated her math”. And then after that that teacher who asked bring the envelope to her last got her a scholarship at Bennett College. She graduated from Bennett College. She’d done well as a principle. And she said that she always tell her teachers when they say, “He can’t participate because he doesn’t have his clothes”. She say, “No, he will participate”. Said, “I will buy his clothes”. She said, “Every time a child does not have, you let them have it”. That’s how I work. I carry kids home, and get their hair done. I kept shopping. They went off to college. I sent them money. Whatever they need, you know, that’s what I did. And so they became my kids.

PM: Mrs. Faulker, how long did you teach?

EF: I taught for 33 years.

PM: Okay.

EF: When I finished teaching I still had the child in me, so then I opened my own 501(c)(3) after school program and I ran that for five years. And then after that I came out and whenever I got a telephone call or a job offer I went and I did it. I worked over here at Penn in the history of culture department for about two years. In fact, I came and did two heritage days. That was quite a challenge but I did it. And so now, I guess I never stop working. I do a column now, my column comes out tomorrow in the Beaufort Gazette, so I'm doing that and then doing research.

DS: Pretty important.

EF: So I try to do a balancing act the best I can.

DS: You know, you seem to have understood the fact that the Gullah children that would go to your school was only difference in dialect or accent and not a difference in intelligence, some of your coworkers, how long did it take them to make that understanding shift?

EF: Oh, it all depends whether they wanted to do that or whether they had a mindset they didn't want to change. But I- when the first white teacher came to St. Helena, there's some kind of fear, some kind of- about African-American males, hate to bring up now after that last trial, but there's a fear of them. So she didn't know how to keep them quiet. So I said, "I have to show you. Let me show you how to teach", and I did. And I went right across the hall and I said, "Okay, you gonna be quiet in here because you gotta learn", and so we did that. And I got to Beaufort High a lot of the things that were done were not right. And so I just told them, I said, "You know, you're not doing right by kids". And sometime I got in trouble saying that and sometime I, you know, but I had to tell them that this is what you do. I remember in the library and there were no books on African-Americans, I said, "Where are your books about the", um... I said, "This school is seven percent black. There are no books here but us". I said, "You need to do better than this". I said that, they didn't like what I was saying, I said, "Well, I've said it". But I- in a way that I did it I wanted to make sure that we were able to be a team. We had to teach, you know. And I had this ambition I had to achieve too. You know, you're gonna decide in October which child is going to fail, you're gonna have him in school two months, so let me help you, let me help you with them and I did all I could to help, you know. I had to show them the best I could because they would say, "These kids", no no, kids can do, you just have to make sure that you bring them up to- you know you set your level high and they have to come to this and they have to do it.

DS: Amen.

EF: I would carry them on field trips and I'll tell you a story about one of my students. He was tenth grade and I'd always say to him when we go on the trips and He said, "Don't make me shame". And I said, "Alright, Freeman Earl". "Yes ma'am, Mrs. Faulker". "Don't make me shame, you know, I bring you away from school". And sometimes- like I carry kids to Charleston, they got to Garden Square they thought that was Charleston. These were children in

tenth grade. So he went onto school. His family members became my friends. And then maybe three years ago I got the word- no, maybe five years ago when he was teaching at Morehouse. So later on I got the word, Freeman Earl was home and Freeman Earl (bus passes by). So now, he's is at another- some chemical company he's working and he said, "I told you I'd never be a shame".

PM: Ah! You bring a tear to my eye.

EF: Yes, and those have been um... and I taught my kids to love the island just like I love it. My husband taught at Robert Smalls and that was a city school, so we never discussed students, especially during athletic competition because they'd always say, "You'd always beat St. Helena because St. Helena, you know, not for my kids sake". And I said, "Oh no, oh no". We knew we had a good band, so one night at a game and Robert Smalls was hitting and half our band played, and Wesley Feedytoo, who composed the Alma mater of St. Helena, he had something- they had used the lights. The lights went out and our kids did not get lost. They fought those lights, I mean, they were outstanding. So that night the fellows came around the front and said, "Oh my gosh, you couldn't beat us playing football but you sure took us in the band". I said, "Yes"! So we did for the kids and there were times when there were field trips and the kids couldn't pay. I said, "You're going, come on". Senior class trip, I carry them to- before we catch the train, this is the class of '67, before we catch a train to go to Atlanta, waiting on somebody to come on the bus, and so, you know, the train doesn't wait on you, so we missed the train. I said, "Okay, lets get back on this bus and head home". "Oh no ma'am, you're gonna get us there". I said, "Oh, you can do it". So I found- I went into the Greyhound buses, I said, "Sir, I need to get a bus". I said, "These kids, on their field trip". I said, "We missed the train. We'd be gone for three days and they already going". And that often, they mapped out the trip. We went from here to Atlanta. We stayed at an Imperial Hotel on Peacetrete Street. I had their names on the marquee to watch the Braves games. Then I carry them to Pascals, they were all black.

