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Davis

LaVerne Davis

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Interviewee/Interviewer

LaVerne Davis, Debbie Frost, Hugh Davis, Kyleene Davis, Kitty Dumas, and Malik Austin

Dr. LaVerne Davis, Hugh Davis, Kyleene Davis, Kitty Dumas
Debbie Frost, Malik Austin
July 24th, 2013
Beaufort, SC

[Start clip 1]

LD: Rhys was named the principal, at Michael C. Riley in Bluffton, South Carolina. I remembered goin' to school there. My first formal education began there. And he loved—he was a historian, so he loved history, and he thought it would be most important for us to make a trip over to Penn Center, because many, most of the children in Bluffton had not had an opportunity to visit Penn Center. So, my father got this huge farm truck from my grandfather. My grandfather was a large landowner back in my hometown. And my father drove that huge truck over to Bluffton, and packed all of us, all the little girl scouts, in the big truck and drove us over to Penn Center. Everybody was so excited, and we were excited, ecstatic about the houses that were over on Penn. We had bunk beds, and my good friends and I tried to all get into the same bed. Everybody wanted the top bunk (DF laughs). But we nevertheless stayed there for a couple of nights, over at Penn Center, and we took a grand tour and learned about how Penn Center evolved. So it was quite an educational adventure. But that was the very first time I had been on St. Helena Island. Then, of course, as I matured and got just a little bit older (laughs) and into my career, I was teaching at the University of South Carolina, and I resigned and moved to Charleston with my husband. He was just so ready to get married to me, so (both laugh) we got married (both laugh), and had our baby and then he moved us to Charleston, South Carolina, and from there, I applied to Beaufort County. The administrators here at Beaufort wanted me to take the principalship in Bluffton since I knew members of the community and they thought that would go well. Well I rejected that respectfully, and a friend of mine said, “Oh, you want to go to St. Helena. If you come to Beaufort, you want to be at St. Helena. Now there's where the real challenge is.” Well, of course I had a degree in curriculum and instruction, so I thought surely this would be a great opportunity. When I first came, I decided it was important for me to review the data—test data—because I recalled everybody saying that there were two really bad schools in Beaufort County. St. Helena was one of them, and it was another school on the other side of the county that was supposed to be one of the worst. Well, as I reviewed the test data, I found out, in math, that my children were not... knowledgeable or familiar with math facts. And that was very disconcerting, and I thought, “Okay, we have to change that.” So I spoke with my faculty, and we agreed that we had to change that. And I said to them, “We can't count on fingers. We're not gonna have any more of that. No counting on fingers. No counting sticks. And no counting our pegs. We've got to memorize those facts.” And that's what we set out to do. I said, “Math is going to be number one.” Well looking at the reading scores, I was devastated. And I realized that the dialect had an impact on that reading. When I looked through the data, I saw that the long vowel sounds were not caught. And the short vowel sounds were not caught. For example: I'll just say, a test item would be, “Which word has the long A sound?” And it

would have, “Snake. Apple. Rat.” And I saw that children were getting that incorrect. So we decided, “Okay, let’s try phonics then.” We would do phonics, do sounds. What I didn’t realize is that sounds were different in the Gullah dialect. For example: instead of saying “man” with a short A, I noticed they were, “Oh, mahn [Note: with an exaggerated long A]! Mahn! Stop mahn!” And the A was not correctly sounded. And so that helped me to understand, “Well, maybe we need to do some phonics.” Well, we tried phonics for a couple of years, and I saw, “Well, that wasn’t really working. I don’t know if I can change—I can’t change the Gullah dialect (laughs), so let’s quit with that!” So I decided that another attack would be sight words. Let’s just look at ‘em, and learn words by sight. And then we’ll have to try to restructure “mahn” into “man.” And we were successful in the sight words. I had a thousand sight words, and (laughs) started with Pre-K. (Laughs, drinks water) oh, ‘scuse me (coughs). ‘Scuse me. Did you get me some ice and water, baby [Note: directed at someone off camera]?

DF: We’re probably gonna take a little, short break. I wanted to say (LD coughs) that today is July 24th, and we are interviewing Dr. Davis. My name is Debbie Frost. And Malik Austin is behind the camera (LD waves). And I really want to thank you for allowing us the opportunity to interview you and hear your story.

LD: Stay overnight if you can (both laugh).

DF: It’s really nice to know, especially from an academia point of view, what it’s like to educate students, and at St. Helena. I know you weren’t born at St. Helena, but of course you do have a lot of knowledge about the culture. And I’m understanding what the language having a major impact in education and even how, you know, you teach students from that culture. (LD’s husband Hugh Davis enters, gives a glass of water to LD) I’m gonna follow up on this, so you got together—

LD: Okay.

DF: You good?

LD: Yes. I’m good.

HD: Can I get you something to drink? We have soda.

LD: We have water—

DF: I could use a water.

LD: —and lots of beverages down there.

KID (Kitty Dumas): [Note: off camera] Are you all finished?

LD: No.

KID: Oh, okay. We're gonna make a lot of noise, so if you're gonna do it and you'd rather we'll walk down to the—

LD: No, you're not.

KID: Okay, okay. We'll be back. Okay, baby.

LD: Okay, so I did is: I got together with the teachers and came up with one thousand—the most frequently used words in the English language—and I found a thousand of them. So what I decided to do is take 'em and break 'em down. I had a four-year-old program. For four-year-olds, we had to learn sight words all the way through the fifth grade. Fifth graders had to know all one thousand. And I made booklets. I had a booklet for every child in the school. Based on their grade, each booklet had a number of words and had little boxes by each word. So when teachers wrote with the children, they could check off whichever of those words the children could pronounce. That way, while reading, it would make it much easier for children not to have to try to sound them out if they couldn't. If you've let them tap in on the words, and they can see them and memorize them by sight, then they can read more fluently and get more of an understanding. So that overcame the dialect influence, and then of course, the teachers were concerned about the math. And they said, "Well, Dr. Davis, wait a minute, aren't we missing something?" And I said, "No, we're not." "Well, if children memorize the math that is two plus two is four... well, it doesn't have any meaning to them. Shouldn't it be that we have to make it meaningful?" I said, "Well, let's do cognition first. Cognition is the lowest level of learning. Let's just start with cognition." And just as you learn the alphabet, the kids have to, (gestures) you know, what he said, she said—Jack. He doesn't say, "Juh-ack." They don't do that. He can look at his name and say, "Okay, Jack." He can look at a word, a sight word, and say, "Mother." Because those sounds don't conform. They're irregular, a lot of irregular words. So, when we got to that, I said, "The math facts have to be just like the alphabet, and like sight words. Maybe they don't know what two plus two means, but we don't care right now. All we need for them to do is to recognize that this symbol (gestures) with this sign and this symbol and this sign will be this symbol. Once they can

recognize that, then we don't have a problem with them moving through the actual testing phase. And we can go back and do the, you know what, PRJs[?] test of putting one here and another one there (gestures) and then they can internalize what the two plus two means. But until then, we've just got to make sure that they can move forward." Now the tests for the state were timed. And I thought, "We don't have time to sit down and do this (gestures counting on her fingers) and make mistake. And two plus two will never be five anywhere in the world. So let's don't let them make mistakes. If they know it, they don't have to count on fingers and toes. And that's not what we want." So everybody agreed, "Yeah, okay, that's reasonable (laughs). That's reasonable." And then we had to get an understanding of how we can look at the test and help children move forward on those tests with confidence. And so what I did was—I actually did it myself—I looked at the structure: test forms, test structures, how questions were asked on the test. And I modeled that. I got tests practice, booklets. And one of the district people came to me and said, "You can't use that!" And I said, "Yes, I've already bought my practice book." "Well, the state department recommends you don't use any of that." And I said, "Oh... really?" (DF laughs) and he said, "Yes! Yes. I'm going to report you to the superintendent." I said, "Oh, okay. If you must. All right." But I said, "Well, I just want you to remember and know one thing: I have a doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction, and I am the expert, and I know that this is good for my children to have this kind of practice, and that's what I'm going to do. This is about the children. It's not about the state department, or not about the district. I just need for my children to do well. And this is a way that I can see that they will do well." And what I felt was that in some of the math questions, for the fourth and fifth graders—they had a lot of word problems. And I wanted teachers to teach those word problems and to look for key strategies to use with the word problems. In other words, I said, "Do it like you do reading." When children take reading tests, usually, I found they tell them, "Go ahead and read your paragraph and then answer your questions." But no, that's not what we're going to do. "Do not read the paragraph. Do not read the story," I told them. "Don't read the story. I want you to read the questions. Read the questions, and then, after you read the questions, you go back to story and see if you can find answers to your questions." But never read the story first because it's too confusing and too difficult. So I told them, "Let's do math the same way. Read the math problem and at the end of it, see what the question is. And once you go the end and find the question and the optional answer choices, then go back to your math sentence and see then if you can answer and figure out what operation to use." So we tried to make it easier. I had them practice on that format, using the format.

