

Interview with **Marcia Webb Lecky**

October 29, 1985

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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*.

00:00:02:00

[camera roll 120]

[sound roll 1109]

[slate]

INTERVIEWER: WHY DON'T YOU TAKE YOURSELF IN THE CORNER THEN AND DO YOU NEED—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, WE'RE SET.

INTERVIEWER: THE FIRST QUESTION IS AN EASY ONE. WHAT DID YOU THINK IN THAT SUMMER OF 1957 WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD THAT THE BLACK KIDS WERE GONNA BE GOING TO YOUR HIGH SCHOOL?

Lecky: The summer of '57, I'm not sure that was when I first learned about the nine blacks entering Central. I think the bigger questions that we seniors were thinking about was, we chose to go to Central, instead of the new school, Hall, and the things that entered our mind in making the choice of going to Central rather than Hall had nothing to do with integration of Central. It had more to do with Central having an excellent faculty, marvelous football team, a lot of tradition, school spirit, and a lot of us seniors, we had our choice, and we chose

to stay at Central. And so it was almost as though something were happening in terms of integration, but it was no big, no big deal that caused any consternation on any of us, not on any of our parts. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: I THINK THE FACT—

Lecky: Sorry.

00:01:21:00

INTERVIEWER: NO THAT'S GOOD. THAT'S—

Lecky: Cut.

INTERVIEWER: NO, NO. WHAT DID YOU EXPECT WHEN THAT SCHOOL YEAR OPENED? WHAT WERE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Lecky: Well, I don't think we thought about what was going to happen when school started in terms of integration. We had been practicing cheerleading and looking forward to the school and then when the announcement came, it was almost as though, oh no, what is Faubus doing to ruin our year? So it didn't seem like we thought in terms of integration being at all a factor. It was Faubus and what he was doing. And, I think, from that point on, we just did what principal and our teachers asked us to do in trying to make it as normal a year as possible.

00:02:08:00

INTERVIEWER: I THINK YOU SAID TO US SOMETHING ABOUT BEING CHILDREN OF THE '50s, NOT SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS. I WONDER IF YOU COULD TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT.

Lecky: You know, sometimes when we look back, we give a different perspective to the way things were than maybe they really were. When we watch *Happy Days*, and some of us don't recognize *Happy Days* as being part of our lives, and yet maybe, maybe it was rather accurate. We children of the '50s didn't have causes like the young people of the '60s did. And we di-, didn't question the authorities as much. So that if they told us to do certain things and we did what we were supposed to do. I know I have a sister, who, who grew up in the '60s and she was one who was involved in every cause. Marched on Washington, wrote letters, and did all sorts of things in an activist way. And I think interestingly enough my, my son who just graduated from college was a little concerned that during his college years that young people his age, didn't have a cause. And he was a little concerned at some of their misplaced values. And I think it's interesting that on the college campuses just today that South Africa is becoming a cause for some of the young people. And I think they're hungry for one. I wish we had recognized ours.

00:03:36:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, LET'S GO BACK TO THAT TIME. CAN YOU REMEMBER WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO SEE THE NATIONAL GUARD RINGING YOUR HIGH SCHOOL, STANDING AROUND IN FRONT OF IT?

Lecky: Well, the only time that I saw the National Guard ringing our high school was on the evening news. And I didn't watch the evening news a great deal. Because we would carpool to school and park the car in a side lot and then go in a side door. And we would go to our homerooms and then we would have five minutes between classes. And Central's such a big place, we would go to our next class. We were asked not to go to the front of the building. And most of us did what we were told to do. So, the soldiers who were there, you would see them in the hall, you would see them at cheerleader practice or gym or football games, but they never bothered us. And we thought they were there, first, because Faubus was causing problems and, then, I think, most of us were glad, when then the resolution came with President Eisenhower taking charge. I saw, once again, the authority as stepping in and doing what's supposed to be done.

00:04:56:00

INTERVIEWER: AND THE BLACK KIDS WHEN THE BLACK KIDS CAME IN, DID YOU SEE MUCH OF THEM?