PM: Oh, yes! I stayed at Pascals.

EF: They ate there. I carry them to get the barbecue on the corner right down from the church. And then that Sunday we were going to church and I told them Martin Luther King was preaching to that core. They got in and listened. So after I said, "You know, it was good we were able to hear Martin Luther King's speech". "No we didn't". I said, "Yes, we did". "Is that who it was"? Oh, they ran like a ran like (something). I said, "I told ya'll"! So then we went from there to Lookout Moutain Tennessee and to Beaufort Falls and while we were in the hotel every morning I was so embarrassed the cook was putting on all these fried potatoes, I said, "Will you all please call it breakfast food". I said, "Come on". So a bunch of them came in and said, "Let us eat (something) instead. Every morning french fries, every meal". I said, "Go ahead ahead. Go ahead and do that. Go ahead eat them. Eat".

PM: I'm sure all of those children will never that trip.

EF: And they haven't. Some of them have carried their families on that same trip. They carried them to the game, carried them to Lookout Mountain, Tennessee and then carried them on to Beaufort Falls. But those are my kids. I love them dearly, that's still true.

DS: Looking back and I can't imagine looking back saying, "Yes, I saw Dr. King speak in church with my teacher". That's gotta be a lifetime memory there.

EF: I tell them now, I said, "now you know if I get, so if I can't get back you gotta come pick me up". "Oh, don't you worry, you're not going to suffer for a thing", so there.

PM: 'Cause they mean that. 'Cause they mean that.

EF: They're good. Like I say, they do surprise me sometimes. Sometimes I'll go to the backdoor and there's a case of tomatoes. In fact, I went to buy, to purchase them for canned tomatoes because they taught me how to can. My daddy said, "(unclear)". So I went to get these vegetables just last week. I carry out my little pocket book at the end to pay and the lady said, "Oh, Mrs. Faulker, happy birthday". I said, "It's not my birthday". I said, "My birthday is next month". She said, "It's your birthday best everyday", filled my cart full of stuff. It's so wonderful. One of the place and I'll watch them grow, you know, to doing all kinds of things, serving on (unclear), being able to express themselves, and fighting for what they feel is right for the island and trying to be the best (unclear) they can. It takes a lot because taxes here are sky high and some of them don't have the means but they save a lot. They still have folks who work in New York who would send them money to pay taxes. But it's still a struggle because taxes go up every year and this is the place everybody wants to be now. And then when boys get in trouble and their parents can't pay the lawyer he gets the property. And if it's somebody who does not look like them then they purposely become a gated place, you couldn't get in. So the struggle continues but they're doing well. They have huge- when I ride by and see the houses they live in, the things they're doing have an influence.

DS: Tell us about your experience with school integration. I'm sure during your years teaching-

EF: It was not the um... we held it down. We had no major incidents. I taught the afternoon session and I just told my kids that, you know, "You got me, you gotta learn. You gotta learn from each other". So every Friday, when I had to buy a recruit, every Friday I'd have donuts and hot chocolate, the chairman of my department wrote me off for doing that. And I told them that I had to help these kids to learn each other's ways and so Friday was our day to talk. So one day, essentially you asked me this, one day this girl got up and said, "I told my mama about this class". She said, "Oh". She said, "I want to call my classmates sometime in Charleston". And her mother said no, she couldn't do that. This is a little white female. I said, "So what did she say about us? We do what"? She said, "Well". I said, "We lie and steal". "Yes, ma'am"! I said, "Mhm". I said, "Then those of you in this class who's parents have maids, raise your hands". So all of the white hands went up. I said, "Oh my goodness and I suppose that they set foot in your house everyday". I said, "Because if we're cleaning in your house with your prize possessions, he must come check everyday because we lie and we steal". I said, "That's why you learn science, so you can learn how to think". She said, "Oh, Mrs. Faulker, I never thought about that". So they became a very cohesive group and at Christmas time I let them come to our house and have a party. And another year somebody who's mother had a place on Fripp Island let us go there. And I said, "Ya'll, please get back home safe, please get back home". But that class has found me on Facebook and they just went crazy when they found out I was on Facebook, so I'm