DF: The backwards approach, yeah.

LD: Backwards approach! There you go. That's it. And they caught onto it very easily.

DF: Did you find that when you were on St. Helena's bar as the community, how did the community enforce[?] education for the children? I'm talking for the parents and the children.

LD: They were ecstatic. They were so happy. In fact, I would say at the PTO meetings, “Ladies and gentlemen, parents, we are here to do a job, and I want you to see to it that we do our job. That’s up to you. You have to see to it that we do our job. And I do want you to know, let me tell you this secret right here: We get paid. We get a salary. We get money to do this. We’re not volunteers. We get paid to do this, so hold us accountable. Anything you see that’s wrong, you hold us accountable.” And I told my senate[?], “If you’ve got a concern, I don’t care what it is and I don’t care when it arises, call me. 525-1910 (DF laughs). You call me. You take it off of you and put it on me. I can’t do anything about it if I don’t know about it. So whenever, if ever you have a concern, I’m up until 3:00 or 4:00 in the mornings. And if you’re passing by the school and you see my car, just stop and come on in. ‘Cuz I’m here usually until 2:00 in the mornings.” And I would get people who would come by, but they were ecstatic about their children learning. And when we started with the math facts, and I’d send out little newsletters about “these are the children who passed their facts, made one hundred”—and you have to make one hundred. You can’t make ninety. That means you’ve made a mistake, if you make ninety or ninety-five. You had to make one hundred. I’d say, “Raise your hands if your children know all the facts (raises hand, laughs)! All right, if you didn’t raise your hand, it’s okay. Next time I’ll ask the same question, and then I’ll expect you to raise your hand, everybody’ll raise their hands (laughs).” So they were just really glad to know that their children were learning. And I would reward them. We had accelerated reading, and we’d let the children pick the colors of the shirts once they reached a certain point in the reading level. And oh! Those parents were so glad. They wanted their children to read. They’d bring them to the public library and make ‘em check out books and read. So I found that they were so very supportive. And open house—my god. Come! Meet the teacher and look at the classroom! We’d have around 1,500 to 2,000 people in that building, just extended family, cousins, everybody. And nobody could find a parking space. They were all out on the highway, parked out there. But the parents... I mean, we had standing room only. We were so excited about having all of them. And they were excited about the school and what was going on with their children. I’ll tell you one instance that I thought was just so cute. We started graduation. Fifth grade, seniors graduating. Cap and gowns. And I mean, we had people coming from New York and Philadelphia (both laugh) and Virginia, all across the United States. It was if it were a college graduation. And I’ll tell you when that music say, “Dong!” and those kids knew, “Uh-oh, we’re starting,” in line, walk, filing, one behind the other. Nobody turnin’ and wavin’ and grinnin’. Everybody’s serious (laughs).

MA [Note: off camera, but likely Malik Austin]: Cap and gown.

LD: Cap and gowns! And so when our ceremony would begin, oh! The parents were so ecstatic, I had to caution them: “No applause. Please. Because we do have children here who don’t have parents. Not that the parents didn’t want to come, but some children don’t even have parents. They’re deceased. So we have to applaud for everyone. We

cannot applaud for some, but everyone. So I'll let you know when it is time to applaud." And they would abide. I figured a couple people would (claps), and I'd say, "No, we don't want to stop the ceremony. Please, hold your applause as I've asked you. If you are unable to comply, I will have to stop the ceremony, and the children will be very upset. So please comply with my wishes."

DF: Was this a surprise? I mean, for some of these of these families—

LD: Oh, first time—

DF: First time graduation?

LD: Yes, and we wanted them to see what would be possible when you do well.

HD [Note: off camera]: Yeah, you can only imagine the... you talked about the community, because all of the stakeholders came out. I mean, the churches, the businesses, I can imagine all the stakeholders—

LD: Volunteers.

HD: Everybody embraced the children. And the teachers, the educators became stars. They actually became stars in the community, because they were... I mean, this is something that was completely new, where you had teachers actually going into the community, going to all the churches every Sunday, and the parents were coming into school. It was an open door policy for school. So you didn't have this—I don't think parents had the sense that they were intruding or the sense that they were not supposed to come. They knew that if they came into the school, they were welcome, and they could invite themselves into the classroom, and the teachers didn't feel threatened. And so it just became a very wholesome relationship between the principal and faculty and community at all.

DF: I mean, we all know, it takes a village. It takes all of us working together.

LD: That was right. It's a theme—

DF: And we build our community... Our community is built on educating our children. Our children are built on education from the community. So it has to be a partnership.

LD: Oh, it was just an excellent partnership. Wonderful! I remember when I first got there, one of the parents came in. She said, "Do you like biscuits?" (DF laughs) I said, "Yes, ma'am. I love biscuits." "I'm gonna bake you some hot biscuits and I'm gonna bring 'em over." I said, "Oh, okay, well, that'd be fine, but you don't have to do that today." She said, "No, I'm doing it today." I said, "All right." And she came over with those hot—and I mean *hot* biscuits; they were like your restaurant biscuits. Oh! And I thought that was just great. And then somebody said, "Do you like shrimp and gravy?" And I said, "What?" And I thought, *Oh, don't make a face. Don't make a face.* I said, "Shrimp and *gravy*?" "Oh yeah yeah yeah, do you like that?" And I said, "No, I don't think I would like that." (DF laughs) "I want to bring you some!" I said, "I don't think I would like that. Don't bother to bring me any." And I thought about it. I eat fried shrimp, I love fried shrimp, and couldn't imagine gravy being over any shrimp. So she went home and cooked shrimp and gravy and grits and brought them back to the school. And she said, "Ah yeah! It's hot!" And I said, "You know something, I'm not hungry, baby." And she said, "You go ahead and see if mine tastes all right." And I thought to myself, *What am I going to do? Jesus. I don't want to offend anybody.* So I said, "Okay, baby. Wait a minute. Let me just—I said, 'It is hot.'" I stirred it up. I put one of the shrimp in my mouth with the grits... got another spoonful (DF laughs), and another spoonful. I ate it all (both laugh). I never in my life tasted anything so... delicious (DF laughs)! Ooh! That was good!

DF: That's their appreciation for what you do for the children.

LD: Ooh-wee!

DF: That's one way they wanted to show you their appreciation.

LD: I am so glad I ate it. 'Cuz I said, "I do not want to hurt her feelings," but lord knows the thought of soggy shrimp was just repulsive. But I tell you that was just the best thing I've ever eaten, I think. I came home and told my husband about it. He said, "What? I never heard of that before." I said, "Me either!" I said, "But you have to taste it! I've been telling her to bring some to your office." "No, no, don't have anybody bringing all kind of stuff to me, 'cuz you know I don't eat all kind of stuff." (Both laugh) so eventually, she did bring some more, and I called him. He came over, and what was your reaction?

HD: I don't know. I'm sure it was the same.

LD: It was the same (DF laughs). Yeah, he said, “This is good! This is good, ‘Verne!’” But they would often bring food and shrimp, raw shrimp. Yeah, “Do you like shrimp?” “Yeah, I sure do.” “All right, I’mma bring you some.” I said, “Do it (both laugh). Do it (LD laughs).” And they’d bring me that, and they’d bring me fish. And then at school we would have food. You brought us some food over when you did that little staff development thing [Note: spoken to HD]. So we were eating faculty (laughs).

DF: It sounds like the faculty embraced, the parents embraced, and the students were proud. And I’m sure that really brought the community together.

LD: Believe it or not, faculty members became friends with the parents. You know, they were friends and they were on a first name basis. And I thought, “Uh-uh! Hey! Hold it (laughs)! Keep this thing professional (laughs)! You can’t be calling people by their first names!”

