

Interview with **Evelyn Morash**

Date: November 9, 1988

Interviewer: Jacqueline Shearer

Camera Rolls: 4051-4053

Sound Rolls: 421-422

Team: D

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

### Preferred Citation

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**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #4051]

[sound roll #421]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Four, twenty-one. Mark it.

[slate]

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

When your kids were in school, were you satisfied as a parent with the education they were getting?

00:00:25:00

Evelyn Morash:

Was I satisfied with the education they were getting? My kids all went to the local schools up until they went into high school...I couldn't have been too satisfied. I knew all the teachers because I was in and out of the schools. But I was always there to try to make things a little better. So, if you ask me was I satisfied, I thought I was satisfied. But when I think about it, why was I there? If—unless I thought I could make things a little better.

00:01:04:00

Interviewer:

Can you tell us about what your experiences were with the Boston School Committee.

00:01:10:00

Evelyn Morash:

With the Boston School Committee. First, I had a horrible encounter with...actually it wasn't with the Boston School Committee. It was with a Boston administrator when one of my children was in junior high school, and the class size was, we felt was too big. It was over the limit. And the local, the teachers couldn't do anything about getting an extra, an extra class put in. And I had called, tried to put pressure on to bring that class size down, get another teacher, another classroom put in the school. And I was told that that could only be done for kids with learning disabilities. And I, you know, screamed, and I said, you know, I think this is highly unjust. These kids need extra help because they're bright kids. And I remember calling a mee—inviting parents of all the kids in that class to this house, and they all showed up because they all had a vested interest in their kids. And we pressured that school department to get an extra class in there. That was one of my first real encounters with the Boston School Department. I had other encounters with the Home and School Association that I was unhappy with. I always felt the Home and School Association was nothing more than a company union. And they dealt with people, school by school. They used the lovely term that the Home and, local home and school associations were autonomous entities. It was a nice way of saying we don't want you talkin' to anybody else. And I had gotten involved with the school volunteers, school volun...Boston school volunteers knew how many text, not textbooks, real fun books for kids, library books had been bought with the easy money, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act money that was still locked up in boxes. They had been bought and never opened. So, school—and the excuse was we used the money because we would have lost the money, so we bought the books. But we haven't had the resources to get the books on the shelves. So, they asked, they tapped me would I go down, this was at the junior high school. At that time, I had, my three oldest children were in school, and I have two young, I have three children together, a group of three children, and then I have two younger ones. Interestingly, a lot of people don't know, at that point in time didn't know about the two younger ones. I don't know why, I never kept them hidden, but they didn't know they existed. Probably because I was also working at the time. I worked part time jobs so that I could also get involved in school activities. But anyway, I got involved with the library program. And we got a great library going down at the Barnes Junior High School. And that was the key school to get one going in East Boston. Once we got that one going, we started spinning off and setting up libraries in all the other, in the elementary schools. And it was a link between the Home and School Associations. And we had volunteers in all the schools. So, we started talking together, and we found out that we, you know, had pretty common problems. But every time any of the individual home and schools went to the school department or the school committee, they got a different answer.

So, we were all getting played off differently. And we formed an organization, of East Boston, we called our organization East Boston Association of Home and School Associations. [plane flies over] And I got into a real hassle—

00:05:01:00

Interviewer:

Sorry, this is [unintelligible]—

Evelyn Morash:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

We should cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Second sticks.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Second sticks again please.

[slate]

00:05:10:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, Jackie.

00:05:12:00

Interviewer:

So, what was the story about the struggle with the school nurses?

00:05:16:00

Evelyn Morash:

Well, I guess I must have been beginning to be viewed as an agitator, and I must have of— well, I knew I had offended, I had offended one of the school principals because of my request for things to be changed. My youngest child, who, this was one of the kids that somehow people didn't know about. He was...started had to have been kindergarten or first grade. But it was the first day of school. I was working. And I got home from work about 5:30, and he has a note. I open the note from the school nurse, and it says your child shows evidence of head lice and cannot return to school until the head lice are gone. Well, I go, What's this? So, I go to the pharmacy, try to get some medication. I, I didn't know that the rules had ju...got changed. You need a prescription to buy Kwell or whatever you needed for head lice. So, I called the neighbor, who had a bunch of kids. She had some around. Doctored the kid up, get the steel comb, do the whole thing. And I'm not seeing any lice. So, after about two hours of soaking the kid's head, and how is he gonna go to school tomorrow, one of the older kids said, You know, Ma, school nurses never check your head the first day of school. All of a sudden it dawned on me. You know, they got back to me. [laughs] And my...there were a couple of, I don't know why that all happened. Maybe I, maybe I offended them. But I know they, they really got to me, and I reacted very, probably just the way they wanted me to react. Scared, spent a lot of energy. [laughs] Called the barber, who the kid had gotten the haircut on the Saturday before school started, and I said, By any chance, did you notice any lice on Eric's hair? He said, No, I would have told you right away. I wouldn't have let him go, get out of here without tellin' you that. So, there were little ways they could get back when you were...and I think it was one of the ways that people backed off from taking an active role. Because when you become an activist in the school, and you're not there all the time, you leave your most precious object in the hands of people who may be very angry at you and leave your kids vulnerable. I remember another time, one of my kids [laughs] was takin' a test in school in an early grade. Taking a test. And someone walked up to him and asked him if he was Mrs. Morash's son. Well, who did you think he was? His name, his last, his surname was Morash. The kid got rattled. [laughs] In very little delicate ways they can do that, and people don't wanna leave their kids vulnerable, so they back off. And I think it's one of the ways that, you know, people stayed away from taking an active role.

00:08:16:00

Interviewer:

Now, you told me a story about walking downtown, looking at the window and seeing groups of people marching up to the state house, and how angry it made you in terms of what politicians were doing to their constituents.

00:08:29:00

Evelyn Morash:

OK. That, I was working at that time at 27 School Street, which is right next to the old city hall. And it was in the days when they were trying to get the racial imbalance law repealed. Probably '73 or '74, but it was before the federal decision. The, the federal case was being heard down at the federal courthouse on Devonshire Street. And I looked out the window. I heard all this turmoil outside. And there was a literal parade of people coming down School Street. Mothers, fathers, all watching, walking up with their signs from the different neighborhoods of Boston. Storming up to the state house to get the state legislature to repeal the racial imbalance law. And I remember looking out that window in tears and, and this is, this is right at the right time we had gotten the libraries going. We were trying to recruit people to help out. And I'm thinking to myself, you know, there's two issues. Number one, people are getting lied to. Thinking that by walking up to the state house they can repeal the racial imbalance law and the threat of desegregating Boston school is over. And that's not where the action was. The action was going down at the federal courthouse, and no one was told that. I mean, it was like that was a big surprise. 'Cause it was easy for people to pressure their local representatives and their local senators. And there were more of them they could exert pressure on. So, that was that one issue of people being lied to, thinking that the racial imbalance law was repealed. The case was all, everything was all over, and everything was gonna be fine. But the other issue that really probably made me sadder was that they could pull out all these people to walk up to the state house, take time off from work, time away from home, on a negative activity where if this same amount of energy could have been put onto a positive action, mountains could have been moved. That was just a very, very sad experience to see those women walking up there.

00:10:39:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. And we—

[cut]

[camera roll #4052]

00:10:42:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Camera roll forty, fifty-two. Sound roll four, twenty-one continues.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:10:50:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, Jackie.

00:10:51:00

Interviewer:

OK, so could you tell us the story again about sitting at work and looking out the window?

00:10:59:00

Evelyn Morash:

OK. At that time, it was probably, it had to have either been '73 or '74. Probably more early '74 when they were trying to get the racial imbalance law repealed. And I was working at that time at 27 School Street, which was directly next to old city hall, down the street from the statehouse. And I could hear all this noise outside. And I went to the window, and there were a literal parade of parents, men and women, coming back from the statehouse with their signs from all their different neighborhoods. And they had been coerced, encouraged by their, by local school committee people to get up to the statehouse to put pressure onto their legislature, their representative senators to repeal the racial im-balance law. And there were two issues that really bothered me and made me so sad. Number one was that they were told to get up to the state house and get the racial imbalance law repealed. And never being told that the real action on the desegregation of the Boston Schools was happening down at the federal courthouse. And that no matter what happened to the racial imbalance law, there still was the federal laws that had to be complied with. And that Judge Garrity was holding sessions right then while this parade was goin' on. So, that was one issue that they were lied to. The other issue was that I started and had been involved in organizing the school libraries. And saw this wasted energy, this manpower and women power walking up there, being just on a negative activity. And all I could think was, you know, if that amount of energy was exerted in a positive way, they could have moved mountains.