back in touch with them. But I had to at least tell them, you know, and I remember when I was at seventh from St. Helena High to Jasper High, stayed there then I came back to St. Helena, stayed there until integration, went to Beaufort High. From Beaufort High when they built Battery Creek, I went to Battery Creek then St. Helena, oh, I mentioned- I received a grant to do a hands-on science program, so I was asked to come in and be the director of that program. So I went back to St. Helena. I stayed there and worked and I went back to school to become guidance, well, while I was at St. Helena elementary. At that time, principals could name their successor, so I was named to be their principal. I was acting principal for four months and God, surely in four months, he did not create me to be a principal, gave it to somebody else. So then I asked if I could go and take the job to be a guidance counselor at Shell Point in Port River, I did that. Then I became full time at Shell Point. A new principal came to Shell Point and, at that time they were having the target 2000 grants, so I wrote that grant. I was on a national board- a regional board and we went to New Market Tennessee, where Martin Luther King and Septima Clark all went and they would do. And I got there and had a rocking chair and I held my hands like Septima Clark and I prayed to get those spirits coming to me to help me write this grant. So I wrote the grant, as did the director of the ACE program, as well as the director of the kindergarden program all for Beaufort county. My grant won, so I became that director. And so I ran that program for like, four years and then I retired from that. So that's why was- obviously I've been completely sightseeing with you guys. Yeah, but I did that and it just made a difference.

DS: One last thing last question, I have. We've heard so many wonderful things about you as an educator, I want to flip the table, I want to hear about you as a child and as a student yourself and growing up in schools...

EF: Oh, I came um... I'm a native of Columbia and so I could walk to the school, my elementary school. And um... I did- first, second grade I took um... first grade we always had tests to take. First grade tests, and I had done tests, and then they wanted to move me from second to third, and my momma said no. Second grade we had two tests. I remember on one test I made third grade eight months and fifth grade four months and the teacher called mom and dad and said, "You gotta let her go, you gotta let her go". And momma said, "No, I want her to stay with her group". And daddy said, "Please, let her go". He said, "She'll be alright". So I moved, at that time, I was going to second grade in the mornings and third grade in the afternoon. End of that year I went to fourth grade. Well, when I did good in school, I helped the fellas with their work. Well, time for sixth grade, there were teachers in our neighborhood and that time teachers would ride the bus because we had a transit system in Columbia. Teachers would ride the bus. Well, this teacher in our neighborhood, Mrs. Draya was one and Mrs. Sesna was one, it was alright if I missed Mrs. Draya, she didn't live there. Mrs. Sesna was in the same church as us. So the principal assigned me to the sixth grade teacher and I went to him and I said, "I don't want her to teach me". He said, "Why"? I said, "Cause she taught my momma, my daddy, all my ancestors". I said, "I don't want her to teach me". I said, "I want Mrs. Sesna to teach me". He smiled at me. So he put me in Mrs. Howl's. She smiled and said, "This little girl"- And little did I know that the reason why Mrs. Howl was determined to teach me is because now that she taught my parents and their siblings but when she would have to stay over to do extension work at school, she stayed with my grandparents. So she felt she had to teach me, and she did, so that meant well. I was only sent to the office one time. We had assembly programs and at this assembly program everybody was talking ain't nobody whispering, got back to class and the