DF: But it really does sound like it was a working relationship.

LD: It was an excellent working relationship.

DF: And something the community was really embracing.

LD: Oh yes. They were just so tickled about some of the things. We started some activities. A teacher came to me, she said, “Oh, Dr. Davis, could we start a singing group?” I looked at her and I said, “What educational value is that (laughs)?” “Oh, Dr. Davis, it’ll give children the chance to perform and stand out and be proud of a skill.” I said, “Now, listen—” That was Rosie Ladd [Note: to KID off camera].

KID: Oh yeah.

LD: I said, “Now listen, baby, I got to make sure that we’re doing what is right here, and that ain’t on the tests. Singing ain’t on no tests, and I gotta make sure we do better.” And she said, “Well, I just want to get some little boys together. Can I get 100 boys and put them together to be a performing group?” And I said, “Well, go ahead and try it. Let’s see if that’ll work.” She said, “Okay, done!” That girl went to the music teacher and they put together—it’s called The 100 Voices. She put together 100 little boys, and after they got started, other little boys wanted to join, so she had about 130-something little boys in the

singing group called 100 Voices. And they taught those kids songs, and oh, those kids were brilliant! They were awesome! And people came from everywhere and invited us to Africa to perform. But we go across the state, and we had people coming in, who wanted to hear the children. And we decided we would accept the invitation to Africa. So we had to raise some money, took the children around. They performed. We had—who's that? South Carolina Leadership? South Carolina came over to the island, and had the children to perform. And they, that group started raising money. Then we had the judges to come for their conference. And they invited us to bring the children, so we had them to perform. And they took their hat off and started passing around (laughs). And we just had people all over the state contributing for us to go to Africa.

HD: But it wasn't without challenge.

LD: Oh yes.

HD: And that challenge came from the district. And the district did not want this school... I'll be honest with you, the administration and the district had a problem I think with this particular school, and I think it is possibly the fact that it was on St. Helena, the school, predominately black, and they were beginning to be successful. And I know a lot of people had a problem with that. So the trip to Africa was something that they did not want to happen, and they did not want to provide any funds at all—

LD: Well, at first, they did give me permission to use my sight-based money, which was about \$50,000. Well, I was called in, and they said, "We can't let you use that money for a trip like that. It wouldn't look good." I said, "Wait a minute. I've already got this thing in the works and planned." Well, I couldn't put \$50,000 on a credit card. I don't think my credit (laughs) was that good, and how the heck would I pay it off? So I called the lady and I said, "Oh, we won't be able to come. I can't get the money; they took it back." "WHAT?! You better raise that money!" I said, "Ah, no, Miss Krauser, I've tried. And we do have some money but we don't have enough." "What?!" "I'm telling you, we don't have enough money, and I don't know what I'm—" "You act like this is your trip. This is not your trip! This is God's trip! You better get those children ready and get 'em on the plane!" She had me on the verge of tears (laughs). I said, "Oh Jesus, help me, Lord." I fell on my knees (both laugh). But you know, we had so many people who donated and we finally got the money to get those kids ready. It was something, because we were (laughs)... I think I was doing some illegal stuff! I was making up passports (both laugh). I was just printing out, just printing, printing. My husband said, "All right. I'm an attorney, but I don't know if I can... I can't save you."

DF: But the trip did go?

LD: Honey, I didn't the money... I didn't have a bus to get to New York. My husband said, "Call the bus company who takes you on your trips, and see if he'll take you and you can pay him later." "I can't pay him (laughs)... With what?" "Yeah, you'll be able to. Just tell him you'll pay him later." So I did call him.

KID [Note: off camera]: Benny Allen?

LD: Huh? Yeah, Benny. I called him. Benny's wife answered. I said, "We need to go to New York to catch the plane to go to Africa." She said, "Oh, okay." "But we don't have any money." "Oh, I don't think that'll be any problem. I'll tell Benny. You know, Benny'll get you there." So she had Benny call me back, and he said, "Dr. Davis, you want to go to New York?" I said, "Yes. I want to take some kids, 'cuz we gotta to the Africa" "Oh yes, ma'am. I'll be right there to pick you up. What time? Be right there."

DF: Doors start opening up, huh?

LD: Yeah, right there. And then the guy who was the head of the Leadership of South Carolina called me. And I want to Columbia. He gave me five or six checks from their members. I came back, and I said, "Count! Let's count!" We counted it up, and then my husband said, "Well, now there's some kids you didn't make passports for. So we gotta see if we can get 'em." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well wait a minute, let me call my brother." So he called his brother, who is also an attorney. And he went over to the embassy, and got the passports printed up for the kids we couldn't get passports made for. So there we were. The bus (makes a honking noise) up by the sidewalk. Everybody with their little bags and stuff. I said, "Wait a minute! Did you have your shot?" "I had my shot." I said, "I didn't see! Let me see! No you didn't (laughs)!" And one said, "Dr. Daaaaavis, I don't have no money." I said, "What! Where is your mama? Where's Gwen?"

DF: Oh, you knew the parent?

LD: "She told me just to ask you for some money." I said, "What's Gwen's number? Give me... Gwen! You got this boy here with no money. What is—Are you crazy?! I'm not taking this child to no Africa and he don't got any money." "Can you just loan him about five or six dollars?" "Five or six dollars?!" I said, "You are—I'm calling Sheriff Tanner. I'm gonna have you arrested for neglect (DF laughs)." So I put that child on the bus. I mean, we were packed up. I couldn't get him to go. I said, "Come on, come on." "No, no, no, (drinks water) nuh-uh."

DF: I'm sure these parents were very excited, because some of them had probably never been off of the island.

LD: On yes, trust me. I'm telling you. We got to New York, at the airport—LaGuardia I think it was—they had a room for us, “St. Helena.” And we went in it and drank water and ate cookies and just had a blast. And we had so much luggage, some of them. And I told them not to pack—“We can't wash clothes there. You're gonna have to wear things over and over, so don't take a whole bunch of stuff.” So we're standing in this line, and... I mean, people just throwing luggage an all against the poor little kids. I had to move them out and say, “Come on, stand over here.” So the lady who heading it for us, Miss Krauser (laughs), said, “All right! We don't have time to stand in this line. We're not going to show you all of these passports. We've got to go!” I said, “Thank you, Jesus (DF laughs).” So she said, “Come on in! Give me the passports, give me, give me.” She took them all and, “(mimes dropping a stack of passports) there you go (DF laughs)! Go on, kids, go on through!” And the kids came rushing through. A man said, “I can't do it like that! That's against the—I can't. I gotta see everybody—” She said, “I'm not waiting out here! And you're not gonna make these little children wait. They're tired! They drove all the way from South Carolina! And you want them to stand here and wait?! And you know that flight is 21 hours, and we don't want those kids to be tired when they get over there. Take those passports and shut your mouth (DF laughs)!” So those kids went on through and boarded. We were straight[?] and got on the plane. The kids, they were just—oh! They were beside themselves, trying to get the windows and look out the windows and trying to find out, and “Okay, I want peanuts too! Dr. Davis!” I said, “Shhh.” “I don't have any peanuts!” “Shh, wait a minute, wait a minute (DF laughs).” So we had to get them all settled in, they got all settled in, and everybody went to sleep. We landed in, uh, Accra. We heard (claps), “Ahhh! Whooo! Yeah!” And, uh, well, we... The natives were just cheering and shouting, jumping up and down, stomping. So my assistant said, “What's goin' on, Dr. Davis?” And I said, “I don't have a clue. Maybe it's somebody's birthday or somethin'.” She said, “I'm gonna find out.” She walks back, she said, “Why are you all cheering? What're you so happy about?” They said, “We arrived safety. We have never had a crash. And we arrived safety.” So she said (claps), “Yay! Whoo! Yay (laughs)!” She said, “Dr. Davis, they're applaudin' because we had a safe arrival, and they want to the pilots to know that they're appreciative—”

DF: These were the children?

LD: No, the Africans, who were going back to Ghana.

DF: Oh, okay, so how were you received on the island, I mean, in Africa?