Lecky: No. Oh. I didn't, I didn't see. Oh, sorry.

INTERVIEWER: TAKE YOUR TIME.

Lecky: "Incorporate the question in your answer." [laughs] We did not know at school what was happening each day. If bulletins were sent around then they did not tell very much about what was going on and if they said anything, we were not to discuss it. So if you didn't have any classes with any of the nine, one really didn't know if they were in the building or not, in those first few weeks of school. And the school is so large that I seldom saw any of the nine. Occasionally, I would see Ernie Green, when I would go into his trig class, because of a ball game that would be scheduled in the afternoon. And he is the only one of the Little Rock Nine who was a senior and in my class and the only one that I knew by name.

00:06:05:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, DO YOU REMEMBER THE CHILI INCIDENT WITH MINNIEJEAN BROWN? WERE YOU THERE FOR THAT? HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT IT? DID YOU, DID YOU SEE IT?

Lecky: I did not see the chili incident with Minnijean. I—that was one of the incidents that one didn't hear about. When I read Miss Huckabee's book, and I read about so many of—

INTERVIEWER: LET ME STOP YOU ON THAT. WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE LOOKING FOR—JEFF, STOP FOR A MOMENT. I'M SORRY—

00:06:30:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Lecky: Ask the question, wait a minute.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED.

00:06:33:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT ANY INCIDENTS THAT YOU HEARD ABOUT IN, IN—BETWEEN BLACK STUDENTS AND THE WHITE STUDENTS?

Lecky: The only incident that I recall hearing about at Central that year was the chili incident with Minnijean Brown. I didn't see the incident, I didn't know the people who were involved in it, personally, but I knew some of them by reputation. And, you know, I don't know if my memory is accurate, but I think that I would recall that one provoked, and it was probably a very natural response, that one had had enough. And so I don't recall thinking that Minnijean was as much out of line as what I had heard had provoked her to it.

00:07:29:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU, YOU NEVER SAW ANYTHING ELSE HAPPEN IN THE HALL?

Lecky: I didn't see any other incident at school the whole year.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO SEE THE TROOPS IN THE HALL THAT YEAR? IT'S SORT OF A, A FUNNY THOUGHT TO, TO US TO THINK ABOUT GUARDS IN A HALL IN HIGH SCHOOL.

Lecky: Having troops in the hall does sound like it would be somewhat intimidating or cause fear or provoke some kind of negative thoughts. But seeing the troops at, at Central, other than those first few days, and being irritated with Faubus, I think, it was somewhat accepted, that they had a reason to be there, and I, I pretty much ignored them. Because one had a place to get to and, and then we would hear rumors, though, about what some of the troops were doing. And since I never saw it, then I would always say, well, that's not true. You know

about being in the—

00:08:38:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Lecky: —girls' restroom or something like that. So, so my thought, I wasn't finished.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH GO.

Lecky: So my thought at the time was that—

00:08:47:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 121]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ALL NEW TAPE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: PICK UP THAT THOUGHT BECAUSE WE, WE RAN OUT OF ROOM ON THAT ONE. SO THEN—

Lecky: Oh the—oh, OK.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO ASK, YOU KNOW, THERE WERE RUMORS ABOUT THE TROOPS BEING IN THE WAY OR WALKING INTO THE GIRLS' BATHROOMS. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THEM?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: IT'S ALL YOURS.

Lecky: There were a lot of, excuse me, there were a lot of rumors at school that year and some of them that I would hear would be like, there were troops who would be in the girls' restroom. And to me, that just was another example of how the whole incident at Central had been sensationalized by the press and they had seized upon even rumors and had turned them into fact. So, I, I regretted that.

00:09:33:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU, YOU DIDN'T HEAR ANY RUMORS ABOUT, I MEAN, IT WASN'T YOUR CLASS, BUT THE JUNIOR CLASS GIRLS THE, THE, THE BLACK GIRLS WOULD GET HARASSED, SAY IN GYM CLASS OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT, DID YOU EVER HEAR OF THAT?