00:12:42:00

Interviewer:

Great. Now, can you tell me how your, how friends of yours, other white parents who were anti-busing, quote, unquote, how did they describe themselves to you in terms of why were they anti-busing?

00:12:57:00

Evelyn Morash:

Why were they anti-busing? They didn't know where their kids were gonna go. They didn't want their kids leaving neighborhood schools. They didn't want their kids going anywhere else but here. They had their right to their neighborhood school. No one was gonna tell them what to do. And the frustrating part for me was when I would try to explain the years that the school committee had stalled, had taken positive actions not to desegregate the schools how so much of it could have been done in a very easy way that had been denied, and there were those, all the actions done to stop it. Now, you tried to explain this to people. And, you know, their eyes would glaze over. You know, and they didn't wanna hear any of that reasoning, any of that rationale, any of the background. And it was like, Don't tell me that. Just tell me that my kids are not gonna go on a bus. And you have to remember that in East Boston...probably a lot of neighborhoods but I think even more so in East Boston, people don't leave East Boston for a lot of reasons. East Boston is an island. You have to make an effort. I mean, and you'll hear that time and time again. You know, East Boston, we're an island. And you try to come, you know, you try to say to people, you know, Yeah, we, we are an island. But, you know, there are people that leave it every day, get on a bus, get on a train, go to work in town. And there are people that come onto this island, millions of people a week, to go to our airport. So, you know, it isn't that we're isolated. The isolation is a mental isolation. So, they didn't want kids to leave. And, I mean, I think a lot of our schools, a lot of the field trips that we were doing at that time in school were into town, getting kids, bringing them into museums. It was, there was a two-fold purpose. It was getting them into the museums. It was getting into those outside activities. But it was also showing them there was another world out there on the other side of the, on the, on the other side of the harbor. But people were afraid to leave. And yo-you, you can be so self-contained here. And east Boston had a complete, total, I mean, we had a, elementary schools. We had a junior high school, and we had a high school. It could have been a total school system. Which a lot of other neighborhoods in the, in the city didn't have that totality school system that we had here. So, probably it was very easy to, for people to think, Why should we have to leave? We've got it all here.

00:15:27:00

Interviewer:

Now, how did people deal with you? Were you seen as a traitor to the cause?

00:15:32:00

Evelyn Morash:

To some people I was seen as a traitor, I think. You know, why, why are you saying these things? Why are you standing up for this? I remember having a confrontation with a local police officer in the bank one day, and he said to me, You know what? What do you, what do you stand up for, what are you, what are you doing this for? I said, Well, you know, I said,

It's, it's, it's illogical. You know, because someone's skin is different than mine and different than yours, they don't have the rights that, that we have. I said, you know, You carry that one step further. I have green eyes, and only one of my children have green eyes. The same logic that says because your skin is a different color and I can't mingle with you, and I can't associate with you, and I don't have to interact with you. You carry that further, and we'll say because you have green eyes you can't drive a car. And I don't want that for me and my one child with green eyes. So...but you would try to explain that, and it was like, dead. But I, I, I guess I was viewed as a traitor by a lot of people, but I did have a body of support. I had a supportive family, and I found supportive friends who were probably of kindred, kindred spirits. People who to this day are very close.

00:16:57:00

Interviewer:

OK. Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mm-hmm.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Speed.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:17:02:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. OK, Jackie.

00:17:04:00

Interviewer:

So, could you tell me about this meeting before the opening of schools?

00:17:10:00

Evelyn Morash:

OK. There was a lot of preparation going on in that summer of '74...of '74. Before phase one went into effect. And the community really was trying to get itself organized. The city had mobilized a lot of activity. There were meetings all over the place, community group, community personnel, priests. There were police department. And I remember going to one meeting in the afternoon. It was very close to the beginning of school. And it was at the social center, and one of the principals came in. Because all the principals were there getting ready for their school openings. And one of the principals came in, and he had his foot in a cast. And people hadn't seen each other over the summer, and someone asked him, What happened to your foot? And his answer was, Broke it kicking a nigger off a bus. And I was horrified to think here we are at a meeting to talk about a peaceful integration, and we still have an attitude like this that can express itself.