LD: Oh! With such... I mean, they were most cordial. And they... "Ooh, the little girl, the little boy. Hey, come on! Acuava! Acuava [Note: meaning "welcome" in a Ghanaian dialect]!" And I thought, *Oh my gosh*. The children, they kinda hung back 'cuz they don't know who these people are. They were very gracious and welcoming. And our tour guide was an exceptional tour guide. So he made sure that the children were all comfortable and if there were any questions. And there were some questions. And he answered. "You from here?" "Yes, I'm from here (laughs)." "You go to the United States?" "No, I don't. I want to, I want to go, but I want to be able to... I let you invite me and have somewhere for me to live." "You come to my house." "No, no, I want you to come to my house!" I thought, *Okay, that's great*. But everywhere, they were receptive. Everywhere we went, they were so receptive. We finally got to our hotel, and of course, we were warned about the water. Don't drink the water. Only bottled water that we have. And the sodas. You can drink... pop, soda pops, but you cannot put your mouth on the rim of the bottle. You have to use straws. Do *not* put your mouth on the bottle top rim. They got all the warnings. When you brushing your teeth, do *not* put your brush under the faucet. You have to use bottled water. So, I think they took that in really well. They did a good job with that. And we went to the restaurants, but particular ones (drinks water).

DF: Now, as you were preparing to go on this trip, I'm sure the families and the communities were really *happy* to support this. And I'm sure there really was a sense of pride, to able to accomplish this really huge task. I mean, that's huge, to take that many kids.

LD: Oh, capital H, capital U, capital G, capital E. Yeah, it was huge.

DF: Any other experiences of students, the children that were on St. Helena's Island that were memorable to you.?

LD: Yes! Uh, we took... So beside the graduation that we had, we would take the seniors on a class trip.

DF: Okay, the 12th graders.

LD: Fifth graders.

DF: Oh, fifth graders. On the—I'm sorry.

LD: They were the seniors.

DF: That's right, that's right.

LD: And we had juniors. Also, the juniors had a class trip. And, um, where did we take our seniors? We took our seniors to...

HD: To New York.

LD: Yeah, we took them New York.

HD: Tennessee. Chicago.

LD: Wait, wait, you're getting ahead of me. First, we went to Canada. We took five buses to Canada (laughs).

DF: That's a great education, to be able to *travel*.

LD: Oh, oh, gee whiz. And they were just too excited to see the mountains (laughs). And we had the Atrium—

DF: Did all the schools go on this? Or just the school you—

LD: Oh, no, no, no. Listen, that was *hard* to do! No one else wanted to work that hard.

DF: Okay.

LD: And the kids got the opportunity to... I never stayed anywhere but Embassy Suites. And that's because of the breakfast and kids love swimming pool, and they just have the wonderful amenities. So we went to the Atrium in Canada, in Toronto. All glass (gestures). And oh, the kids just... And they had a welcome room for... They were just pressing their noses up against it. "Ooh! I can see that!" "Get away from there before it gives away! And you, down on the street..." But they were just so excited, being in that environment. French! Some people spoke French, and... Ah, I can't remember all the places we went to.

HD: The Bahamas.

LD: Yeah, then we took them on a cruise; we went to the Bahamas. The next fifth grade class trip. The big red boat. And then we went to... Chicago! Shy Town. Then we went to...

HD: Memphis.

LD: Memphis, Tennessee, yeah. Then we went to... where're the Amish? Pennsylvania! Then we went there, took the kids there. And they went to the little school, where this guy shot those kids. Some crazy fellow went into the little school and shot some girls, wasn't it, some little girls. Well, they went to that school, and when the killing happened, many of them remembered it, recounted going there.

DF: So I'm sure they looked forward to getting to fifth grade, to have this senior trip. And the fact the parents didn't have to pay, so then you had to raise this money, which really—

LD: We had them to pay.

DF: Oh, pay some?

LD: Yeah, they had to help pay, but we did...

DF: Do some fundraising?

LD: Yeah, we did a lot of fundraisin'.

DF: And that community involvement.

LD: Uh-huh. But the parents wanted them to go, and y'know, you'd be surprised, when parents want something for the children, they will work towards gettin' that done.

DF: Right, right.

LD: And so we had these trips... They made sure they got—and some of them would have fish fries and chicken baskets at their houses to get the kids' money together, so they did everything they could. Churches also pitched in and provided, uh, funds (drinks water).

DF: It sounds like really was a community effort, and like you said, there's a sense of pride. And maybe if parents couldn't travel, they still made a way to afford their children to have that opportunity.

LD: Mm-hmm, and I did take parents, as chaperons (DF laughs), and I had to remind some parents, "This is not your trip! So you have to read a book too, I'm sorry (both laugh). If you don't have a book, borrow a book from somebody." Because everybody had to—everybody! We had an elaborate plan, I mean, even down to the bus seating and the buses and, uh, they had to have a book to read, so nobody can get on the bus without a book. And we'd go ahead and check some out of the library in the event... So they had to read. And no chitchatting and all this carrying on. You wanna listen to some music? It has to be ear, in an ear plug. No loud music and no loud talkin'. And if you on my bus, you better wear double sneakers, 'cuz you wanna move? You got to move very quietly, and none of that hollerin' and screamin' and all that craziness kids sometimes do. So I stand up and look back, so I say, "Uh-oh... (mimes scanning a crowd) uh-oh." (Laughs) and they were, they were good.

DF: It sounds like you really loved kids, and you and the faculty could provide not only an education in the classroom, but extended it outside the classroom.

LD: Oh, my father always said, "You cannot learn within four walls. You have to go beyond." Now, he didn't use the word "global," but that was what his perspective was. I was so proud of him. He was a man ahead of his time. And I just learned a lot from him about how to run a school. And he would always tell me—which was great advice—"Everybody who works in the school is important, and you make sure you let that be known." So I would do faculty retreats, faculty and staff retreats. And I would make sure my maintenance workers, my cooks, my bus drivers, aids, and their families got an opportunity to go on the staff development trips. I took them... One staff development, we were going, we went to Boca Raton. Of course, the superintendent wanted to kill me. "No! No! No! You *cannot* take anybody to Boca Raton! Don't you know that looks like a vacation?" I said, "Well... maybe it does, but that's not what it is." I said, "If they want to take vacations, they know how to do that on their own. But we're goin' there for staff

development. I already have a university faculty already placed there, and they're waiting for us, and they got sessions set up."

DF: But it's because you valued your teachers as well.

LD: Oh, I needed for everybody to come along, oh yes. To Boca Raton we went (both laugh). And they had a marvelous time! And from that, I had teachers who enrolled in that tour program, y'know, in programs. But what I did, I always told them, "Let me tell you something: you sittin' right here, teaching. And you're not furthering your education. You can always get an extra degree. And I just want you to know that the district has built into the budget for every teacher to have a master's degree. If you don't have a master's degree, the rest of your money is goin' to Hilton Head [Note: another school on a nearby island also called Hilton Head]. So."

DF: (Laughs) the rest of your money...

LD: That's right, that's right. "So you supposed be paid for a master's degree, but if you don't have one, you can't get it. So somebody else is gettin' your money. So you can sit around here if you want to, and smile and grin. But the people over there, those rich folks, they're havin' a ball." So here (laughs) comes somebody. "Uh, Dr. Davis, here's my form. Will you sign my form? I'mma go back and get my master's." "Oh really?" "Yeah, I need your recommendation." "Okay, baby. Lookit, leave it over on my desk. I'll sign it." I said, *bap bap bap* on the mic, *bap bap bap*, "May I have your attention please? Please, let me have your attention." Everybody get quite. "I want you to know I am so excited. Miss Wilburn has just brought to me her recommendation form so she can go back and get her master's degree! Isn't that exciting? Yay (laughs)!" I said, "When you see her, please extend congratulations to her. Let her know how proud you are. Please. I am so—wow! I am so excited. Oh! Thank you, Miss Wilburn. I'm proud of you!"

DF: That's right. Learning goes both ways.

KID [Note: off camera]: It started a chain reaction.

LD: Yep. Wait a minute (knocks on table). "Yeah, come on in!" "Uh, Dr. Davis. I just downloaded my form. I wanna go... I'm gonna get my master's degree. Can you go ahead and, uh, sign this?" "Yeah, put it on my desk!" *Bap bap bap*. "May I have your attention please (both laugh)? May I have your attention please? I am excited all over again (DF laughs). Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, Miss Gibbs has just brought her form. She will be getting her master's degree. She's gonna go back to school and

complete her degree. Oh! I'm so excited! Ah! Everybody, tell her congratulations. Thank you, Miss Gibbs, I'm so proud of you. Oh my goodness, that's two people today! Yay!"