teacher asked those who were talking in the assembly program to raise their hand. And so nobody raised afterwards I raised my hand. And she said, "Nobody else talking but Ervena"? And everybody said no, I was the only one talking. She said, "Go to the principal". I said, "Oh, my dad is going to kill me when I get home", you know, 'cause you didn't act up in school. So I got to the principal's office, he said, "Ervena, you been talking"? All the tears start coming down. He said, "Just sit there". He called for Relly Jackson, who was our custodian, he said, "What kind of ice cream do you like"? And I said, "Strawberry". He said, "Go up to the store and get a pint of strawberry ice cream". So he came back, he cut that in half, got a spoon, he said, "You and I are going to eat this ice cream". They said, "What happened"? I said, "I can't tell you. He just talked to me". I said, "I can't talk. He told me I can't talk". So that was my encounter. Then I went on to the St. Johns and we were the first seventh grade class, at that time they were still doing this separate but equal they ran north of the separate but equal. But in a city it's different between being, it's different being a African-American in the city and being a African-American in rural. I found out after I came here, it's a difference. Our schools there were, when they say separate but equal, I mean they were the same. They built a white high school, (something) high and they built St. Johns for us. And we had everything and we had pipe cleaning and everything. So I went there and did well and from there I was the salutatorian in my class went on to college in Allen University. And in Allen I um... I'ma tell this story, my freshman year my daddy, everybody was excited, they knew I was gonna go to college, my daddy, he always paid his bills and he never borrowed money. So he give me the money to make up in September. What he had was we wanted to cut for the system was like December time for money at the end. Now, mama said, "I told you, I don't have anymore money. Ask your dad". And daddy said, "I have to give you the money next week". My daddy had a gray streak and whenever he come back with money he'd scratch that streak. I said, "Daddy, have the money today. Can I get it to you next week? Anybody I owe, I can pay next week". So I called my advisor and I told him I don't know if I'd be back to school or not because my daddy hadn't gotten his money streak here. He said, "Well, do you have the money"? Because I told him that I had nine ironing jobs when I grew up (someone's) parents could not send her anyplace. So she finally said that was it and she left Columbia and went to stay with her aunt and gave me all her ironing jobs. So I made two dollars a night ironing. (You know, young stuff when about your lunch). So Ms. Murrans said, "You told me you were working". She said, "Where are those two dollars"? And I said, "Oh". She said, "Well, you got nine times you working that's eighteen dollars". I said, "Well, I don't have that money now". I said, "I guess I have to dropout". Well, I had a scholarship for being salutatorian and I was staying with Alma Faith, that was another scholarship, so when can't help it she come on campus. So I was on campus on Friday afternoon, figuring that was my last step at Allen and the bishop wrote me a check and increased- doubled my scholarship. Well, my dad got his act together and paid. Now, they say you have to go to the president to ask for more money. So I went to the president and here all these people, I said, "What ya'll here for"? They said, "We come every time". I said, "What"! I said, "Oh no, this can't be". So when the president got to me he said, "Little girl, tell me you're a little short on money". I said, "Yes sir, I am". "Will you be able to pay this money back"? I said, "I will pay this money back and you won't see me in here anymore". He said, "How do you know"? I said, "'Cause I'm not going to do this". I said, "I'm not going to come here every quarter asking for money". I said, "I have to get me a job". So he did- I paid that- I got that money. I paid that money back. But that was a two dollar job that I had and so I always tell folks, you know, if you want to do you can do. So then my girlfriends, we were always close, they had jobs working at

Columbia hospital. They was making 35 cents an hour and that was more than making two dollars a night for ironing. So somebody time was up they went and graduated and my girlfriend come and said, "Girls are open at Columbia hospital, you come on. The job is yours if you get here". I went and I got that job and we worked. And then in the summer time when in the break in the downstairs department, in the summertime when these people have their vacations, who work, we worked. We worked, we put in after twelve hours. We worked from five in the morning to five at night, and so we made good, we call, good money.

PM: Good money.

EF: So that's what I did. So when it was time to get a job, I came to Allen, so I could get me a job and I knew I wanted to teach. And so I was the first one out of my class to get a job and come to St. Helena. So my high school classmates tell me that everybody went north of me. I;m the only one who came south. But they say, "But you so happy"? I said, "I am. I enjoy my work". So I meant my husband here. He worked at Robert Smalls and so we stayed here and we've been here ever since. Been here over fifty years, yeah.

PM: So, not to take all of your morning to our Cleveland students and teachers maybe, what would you want to tell them?

EF: That you cannot beat education but you gotta want to do. You gotta have that desire to do. And now you know it, I tell people now about all black boys. It's always been a time of the males, if you go back to slavery, it was a time of males. If you go back to not getting a job, it was males. Black women have been able to maneuver through it. Black men have always had a time. Can we turn it around? You gotta have caring females who want to see males do. And you gotta say every morning, every night. You gotta have a goal. You gotta want to be somebody. If you want to be somebody, you'll make it. Sometimes we make it hard for ourselves by not doing things in a systematic way as we should. But if you have that goal, then stick to it, you're gonna make it happen. So far as the teachers are concerned, the kids gotta know you love them, and they can tell. They can tell by how you speak and how you act. They watch every move you make and how you move it. And so they know you care and you want them to do, they'll do. I always tell my kids when their children ask me, "How did my mom and dad do in school"? I said, "I didn't teach dumb children. The children I taught was smart, so if I had your mom and dad they was- in my class, they was smart". And sometime they were not but if you mine, you mine, and you going come up doing. So I always tell the principal, "Now, don't give me this class and after a week take it back from me because once I got 'em, they mine"!

PM: They mine!

EF: So it can be done but you can't teach just for the money, that will come. You gotta teach for the love of the kids and if you love them, they'll learn and they'll do well. They will not make you shame.

PM: Thank you so much Mrs. Faulker.