00:18:19:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:18:26:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:18:28:00

Interviewer:

Did desegregation have an effect just for Black kids and their parents?

00:18:33:00

Evelyn Morash:

No, I don't think so. For years I had always thought here in East Boston itself, where I said that we had a total school system with—we really had even inequality in those school systems. We had one junior high school, and we had two school, which went from seventh to ninth grade. And we had two schools which went through the eighth grade with kids graduating in the eighth grade. I always thought that was very discriminating to the kids who went to the junior high school. Kids who were at the junior high school, and those were the kids basically from this area here, Eagle Hill, and all the way down to the bottom of the hill had to stay in that junior high school until the ninth grade. So, if those kids wanted to go to Latin school, they had to go to Latin school as sophomores, not in their freshman year. So, if they were looking for a pure academic experience at Latin school, they were, only got three years of it. If for purely sports interested parent who wanted their kid to get a sports scholarship, that kid didn't get up to the high school to be on the football team until he was a sophomore. I said, There's something wrong here. We're gettin' inequality. One, one of the key pieces of the desegregation order was that it broke down that two system, and it made it a one system. We got elementaries, middle schools, and high, four-year high schools across the city. So, everybody had the opportunity to go to a four-year high school. That, to me, was a big change in what we had. It also gave people a chance to look at what different kind of high schools were around. Because as long as you could go to your district high school, you were gonna be happy with it. No matter what they did there. And you didn't look—and it might have been the best high school in the city. But it might not have been the best one for you. So, you, it was really limiting your options by not opening up, not giving you access to all those other high school. And the desegregation order did give you access to those other high schools.

00:20:46:00

Interviewer:

What about the difference between, if you think there was one, between the Home School Association and parental involvement as mandated by the court's order.

00:20:54:00

Evelyn Morash:

Home and School [sighs] Association involvement really had the blessing of the school departments because it was a, it was a, it was a very passive, benevolent kinda thing. I mean, you did cake sales. You raised money. You filled in the gaps that the school budget didn't have. But you really didn't get involved in any curriculum issues, looking at criteria for teacher certification, looking at qualifications of principals. So, it was a passive kind of involvement. And it wasn't ordered. And if a school didn't have it, if a school prin-principal didn't feel like encouraging a Home and School Association—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound[]]

Evelyn Morash:

—the school principal didn't need to.

00:21:47:00

Interviewer:

OK, I'm sorry. We ran out, so we can—

Camera Crew Member #2:

That's a roll out on camera roll forty, fifty-two.

[cut]

[camera roll #4053]

[sound roll #422]

Camera Crew Member #3:

—both knew.

00:21:54:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:21:59:00

Interviewer:

So, we were comparing the Home School Association with court mandated parental involvement. And you were just saying that the Home School Association wasn't an order.

Evelyn Morash:

No.

Interviewer:

So, the principals didn't have to do it.

00:22:13:00

Evelyn Morash:

Yeah, Home and School Association could be a very passive thing. You know, you raised money for school activities, raised money for field trips that weren't in the school budget. And if a school principal didn't feel he wanted a Ho-Home and School Association, didn't want parents in the school, he didn't have to encourage it. Didn't need it. And didn't, didn't miss it at all. But the court order was an order. And the parental councils were ordered by the court. They were difficult to get into place because they weren't in the neighborhood schools. And the parents had a right to be in those schools, and that thought was offensive to teachers and to school administrators.

00:23:01:00

Interviewer:

Now, I'd like to...sorry for this, but I'd like to jump back in time again and go back to in, before school deseg actually happened after the court's order but before the opening of school. Was there anything in the wind? I mean what was the feeling out there? Were you scared that something was gonna happen? Just describe sort of the, the, the mental climate of the city.