KID: And now she has a doctorate.

LD: Yep, yeah, (laughs) everybody comin' back and everybody bringin' in (laughs). And those girls they worked and they got those master's degrees. I was so glad, 'cuz one only person had a master's in my school, other than my—well, I had beyond, but. I don't know, they said, "Well, we didn't ever see no need for that." I said, "Stop that. There is always a need." And then when they got their master's, they saw their paychecks increase. And oh, they were excited. "You know, you were so right. I got a \$4,000 increase." I said, "Okay, you owe me. You give me part of it (DF laughs)." And then of course, other people started to get their master's. I said, "Okay, let's don't stop there. You can't stop there. You've got to get your doctorates." They said, "Ohhh no, nobody that crazy (DF laughs)." So then, one girl applied. And they accepted her. And then I got back on my mic: *tap tap tap*. "May I have your attention please (both laugh)?" I said, "Oh, Miss Ladd just came in here. She's gonna get a doctorate degree. You'll be calling her Dr. Ladd. Oh, I'm excited. Aren't you excited too?" I could hear some people down the hall, "Yes, ma'am!"

DF: (Laughs) "If you see her in the hall, say congratulations."

LD: Yeah, so then everybody started applying, and they all got together and went as a group. And they took my group—there were, uh, twelve people, initially, who got accepted and worked through that. Mm-hmm.

DF: Mm-hmm.

LD: So we just decided that you just have to move forward. And it's increase in pay. I know you're not working just for that. But that's part of the deal. Mm-hmm. So they got their degrees. I put it in the newspaper. Of course. Their picture, in the paper. And I was in one of them (laughs). I was in the middle, I said, "Okay, let's hug!"

DF: (Laughs) that is so wonderful.

LD: Yeah, they were just proud of themselves. Then I said, "Okay, we've got to go one better." Got everybody in the faculty and staff meetin'. "I need for... all of our assistants to... go ahead and work towards getting into school so you can get your degrees." Well.

They thought, *This woman is going crazy, now!* “You crazy?” I said, “Yeah, all right, all right now. Okay.” So sure enough, I did have assistants who went back. And my maintenance—my head of maintenance went back, and I think he was the first one that got his college degree. He got a BS. And oh, he thought, *I don’t need anybody to tell me anything. I’m not taking any orders from downtown.* I said, “Okay, now. I don’t have any money. You better take orders (both laugh).” And they actually got the BSes... my secretaries went back and got their BS degrees. And of them got her master’s. She decided, she said (whispers), “I don’t want to just stop at the BS.” I said, “Okay, well, you don’t got to whisper, okay.” (Whispers) “I want to get a master’s degree too.” I said, “Well, do it (laughs). Just do it!” So she enrolled, and she has her master’s degree also. So everybody started goin’ to school (laugh). I told somebody, “See, here, these kids are gonna catch you. And they’re gonna have degrees before you get ‘em. You better move on.”

DF: And that’s just also too the education is the major force on the island. Because even with other families, they’re very proud to say, “If you don’t mind minding my children, because my nephew is in school.” And that’s great, because we really need to education our children.

LD: That’s the only way we’re gonna be able to function. Yep. And then we got the Algebra Project.

DF: Yeah, ok. Tell me about the Algebra Project.

LD: We actually went to Mississippi, and got the training. And my assistant principal said, “I’ll head up it back at the school.” I said, “Okay.” So she actually did... She took the curriculum—that Dave said we stole. “They stole my curriculum!” Well, I said, “I didn’t do it. Cynthia stole it (laughs).” She brought it back to the school and went through an initial introduction with the teachers. And she said, “I know we can do this. You can do it.” So she named it Algebra Project—Algebra *Academy*, from the Algebra Project. So, when she put it all together and put all the lessons together for the children, teachers. And the third through fifth grades were taking algebra. And then, uh, the Algebra Project direct—administrator came to the school. Because he couldn’t believe it. He said, “This is not designed for third grade and fourth grade! This is designed for fifth grade!” I said, “Well, our fifth graders are usin’ it.” And (laughs) he said, “Well, I’ve got to less everybody else see!” So he brought all the people from North Carolina, and they asked questions and went around the building. And who else did he bring? He got them from Georgia, and they were all excited and amazed, and so was the director, Dave. Then he said, “I’ve got to bring Danny in on this!” And I said, “Really?” “Yeah, Danny’s a board member of us. And I told Danny that you were starting in third grade, and he said, ‘Oh, no way, man, no, no way.’” So he said, “Danny Glover is gonna be coming next month.” I said, “Oh! Okay. Tell him to come on.” So he did, he structured it, and Danny did come.

And Danny went around the entire school, hugged every kid (laughs) he could. And I, um, well, I had the biggest, single elementary school in the district. I had more children on free or reduced lunch than anybody else. And so we just kinda stood out. And then we were fighting with the other school on the other side of town not to be last. What happened is: my first year, the put the scores in the paper. And I was traumatized, (laughs) I was.

[End clip 1]

[Start clip 2]

LD: “No, no, no, that’s not it (DF laughs).” I said, “Well, that’s what it seems like to me. I can’t explain it here, because there are no blacks over at Hilton Head. Not administrators, and very few teachers. So you don’t want us to be a part of anything.” “No, that’s not it.” I said, “I know that’s what that is. And I’m not apologizing for being black. And I’m apologizing for my kids and my school. And you always treat us like the stepchild. So I’m kinda almost acclimated to that.” “Ah, no, well, we’re gonna open it up.” And so, they sent a memo out: “If you’re interested in IB, contact Kathy (laughs, drinks water).” I passed my email back to Kathy. “You wanna go?” I said, “Absolutely! And I want to take my assistant principal and one of my league teachers.” “Oh, okay.” And I said, “We’re getting packed as we speak (laughs).” She said, “Oh, okay. All right, Dr. Davis. I’ll put your name in, and I’ll let Dr. Flynn know you want to go.” I said, “Yes, I do. Thank you so much.” Well, we were approved. We were so excited! (Laughs) I couldn’t calm those girls down. Well, the assistant principal took her husband, which was good. And there we went, flying over to the Netherlands. Got off the plane, tryna locate our hotel. Pick up the phone, couldn’t even use it (laughs). It was, um, whatever the language was. Could not use it, couldn’t understand a thing it was saying. “Now how are we gonna get to the hotel?” I said (laughs), “Well, I don’t know. We better ask somebody.” So an assistant went over there and asked somebody. And they said which train we needed to get on. Well, my assistant principal had something this big (gestures), a big ole duffle bag—huuuuuuge something. I said, “Girl, you need a car for that. You can’t—” And her husband just busy draggin’ it, we got on the train Finally get into town. We went into Maastricht, and got off the train. Now we don’t know where the hotel is. So somebody said, “Get over there on that bus, and that’ll take you to where—” Uh, so there we were. He had that ole big bag, knocking people down, and I said, “Oh my god, I can’t be with y’all, ‘cuz I’m gonna get killed!” And we got on the bus; the bus went, and people gettin’ off. And we never did get off. We couldn’t get off. So the assistant said, “I’m gonna ask this man right here. Where is our hotel, Svairra [Note: unsure spelling]?” He said, “Oh, ok, you gotta go down. You got three more stops.” So they slung that big ole thing back on and I grabbed my junk, and on, back on the bus. So we went down there. We got to the hotel (laughs). “We have no vacancy.”

DF: Oh, you had trouble getting in?