Lecky: I didn't have any classes with any juniors that year or most of my classes were senior classes and I didn't have any classes with the Little Rock Nine. And there was not much discussion of the integration, and so one, since one wasn't taught—since we weren't—maybe we should start over.

INTERVIEWER: JUST GO RIGHT ON.

Lecky: I'm—

INTERVIEWER: GO ON.

Lecky: We didn't talk much about what was actually going on. I don't know if that was because the administration had asked us, as a group, not to discuss it. So we didn't really have a lot of curiosity, perhaps, about what was going on. We weren't looking for negative incidents and thus, maybe we didn't ask questions, we didn't know, we didn't hear.

00:10:38:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU, COULD YOU TELL US HOW WELL YOU THOUGHT THE TEACHERS AND THE ADMINISTRATION DID? YOU KNOW, YOU—PERHAPS YOU COULD RELATE YOUR ANSWER TO THAT YEARBOOK OF YOURS, THE WAY IT REFLECTED A KIND OF THE DETERMINATION TO HAVE A NORMAL YEAR. YOU CAN PICK UP THE NOTE—THE, THE BOOK TOO IF YOU LIKE.

Lecky: You know, as I look back on, on the senior year, and you have so many pleasant memories. I have so many pleasant memories about the year. And you think, someone really did their job, in terms of administrators and teachers. They had asked us to do what we were supposed to do, in terms of, going to our class, studying, and I think most of us did that. And when you think of the leadership that they showed and, particularly, keeping the problems and there were problems, now I know that there were, but yet when they didn't pass them on to the young people, I think, it shows that they really felt a responsibility to all of the student body at Central, to make the year a meaningful one where education was taking place. And today, as a teacher, I can appreciate the responsibility that they had. And, as a student, back then, now I thank them, for all that they had to go through to give us as normal a year as possible.

00:12:13:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE YEARBOOK? ABOUT HOW THERE'S ONLY TWO PAGES OF PICTURES OF—

Lecky: I think when one looks at the 1958 yearbook, and there's only four pages of pictures about the year and there's not a single picture which suggests anything that's sensational or negative or there's not a picture of a mob. There's not a picture of anything that you see in history books or newspapers, the ones that were in the newspapers at the time. And there is a letter from the principal, who had a son in the class, and I think that reflects, also, the attitude of the administration, that we need to accentuate the positive about the year, because there were so many good things about the class of '58. And, I think, the yearbook shows that that's what they wanted to be remembered. Of course, as a history teacher, I think it's so ironic that that's how they want it to be remembered and then how it is in the history books today. And I've brought it up to the present again—

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

Lecky: —and you didn't want me to do that.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S ALL RIGHT. I DON'T MIND AT ALL.

Lecky: Oh well. You want me to—

INTERVIEWER: BUT, BUT MAYBE, MAYBE YOU—I WOULDN'T MIND IF YOU'D TELL—NO, NO, I DON'T WANT YOU TO DO THAT, BUT IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND PICKING IT UP AND AS YOU TELL US IT JUST OPEN TO THE PAGE AND, AND LOOK AT IT. YOU KNOW, JUST, JUST START IT—LET'S, LET'S START FROM BRINGING IT DOWN AND THEN JUST PICK IT UP AND LOOK AT IT. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SHOW IT TO ME.

Lecky: Don't, well, that's what I, I can't figure out—

INTERVIEWER: WE FIX IT. DON'T WORRY.

Lecky: You fix it.

INTERVIEWER: WE'LL FIX IT.

Lecky: OK. You know, in looking through the yearbook, it's sort of fun to read some of the letters, and they—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: STOP FOR A MOMENT.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO STOP FOR A MOMENT AND HELP YOU ON THIS 'CAUSE—

[cut]

00:14:08:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK.

INTERVIEWER: HOW WELL DO YOU THINK THE TEACHERS AND THE ADMINISTRATORS DID THAT YEAR IN MAKING IT A NORMAL YEAR?