00:23:28:00

Evelyn Morash:

OK. The first quarter, the states was, was goin' to implement at their, their fashion of desegregating school 'cause they were ordered to. And they were gonna be in violation of the state racial im—of the state racial imbalance law if they didn't have a, a, a desegregation plan in place in September. So, that was all set to go. We knew that. Then the court order came down the end of June. And rather than come up with a whole new plan, Judge Garrity used the state's plan as phase one. People were very anxious. People across the city knew that that had to happen in September, and groups started to organize across the city to explain the plan to, explain the plan to parents to try to quell any kind of trouble that might start arising. But ra...even looking at it a more positive way, rather than trying to quell trouble, to answer questions, to give positive information, and to just stop all the rumor mongering that was going on. And if kids were assigned, gonna be assigned to, to schools, and they weren't gonna be assigned to schools way across town. They were gonna be assigned to neighborhoods adj—contiguous neighborhoods to get the parents to go to visit those schools. And during that time, there were parents who saw the schools their kids were gonna go to

and weren't happy about them. And pressure was put on to get some of those schools into better shape when the kids got there. So, there was a lot of activity that summer. There were all those community meetings going on. There were people rallying around. I mean, there were also people rallying around. The ROAR group was rallying to make the opening of school as disruptive as possible. But there was a lot of activity going on that whole summer.

00:25:26:00

Interviewer:

You talked about them hosting one of the coffee hours that Kevin White had with, with White mothers. Could you tell us what that scene was?

00:25:37:00

Evelyn Morash:

Kevin himself was doing that across the city, all over the place. It was one of the things I felt they should do. There were a lot of people who were, they were mostly my neighbors I would say who were here, but Kevin had to meet as many people as possible because it wasn't just parents of school children who were concerned. It was people of all...from all spectrums, spectrums of the population who were concerned about school opening. And he did that all across the city. And he came, and he sat down, and he met with people, and answered questions. It was his way of doing what he could. I don't know if it worked as well as he wanted it to work. But we had that, we had one of those here, and people were here answering, and he was answering questions and trying to explain that it was the law. And he had a responsibility as the mayor to carry out the law. And there was nowhere that he could violate the law. And he was setting the system up in place. The city hall communication network was being set up, and people could call in. I mean, people, people in the city administration at that time in time did yeoman service to make opening day as peaceful as possible.

00:26:52:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

00:26:56:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:26:59:00

Interviewer:

OK. So, can you give us a flavor of, of that?

00:27:04:00

Evelyn Morash:

Yeah, it was, probably was easier for me if people were unhappy with me, and would ask me questions, and they weren't happy with my answers. And I could have a face to face confrontation, and I knew who I was talking to. The scariest part of those days were the telephones calls I would get late at night. Not knowing who was calling but threatening my house was gonna get blown up. My kids were gonna get kidnapped. Probably the worst experience I probably had was woke up one morning, and we had a dog who was, [laughs] wasn't much of watch dog 'cause he slept all night. Came down the stairs, found the window broken with a rock through the window, found the front of the— [plane flies over]

00:27:46:00

Interviewer:

OK, I'm sorry. We're gonna have to wait for this plane.

Evelyn Morash:

OK.

Interviewer:

But this is—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

And speed.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:27:53:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, Jackie.

00:27:55:00

Interviewer:

OK. We liked the whole way you were leading up to it, before, even with the dog. So, again.

00:28:00:00

Evelyn Morash:

OK. You know, it was probably easier for me to deal with people who asked me a question, you know, Why, why, why do the kids have to get bused? And if I, even when I tried to explain the whole story, and their eyes would glaze over, at least I knew who I was talking to. I knew they were angry at me. But I knew who I was talking to. The scariest part of those days for me were the threats that, the anonymous phone calls I would get. Not knowing who was calling. Especially ones that came at night, after I had been asleep. And I could, you know, I could listen to almost anything if I'm wide awake, and I think that's probably true of anybody. But when someone wakes you out of a sound sleep and threatens that your house is gonna get blown up, pretty difficult to go back to sleep not knowing what's out there and who you were talking to. On the morning that I came down and found a brick through my front window, and found the front of the house all splattered with paint, call the police, reported it. The police came up and didn't make me feel much better when the policeman said, You know, lady, that could have been a firebomb. And I would have probably lost the house. And never knowing who was doing that. So, it's, I could probably do an analogy to when, you know, you lose your wallet at work, and everybody is suspect. So, when you don't know who is doing those things to you, you know, it's like everybody is suspect, and who did it, and who could have, who could have thought that badly. That was, those were the bad times.

00:29:37:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Wonderful.

Evelyn Morash:

[laughs]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:29:42:00

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