LD: Now, wait a minute (laughs)! Lizzie, she's just cursin', and just scared them. "I know you're lying! 'Cuz we already paid!" "(Shakes head) no vacancy," he said. "I'll help you get another place." So he helped us get another place and we called a taxi. And oh, that taxi, he had to put that big ole duffle bag on the top, and Mike had to hold it (laughs). And there we go, driving through town. We finally got to a hotel, that he suggested, and checked in. I went up to my room, and I didn't see an air conditioner. So I called and I said, "Hello?" "Yeah?" I said, "I wanted a suite!" They said, "You are in a suite (both laugh)." I could reach from here over there (gestures) and touch both walls. (Laughs) I was so worried. They said, "You are in a suite. That is the suite." So my assistance principal, she's over in the next room. She said, "Why, I couldn't even go to the bathroom! I had to crawl all over the luggage just to go to the bathroom, to get into the bathroom. These rooms are so small." And we, uh, we had what? Cheese, every day. Cheese and crackers. I said. "Oh my goodness, I don't know what's gonna happen to me with all this *cheese* (HD laughs)." And every meal was cheese and crackers and goat milk! Well, we just spent the night and then went on to our training destination. We finally did get to the right place. We got there, and there were the people from Hilton Head sitting in there, and a couple other schools. But we got the training. And when we did finally get back home, and then we wanted our certification. And they said, "No! It costs too much! We can't pay no money for any certification!" And I said to myself, *Why they investing in this, and not getting this school certified?* That just didn't make sense. "Well, how much is it for high school?" "A hundred and sixty—"

HD [Note: off camera]: About a hundred and fifty-two—

LD: Yeah, about a hundred and fifty or sixty thousands dollars. So they said they couldn't do that to certify the elementary schools, so I said, "Well, to heck with it! (Drinks water) it's okay, we'll do something else." Then when we got the Algebra Project, everybody wanted that, but good thing the guy said, "No, just my good friend, Dr. Davis."

DF: Mm-hmm! "Just my good friend."

LD: Yes. And that's what it's designed for. It's designed for at-risk children. Low-income, at-risk children. Therefore we were mighty happy, mighty proud to represent. And that's how that came about. And then we, uh—ah, this is our business card

DF: Well, it looks like you have some wonderful stories to share with us about your education experience on St. Helena's Island.

LD: I'm not done!

DF: You got more?

LD: I told you about the 100 Voices already.

DF: Yeah, the 100 Voices.

LD: Then a little girl came up to me and said, "Dr. Davis?" I said, "What, baby? Whatchu need, sugarfoot?" "Can a girl be with the 100 Voices? I want to be in—" I said, "No, no, no, the girls can't be in it, my sugar, no." "That's not fair!" I said, "No, you're right. That is *not* fair. So we're gonna have to do something about it." So we came up with a group for the girls, called the Choraleers. So they had their little songs and tunes, and sometimes we would combine the two groups and let them sing together, and other times we just let them go separately. But what was so cute with the boys, is they got them on drums, and then the guy taught them how to play the guitar. So they became sorta musical all round, not just singing. We got so excited about the 100 Voices and how good they were doing. And one guy, who was also a music teacher, I hired him too. I had two music teachers (laughs). He said, "Dr. Davis, I want to do a musical group." I thought to myself, *Oh no* (laughs). I said, "Okay, what do you want to do?" He said, "I want to do bells."

DF: Okay.

LD: "Okay, well, tell me how that's going to work." He said, "I want the kindergarten children, since they don't have their voices developed yet. Their voices are actually not as developed as the other boys on the 100 Voices, so rather than using their voices, I want to teach them to do the bells." I said, "Okay." He said, "I have bells already—" "Cuz I thought, *How much is this gonna cost me?*" "I have bells already." I said, "You have bells?" "Yeah, I brought them from the other school I used to be at (laughs)." I said, "Ooh! Lord, don't say that to anybody else!" And he had those little kids...they had on their black pants and white shirts, and white gloves. And their bells. And he would play the music, and then he'd flashed a card, and oh, they just busiest (mimes ringing a ball), ringin' their little bell (laughs). And it was just the most gracious thing I've ever seen. Beautiful.

MA [Note: off camera]: Reminds me of in church.

LD: Isn't it wonderful?

DF: Yeah, in church, we have those bells too.

LD: Isn't it great?

DF: It's beautiful.

LD: And the little kids were just so awesome.

DF: A little something for everybody.

LD: Yes, absolutely. And then I thought about what else. And someone came to me and said, "I wanna... Can I do a project too?" I said, "Okay, what do you want to do, Cheryl?" "I want to do, um, step team!"

DF: Okay (laughs).

LD: I said, "What kind of educational... is that some educational value in it?" "Aw, come on, now, Dr. Davis. Everybody got a group and everybody performin' and you didn't stop them!" I said, "Okay, let's try, let's pilot this." And she got those little, all the little... just wrigglin' them little butts and stompin' (claps). Ah! Brought the house down. So we had all the schools met together in the gym for an event, and I said, "I want my little step team to come out and to do a step." And they said, "No, no. We can't do that." I said, "Why not?" "I got to clear that." I said, "Okay." And they cleared it. My kids got out there, and every school in the district had a step team after that (laughs) Then, uh, yes?

HD [Note: off camera]: (Clears throat) say something about the school uniform and also the time the superintendent wanted to go around to each school and have lunch or something.

LD: Oh yes, oh yes. Uh-huh. We, uh... Did I finish with that one? No. Everybody in the district had a step team, after that. Then, who's that who came to me and said, "I

have something I want to do." I said, "What do you want to do, baby?" "I want to do cheerleaders!" I said, "What educational value is that (laughs)?" "When we do PTOs and the programs, I'll have the cheerleaders pump everybody up, and when it's time to take the test, we'll have our little cheer squad and get 'em ready for the test." Then we had the cheerleaders and oh my goodness. And it had a little, little girl—the assistance principal's little girl—she was the little mascot. And ah, jumpin' and hollarin' and twisting. Those things were wonderful. Then all the other schools got cheerleaders, of course, yes. Now, um, okay, you say you want me to talk about the uniforms? Okay. I thought it would be a good idea for us to have uniforms, and I thought that would bring together a little bit of harmony, and would help too with... Of course, I didn't have behavior problems. Kids were, uh...

DF: They were engaged.

LD: They were, yeah, and they were respectful. I had to back 'em down sometimes (laughs). "All right, you want me to call? All right, you want to go home and work with your mama today?" "No, ma'am." "All right, 'cuz I'll put in the car until you right on over there. And if you think you can work with her..." And they said, "Don't bring her to me! No! No!" I said, "Well, he can't run this school, baby. Either I'm running it, or he is, and he not gettin' paid to run it. I get signed a contract, so. Nope, we can't do it that way." So I thought, *Let's try some uniforms*. I liked the way uniforms looked. And I contacted the uniform people—French Toast, is what it was. So they came and brought the uniforms and we looked at them. Ah! And they were just superb. And so our kids began wearing uniforms. And I told 'em, "You don't have to wear them everyday. You could one on Monday... and Friday." So those couldn't afford the uniforms, we had a kitty[?] and we gave them uniforms. Everybody else got uniforms (laughs), all the other schools.

DF: Ohhhh, mm-hmm.

LD: Yep, everybody else. And what, the board? They had to go through the board to get—I didn't go through the board to get mine. We just did our own thing (both laugh). But the kids, they enjoyed it. And the parents thought it was nice too. They said they enjoyed having the children, uh... not having to buy a bunch of clothing that would cause controversy or somebody, y'know: "I want this \$500 pants and \$200 blouses or skirts (laughs)." So. And what was the other one you said, darling?

HD [Note: off camera]: Oh, I was just thinkin' of the time when the superintendent wanted to go around to different schools and—