Lecky: I think they did a superb job. When you have that many students and you have the responsibility for that many students and you try to make it as normal a year as possible, when you look at the yearbook for that year, and you recall how the yearbook remembers the year, there are only four pictures which are devoted to the Little Rock Central crisis. And the pictures that are in the yearbook are ones which certainly aren't sensationalized. They're the ones that look like the troops are just standing around that students are doing what they're supposed to do. It shows the troops sleeping, back from the fair, footsore and weary and far from home. There is nothing to suggest that we were making history at the time. And I think that the yearbook shows what the administration was encouraging, that we make it a normal year, and accentuate the positive. We had an outstanding class, football team and, and having as normal a year as possible, and the yearbook reflects that.

INTERVIEWER: THAT, THAT'S JUST WHAT I WANT. HAD A SENIOR YEAR AT THIS POINT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SOUND ROLLING.

INTERVIEWER: IT WASN'T, IT WASN'T ALL TROOPS, IT WAS—

[cut]

00:15:37:00

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SECOND STICK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SECOND STICK.

[sync tone]

Lecky: What about, what about the next year? Get not, not say anything about that?

INTERVIEWER: NOT, NO, LET'S JUST—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THAT WAS SECOND STICKS.

INTERVIEWER: —REST OF THE YEAR. ALL RIGHT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

Lecky: I've forgotten, did you want to ask—

INTERVIEWER: SO WHAT WAS IT LIKE, THAT, THAT SENIOR YEAR FOR YOU? ANYTHING THAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND?

Lecky: You know, I think the senior year is always a very special year. Being seventeen is a special time of life. And when I think of my senior year, most of my memories are, are, are the real fun ones: homecoming, cheerleading, research paper, the dances, the people you dated, and slumber parties; all the fun things that seventeen-year-olds, I think, should be doing. And even though we were making headlines, it was, it was a fun year.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT GRADUATION?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'M SORRY, I—

INTERVIEWER: OOPS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: —I HAVE A—I OUGHT TO CHANGE BATTERY.

[cut]

00:16:40:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO ASK YOU TO TELL US ABOUT GRADUATION DAY. WHAT IS IT A PRETTY DAY?

Lecky: Graduation Day was a pretty day and that was one of the concerns, because when you have an outdoor graduation, you want it to be a pretty day. I don't think it had entered my mind that there might be any kind of incident. One just thought in terms of hoping everything went well with a new kind of program. We didn't have a speaker, we had some kind of original composition, that was going to be sort of, I don't know, it was gonna be a, a talk, or a, a song. I never could figure it out, it was sort of an in-between kind of thing. But it went well. Right before graduation, it did come back to the forefront of my thoughts that Central was making news, again, because I received a phone call, and I was a class os—officer, and so someone from one of the major news networks wanted to interview me about what the

year had been like, sort of looking at Central nine months later. But instead of just giving the interview, I, being a child of the '50s, asked the superintendent if he thought it would be a good idea and following through with the strategy of the administration not to seek publicity and to sort of downplay the whole thing. Then he suggested that I not do it. And so I said no, and then promptly forgot it, and went on to making sure you had white shoes to go with the cap and gown, and so, you know, graduation went off without a hitch. I wish now that I had known that Dr. Martin Luther King was at my graduation, and I would have made it a point to have looked for him, but at that point, I didn't even know who he was.

00:18:50:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN ERNIE GOT UP? WAS THERE ANYTHING DIFFERENT ABOUT THAT, WHEN HE GOT UP FOR HIS DIPLOMA OR WAS IT JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE?

Lecky: I don't recall it being any different. So, in one sense, if I don't recall any difference, then maybe, at least, it seemed like everyone else. [pause] It seemed to me that Ernie, since he was the only senior, and that was my class, it seemed like he was an accepted member of the class and so we didn't want anything different to be made of it if it was going to come out in the class—in the papers as sensationalized.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU EVER TALK TO HIM? OR TO ANY OF THE LITTLE ROCK NINE?

Lecky: Ernie was the only one of the Little Rock Nine—

00:19:43:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Lecky: —that I ever talked to, and it was in trig class.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: JUST BARE—I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO MAKE IT. WE JUST BARELY RAN OUT.

Lecky: That's all right, it wasn't all—

00:19:50:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 122]

Lecky: How many more questions do you have? [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: ALMOST NONE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'RE ROLLING.