LD: Oh, yes. The superintendent sent out a memo that he wanted to go to every school and wanted to have lunch with a group of children. So, um, he wanted to eat with the star students, just the students who were on the honor roll (drinks water), A students. And so he wanted to come to my school. I thought, *Okay. That's good.* And so he, uh, a girl called me: "The superintendent will be over there on Tuesday. Do you want to order what you want for your children to eat?" I said, "Yes, I'd like to order." I said, "What do they generally order, other schools?" She said, "Um, they like McDonalds, and Burger King. Stuff like that." I said, "No." I said, "No, that's not... I don't want that." I said, "I want my food catered (DF laughs). I want Mr. Holmes to cater the food, please." They said, "Cater?! We never had anybody cater anything! He not gonna pay for that!" I said, "Well, he won't be eatin' then. He won't be eatin' lunch (laughs)." They said, "Okay, I'll check on it and see." I said, "Okay, well, check on it." So they checked on it and said, "Yeah, he said okay (DF laughs)." I said, "All right, dear. I'll be lookin' for him." Food came in. I decided, *Okay, lemme see how I'm gonna do this.* I know my children. My children get so angry with me if I just invite some children and don't invite others. And I don't want them to be upset that I've got a bunch of food, feeding kids, and then some going back and saying, "Oh! I can't stand that!" I can't have that. So I said, *I'll fix this joker. I'll fix him.* So I got my children. I said, "Miss Babben, send me about four of your children, please." I contacted my special ed teachers, told 'em to send me some children. And there they were! They were the cutest little things (laughs). They were so cute. My little twins came up, little girls, the twins. They came in, and I said, "Okay, boys and girls, do you know who this is?" "He the principal!" I said, "No, he's not a principal. He's a superintendent. He is the superintendent for Beaufort county. He's over *all* the schools." Then I had one little autistic guy, he said, "All the schools?" I said, "Yes, all the schools." "Oh! Is that haaard work?" "[Note: imitating the superintendent] Yes, it is. It's hard work. Yes, it is." And the kids, uh, they were ready to eat, so I said, "Okay, come on. Let's get up so we can all get served, babies." So we got up and got served. And he said, "Oh, this is different (DF laughs). This, this is different." I said, "Oh, you will enjoy (drinks water)... You will enjoy these babies. These are some smart, smart kids." So one of the little twins said, she went in her little book sack (gestures) and she said, "You buy a ticket from me?" He said, "Uh, yeah, I'll buy a ticket." She said, "I want a lotta money for my ticket." He said, "Ohh, okay." He reached in his wallet, he gave her ten dollars. She was runnin' for Miss St. Helena. Yeah, she was runnin' for Miss St. Helena. So she was busy trying to sell her ticket. So her little sister say, "I want one too! Here, take a ticket from me. And give me some money too. I want money, and I want a lotta money too!" So he said, "Okay, I'll give you \$10 here." And he gave her ten dollars. So they were sittin' there eating. So, um, he said, "What subjects do you like?" And one, Antoine (raises hand), "I like readin'." And, "I like math!" He said, "Okay," and then one of the little girls, she said, to the superintendent, "Get me some mo' chicken!" He said, "Okay." (Laughs) he said, "Okay. All right." He went up and got her her chicken, and... somebody say, "I want some more to drink. Give me something to drink!" He said, "Okay," (laughs) and so he started to servin' them. Yeah, he had to serve. So the little boy, Antoine, he said, "I can *read*." He said, "Oh yeah?" I said, "Yes, he can. Get a book off my shelf, Antoine." Antoine went and got this big book (laughs). I don't know what the book was, but

something big, something huge, but he couldn't even hold it. So he had the book, and of *course*, he could everything and just, busy, looking around, still reading. He just had that ability to remember what's in the page. And then he was sounding out, which I thought was so cute. And so the superintendent said, "Oh, you can read!" He said, "Yeah, 'cuz I'm smart (DF laughs). Ask Dr. Davis." I said, "Yes, that's true. You are smart, Antoine. You are smart, baby." So he said, "Well, I have to go. I have to go back to work." I said, "Oh, don't leave so soon." I said, "The children are enjoying you." Lying through my teeth (laughs), right? He said, "Well, this has been different today, and thank you for having me." I said, "What do you do say?" "[Note: imitating the children] you comin' back? You gonna bring some more food?" "I don't know if I'm coming back. I'll try to come back. And if I do come back, I'll see if can bring you some more food. But it was so good meeting you." And he went around shaking hands and went around—I had a big conference table. He said, "Okay, Dr. Davis, I'mma take leave." I said, "Well, go on through the school. And just walk through, let people see your face. 'Cuz no one knows who you are, and it might be good idea to walk through, let us see your face." He left, and I heard he was so mad with me (laughs). He was so mad with me. And he stopped, he didn't do it anymore. That was the end of that. He was angry with me. "You know what that crazy woman did? I told, I said, I was clear who I wanted to talk with. I wanted to talk with the *stars*, so I could give 'em a pep talk! And that crazy lady got the *special* children (DF laughs)!" I got the word back, and I thought, *Well, that's who he needed to be with. They are my stars.* And I had some really good special students (drinks water), mm-hmm. (Points off camera) Her grandson, Kitty's grandson, was, um. He was so precious. He had his little walker (laughs), and the kids just—oh! They just loved him so. And he could hardly... he'd go in the cafeteria. They'd take the walker from him. I said, "Stop! Before you make him fall! They grabbed the walker from him—

DF: Tryin' to help him?

LD: Tryin' to help him. And go get his tray. And come over, and, "Hey! Hey!" I said, "No, no, no, just take it to the table for him. And don't push him. Just let him sit down." And they were busy movin' the chairs, about to knock Tony over. I said, "Hey, get away!" "Stop it! I'm happy!" I said, "Okay, okay, but don't make him fall." Mm-hmm, they didn't want him to lift a finger.

DF: It sounds like you created a nice, warm, loving, and nurturing atmosphere for these students.

LD: I'd like to think so.

DF: Yes, it sounds wonderful. And I can just imagine what the families—how the family and the community felt about their children being successful. And also getting to have this rich experience, not only like I said inside the classroom but also outside the classroom. And that you genuinely *cared*. ‘Cuz when you said you were going to pick up the phone (mimes) and call, you *knew* them. How many administrations or even curriculum directors know their students that well?

LD: Oh, I had to. I learned everybody’s name (laughs).

DF: That’s a special quality. All right, thank you so much for all this time—

LD: Oh, I’m not done!

KID [Note: off camera]: You sure, honey?

DF: You got more (laughs)? Oh, okay.

LD: Oh, you’re done?

DF: Well (checks watch), I didn’t want to hold you too long, but unless there’s something else you want add to the story.

LD: Yes, yes.

DF: You are on a roll here!

LD: (Laughs) they walked down the hallway with their books, goin’ to lunch. And they would walk, they would have their books. And my daughter, Kylene! Step right here (DF looks off camera). You said... Tell ‘em what you said, when you came into my office at the end of the day. You’re good.

KYD (Kylene Davis): Well (walks on camera), during my breaks, when I’d come home from college, I would sub at my mother’s school. And one particular day, I had a pre-K class. And I was fortunate enough to have an assistant in there with me, ‘cuz I think I would have been lost without her. But, um, she carried the lessons, and to

my surprise—they had a little routine and everything that they would do—and to my surprise, they knew their math facts. And they would recite them, as a class. And I just, I stood back in amazement, because I knew that these were four-year-old children, and they knew their math facts. And they would just call ‘em off, (snaps) just like that. The assistant would be drillin’ them and they would just call ‘em off from memory.

LD: She came into my office and said, “Mama! Mama! Guess what?” I said, “What?” “All the four-year-olds know math facts!” I said, “Oh, yeah. Yeah.” “How did y’all get that to happen?” I said, “Well, that’s one of those things we do.” And I think I said to you, “We’ve to bring out the *cognitive* in children. Once they can learn cognitively, then they’re ready, they can go from that point. But if they can’t do cognition, that’s it, it’s closed, it’s over.” And that... ah, okay, I just wanted you to say that. “Mama! Mama!” She was so excited, I thought, *Oh, isn’t that wonderful?* And we would have sleepovers (KYD walks off camera), at the school. And sometimes, we would have around 700 kids at sleepovers (laughs). And we would have little activities throughout the night, and I would go. I had my feet in pajamas. Lord, when I hit the gym, they would scream, “Ah, Dr. Davis! Ah!” And come runnin’ over to knock me down. I said, “Oh, wait! Wait, wait!” They said, “Ah, she’s got her pajamas. You’re sleepin’ with me! I wantchu—” “No, I wantchu to sleep with me!” And I had to go around sleepin’ with everyone, even the boys too. I said, “Oh, wait a minute, fellows. Let me put a leg over here on your blanket and I’ll put a leg over on yours. But we would have these sleepovers, and the kids would just have fun. We would read to them and watch educational videos. So we would do those things. We had block parties, actual block parties out in the parking lot, where we would have jumpers for the kids. And we only had invitation. You can’t come to the block party without an invitation. And that invitation, you would earn by being an accelerated reader, by having your points, your math facts, and good behavior. And out at the block party, we served punch and cookies and ice cream and little snow cones, and everybody—I mean, they come through with their invitations and didn’t come out. In the middle of the hallway was a what? What did we have?

KID [Note: off camera]: Bubblegum.

KYD [Note: off camera]: The bubblegum.

[End clip 2]

[Start clip 3]

LA: An eight-foot bubblegum machine, holds 1000 balls of bubblegum (laughs). And the bubblegum was for the kids. It was a reward. We always had a reward system. And they would earn bubblegums. You have to earn it based off math, reading,

behavior, or something, some accomplishment. They come down the hallway, and now we always walk on the right of the hall. So people on the right, if you had a bubblegum ticket, you walk on the right. If you did not get bubblegum or wear not going to get it, you walk on the left. So at the end of, on Fridays, there we were, gettin' in the right line. One little kid had a ticket, gave it to the counselor who was actually passing out the bubblegum. It said, "Give him a bubblegum. – The Teacher." (All laugh) she said, "No wait a minute, wait a minute. Your teacher didn't give you this." "Uh-huh, yes she did." Yeah. Give him a bubblegum. – The Teacher (laughs).

KYD [Note: off camera]: Tell about the volunteers.

LD: Huh? Oh! Yeah, we had volunteers...

KID [Note: off camera]: (Laughs) a bunch.

LD: ... from the retirement communi—

[clip appears to skip at 1:29:13]

LD: Textbook executive. So he would see to it that books, children's books, were delivered for everybody in the school. And they would just sit there and write the names of every child. "And what's your name?" "Rocky Un... Rocky Unjabah (DF laughs)." "And how do you spell that?" "R-A..." He said, "Well, I'll spell it, let me write it." They were so excited to get it. They pick out their own books, and they could browse them. But they gave every child a book twice a year. And the kids really enjoyed that.

KID [Note: off camera]: Can I interject here?

LD: Yes, go ahead.

KID: The more about this thing about the accelerated reader and what it did for the children, you saw evidence that the children enjoyed readin'.

LD: That was the key.

KID: So I remember going on one of the trips with the children. I think I took my oldest granddaughter, and there was not a child that did not voluntarily have a book. And the comments was, "I got to read three books before this trip is over!" Because they had their own personal goals that they had set for themselves in order to get their rewards that were already in place for them. It was just one of those things that the children look forward to, the fact that they could not only read, but I think they also wanted to establish that they could be successful and make Dr. Davis very proud of them.

DF: Right.

KID: And that was part of the key of it. And it's just amazin' that you the impact of that even today. I remember, just the other week, during Fourth of July—I haven't even told you this—one of the young men, Jeremy, Dr. LaPointer's grandson—

LD: Grandson, yeah.

KID: He had actually come to the house, but he stayed in the car. He did not realize that you were there. He was told you had been there, but he thought you were gone.

LD: Ohh.

KID: And so the report was—and I got this just yesterday. The report was that he was just *soooo upset* because he did not get a chance to hug you (LD laughs). Y'know, Dr. Davis is in the house! And that is really, that is the attitude with not only with the young girls, but so much with young men today, in their 20s, and you know that went through St. Helena school. She is really, in their mind, a jewel. And I think I said to you yesterday that (camera pans left to show woman), uh, she called all the children "sugarfoot."

LD [Note: off camera]: Yes (laughs).

KID: And, sugarfoot, they each one took as a personal word for just them (LD and DF laugh), not realizing that all the children were called "sugarfoot," but that was a special event. And then I think one of the most outstanding things was when my oldest granddaughter, who is now 25, when she was in kindergarten, she... I owned a restaurant, a very successful restaurant, and we were extremely busy this

particular day. I mean, it was just jam packed, and I was wearing different hats. And I was coming back and forth and she was running behind me. "Grandma! Grandma!" And I said, "What, baby?" She said, "Ah! Oh (grabs head)! You won't believe!" I said, "What, baby?" "You won't believe who's here!" I mean, she was just dramatic (DF laughs) and she just kept doin' it. And I said, "Tara, please, tell me who is here." And she said, "OH MY GOD! IT'S DR. DAVIS! She's in the house, Grandma!" (LD laughs) and she's beatin' her hands, and it was just fantastic, and it made me stop, because I began to reflect of how wonderful that was, how often we have different idols—you know, the movie stars and y'know, musicians. But how many young people look at their principal or their teacher as being *the* person that is so important in their live and it was just so real. And I couldn't do anything but say, "Oh my *god*, this is wonderful." Y'know? But you'll find... like, Dr. Davis was at home not too long ago. And even at Christmas time, and my oldest grandson, who is 23, he sat down next to her and said, "Oh, Dr. Davis." (LD laughs) he said, "I can't believe that Dr. Davis is here. Dr. Davis!"

LD: (laughs) I think he kissed me the whole day.

KID: And then he kissed you and then he said, "Ya know, I love me some Dr. Davis. (DF laughs) Dr. Davis!" And it was just, y'know, when you see young men... adore her, and the impact of education and bein' successful and takin' that with them into their adult life. And I think you'll find that with... there is not, I think I can honestly say this, there is not a child in St. Helena island that came up through this administration as a student will not say the same thing, nor their parents. It's that her impact on education in this community has been extremely great.

DF: Yes.

KID: And she went against the establishment to make sure that her children was equipped with education and the desire to be education. I mean, you can education someone, but if they have the desire and the tools, then they can be successful in anything they do. And that's what she put in them, is that they could be successful, even when they were on the bottom. They began to say, "We're number one (LD laughs)! We're number one!" That went from the lips into actuality, and so, y'know. She knows that I honor her, but I just think that's something to be said. Not trying to change them from being Gullah-speaking children, but to show them how they can adapt in this world, be successful, and still hold on to their traditions. Y'know, being equipped with these tools, and self-confidence. And that's what she did, and I honor her for that, she and her husband. 'Cuz it took Hugh—Attorney Davis—to work right along with her in the middle of the night; when I'm sleeping, I knew my children, my grandchildren were in good hands. And that is, I think, just fantastic.

DF: Absolutely.

KID: And you know I mean that from my heart. I'm just blowin' smoke, girl!

LD: Yes, I paid her to say all those things (laughs).

KID: Yeah, but it's the truth! And you know, you took it very serious. And you went against the odds, and then you pulled the team together of dedicated teachers that you helped to instill the drive to accelerate in their own academia. I just think that's fantastic, and it's a gift—it's a gift from God. You know, and I salute you. I just have to say that.

LD: And the school was truly a community school (camera pans back right to show her).

KID [Note: off screen]: Oh my god, yes.

LD: It was truly a community school. We had wedding receptions, funerals, vacation bible schools... what else did we have over there?

HD [Note: off camera]: Library.

LD: Uh, yeah, a public library. And we had an infant... a nursery, so infants could come. Adult education, during the daytime when all the kids were there, we had adults there too. And it was truly a community school. I thought it was just... We kept it open to parents and the public, and we had computer classes. I had Saturday classes, and we had Computer 101 and 102 for community members. So when the kids came to Saturday school, I invited parents to get on the bus and come on too for the computer classes. So we just opened up our facility to the community, 'cuz it was truly their school. And I just maintained an open door policy. That was so important.

HD: And personally, I think one of the failings of the American public school system is that we still livin' in an agrarian society. And under that, we're limitin' ourselves in terms of what our children can learn, 'cuz we only go to school for nine months—I say, less than nine months really when you look at it. I mean, that's a lot of time wasted, that they not learning. One of the things they did in school was, uh, the

school ended on June 1, or whenever it was. They were shut down for ten days or two weeks or whatever it was, and then they would resume school. And they went to school from second week of June, or whatever, until either July 31 or August 1. So in ten days, they are ready to go back to school again. So was a time when they really... And then they invited children from the other schools and had studies for the middle school and the high school. So they were not only trying to educate the children at St. Helena, but also the children at the other schools.

KID [Note: off scream]: Makin' transitions.

HD: Yeah, transitions. Middle and high school, so, uh. I don't think... nobody in this day has gotten how long, really, time that needed to be spent inside the classroom. I think we still on a default, I believe, in terms of that. And they're tryin' it now in some schools, but it's more or less a daycare thing, I think, not really teachin'. But they actually taught. Just thought I'd put that out there.

DF: Thank you, thank you. Well again, I'm gonna thank you, and I know you have probably more and more stories you can share with us (LD laughs), but you know—and we want, I want to hear those stories, but I'm gonna let Malik take himself a little break. But feel free to talk to us anytime, y'know? I'll be back. Thank you so much, Dr. Davis, you are wonderful.

LD: (Laughs) here, you wanna spend the night (everyone laughs)?

DF: Thank you, Malik. Well, thank you—

[End clip 3]