INTERVIEWER: LET ME BACK UP FOR A MOMENT HERE AND ASK YOU TO DESCRIBE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL FOR US. BIG SCHOOL?

Lecky: Little Rock Central is one of the most beautiful buildings and one of the prettiest schools and so when I think of it I have such, such nice thoughts about the school. But it is huge. And I moved here from Dallas, when I was a junior, and it was a rather large high school that I moved from, but nothing compared to Central. So when you go in and, particularly, if you go in at the bottom floor of one of the side, side entrances and you have a first class in that part of the building, and then your second class is maybe on the third floor at the other end of the building, that's when you really become aware of how big the school is. And, and how many students there are in the halls. Which is why, if you're the type of student who gets to class on time then you don't have a lot of time for milling and greeting and whatever else students, students tend to amble, today, instead of walk. But if you're at Central, you have to walk.

00:21:09:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU TOLD US THAT, THAT THE THING, ONE THING ABOUT THE SIZE WAS THAT IT MEANT THAT THE NINE KIDS WERE KIND OF NOT VISIBLE. THERE WERE TOO MANY OTHER KIDS AROUND. YOU JUST—YOU MIGHT GO A WHOLE DAY WITHOUT SEEING THEM.

Lecky: Central is such a large school, that when you have about two thousand students, nine blacks, one could easily go through the day, every day, without seeing a single one of the nine, any of the nine.

00:21:40:00

INTERVIEWER: WHEN YOU, WHEN—DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU SAW ANY OF THE BLACK STUDENTS? DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT THEY LOOKED LIKE? DID THEY LOOK NERVOUS? NORMAL? WERE THEY WELL DRESSED? DO YOU REMEMBER?

Lecky: I don't recall the first time that I saw any of the Little Rock Nine. I don't have any recollections.

00:22:02:00

INTERVIEWER: GENERALLY, WHEN YOU'D SEE THEM IN THE HALLS, DID

THEY LOOK LIKE THEY BELONGED THERE?

Lecky: When I would see any of the nine in the halls, then it would not be often, I mean, I cannot, I can—cannot recall seeing any of them, except Ernie, in the halls. And when I would see Ernie, I would say, hi, Ernie, but that was—one didn't have time to talk or it probably wouldn't have been—I mean, I didn't stand around the hall and talk to anyone. But it would be the, the smile, and the hi, and in that sense, is how I think that—what those of us who had the right attitude, if we had just done more, to be a support system for nine people who were in a new situation, and from their perspective, their not knowing what was going on in the minds of the other students, and yet we did not go enough out of our way to seek them out and to be a support system for them and that's what I would do over and I wish the administration, looking back, had encouraged some groups to do, to be a support system for some young people who really needed some help. Because being in the schools today, I'm so much aware of students who have needs, and they need someone to turn to and, I'm sure, that those students had some teachers that they felt comfortable with and I know that Mrs. Bates offered a lot of support for them. But there were a lot of us who could have and I wish we had.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU WANT TO STOP FOR A MOMENT? I REALLY—

[cut]

00:23:50:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLL SOUND AND SECOND STICKS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SECOND STICKS.

INTERVIEWER: DIDN'T FEEL LIKE YOU WERE UNDER ARMED GUARDS IN AN ARMED CAMP THAT YEAR?

Lecky: Central was in no way an armed camp that year from my perspective. It was a fun place to be, a happy place to be. I remember one of the days when we had the bomb threat and we had to spend, oh, it probably was minutes outside, but maybe it seemed like an hour and there was just a lot of fun conversation going on and I noticed a picture in the yearbook of our being outside, and I recalled why we were there, and yet, you might think a bomb threat sounds scary, but I don't even remember that being scary. I think we just saw it as an excuse to get out of class.

INTERVIEWER: THAT IS A PERFECT—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: GREAT.

INTERVIEWER: —PERFECT ANSWER.

00:24:48:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: AND LOOK AT YOUR TIMING.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND WE'RE CUT.

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE CUT.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:24:52:00

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