

**DISSERTATION**

**ONE INTERGENERATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY'S  
PARTICIPATION IN  
K-12 SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS**

**Submitted by**

**Wanda Beaman**

**School of Education**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Colorado State University**

**Fort Collins, Colorado**

**Fall 2008**

UMI Number: 3346477

Copyright 2008 by  
Beauman, Wanda

All rights reserved.

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform 3346477

Copyright 2009 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC  
789 E. Eisenhower Parkway  
PO Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

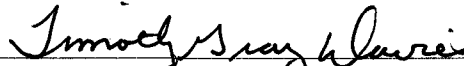
November 7, 2008

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY WANDA GREER BEAUMAN ENTITLED ONE INTERGENERATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY'S PARTICIPATION IN K-12 SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

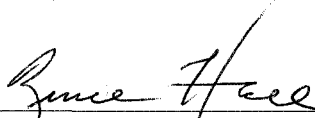
Committee on Graduate Work



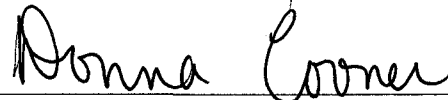
Clifford P. Harbour, J.D., Ed.D.



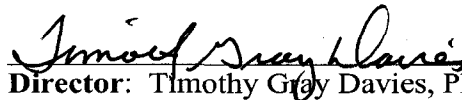
Timothy Gray Davies, Ph.D.



Bruce Hall, MSW



Advisor: Donna Cooner, Ph.D.



Director: Timothy Gray Davies, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION  
ONE INTERGENERATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY'S  
PARTICIPATION IN  
K-12 SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS

The goal of this narrative study was to hear the experiences of one intergenerational African American family's experiences with school choice options. The narrative stories were collected through face-to-face interviews with each participant, and all of the interviews took place in the participants' homes.

The three generations of the family consisted of nine members including the patriarch and matriarch, their two daughters, their grandchildren, and one son-in-law. At the time of the study the oldest member was 80 and the youngest member was 7. The participants discussed their school stories over a period of time beginning in the early 1930s and continuing through the early 1970s. During that time, the families lived in the southern United States, in the Midwest, and on the East Coast.

I did not attach expectations and outcomes to this study because my goal was to listen to the adults and to the children so that I could learn about their experiences and then share them with the community. My interest in this particular format came out of my own background as an educator and so part of this telling of educational experiences includes the story of my own family's educational journey.

Wanda Greer Beauman  
School of Education  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
Fall 2008

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends who had faith in me and who supported me as I worked to complete this study.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dr. Donna Cooner, my committee chair, and Dr. Timothy Davies, my methodologist, for their expertise and for their patient caring leadership. I thank Dr. Cliff Harbour and Dr. Bruce Hall for their insight and for their enthusiasm. I thank Dr. Don Quick for his warm, thoughtful encouragement.

And I give thanks and praise to my Lord for seeing me through this educational journey because through Him all things are possible.

## CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>NARRATIVE STORIES (CHAPTER FOUR).....</b>	<b>4</b>
Wanda’s Story .....	4
The Patriarch .....	31
The Matriarch .....	51
The Oldest Daughter.....	73
The Oldest Granddaughter .....	86
The Oldest Grandson .....	93
The Youngest Daughter .....	103
The Son-in-Law .....	131
The Youngest Grandson.....	149
The Youngest Granddaughter .....	155
<b>CHAPTER FIVE – OBSERVATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: CHAPTER TWO—LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>194</b>
School Choice.....	201
Charter Schools .....	205
Private Schools .....	206
Religious Schools .....	208
Home Schools.....	209
<b>APPENDIX C: CHAPTER THREE—METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES</b>	<b>214</b>
Significance of the Study .....	214
<b>APPENDIX D—BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>229</b>

## PREFACE

I have chosen to present this study in a format that allows me to share the data from the authentic perspective of the family members as they tell their stories. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews, which began with a study of the family patriarch in 2006, and concluded with the youngest grandchild in 2007. I have set the presentation so that it runs in this order: First, I have explained my own history and my own participation in the public school arena from kindergarten through 12th grade. This story also includes the school experiences of my immediate family members and my close ancestors who influenced our family over the past three generations. I then moved into the stories of the participant family grandparents, daughters, and grandchildren, along with information about the influence of their ancestors and extended family. My conclusion brings all of these stories together through looking at the core themes that were common to each generation.

The traditional elements of the dissertation are included in the following format. The significance of my study as it relates to the use of educational school choice is found in Appendix A. I have placed the review of the literature in Appendix B. And the qualitative narrative methodology is explained in Appendix C. The conclusion is presented through the identification and comparison of core themes that are shared by each generation.

This qualitative study has provided a chance for me to learn about some true-life experiences of the educational choices and opportunities of two intergenerational African American families over a period of time from the early 1900s through 2007.

There are 9 participants in the intergenerational African American family, and their ages range from 7 years old to 80 years old. Their individual stories provide a uniquely broad cross-section of academic opportunities that reveal their struggles to access resources, and their applications of knowledge and skills based on their educational experiences. It also gives a unique perspective of how educational influences were passed from generation to generation.

The school choice models outside of the public system that were selected by this intergenerational family include: charter schools, private schools, religious schools, and home schools. Charter schools are public schools of choice that have some exemptions from local and state regulations in order to provide more flexibility in operation and curriculum delivery than regular public schools. Private schools are schools sponsored and operated by individuals, corporations, or other organizations, and they are not funded by the state nor are they tied to public school restrictions and guidelines. Authorities in religious denominations generally sponsor religious schools, and the curriculum often includes instructions in the belief system of that particular religious sponsor. Home schools have varied curriculums and are conducted in the family's home with extended activities at libraries, museums, and other community institutions.

This study shows how these models are accessed and used by my family, and by this intergenerational family over the past eight decades. I will begin with my family's story so that the reader will be able to understand my perspective. Then I will move to the story of the selected participants.

## NARRATIVE STORIES

### Wanda's Story

I have a white book sitting on the shelf in my office, and it is simply titled "The Cleaver Family Heritage: A Configuration of Time." It is large by dimension compared to a novel or textbook, as it measures 9 inches x 12 inches, but it is even larger in value to me because it is a collection of the experiences, choices, opportunities, and accomplishments of five generations of my family. There are pictures, personal stories, and reproductions of legal documents, mini-biographies, and documentation of the expectations for achievement and success for future generations. Interestingly enough, the idea for this book began with my great second cousin who wanted to capture the family's history. She passed her information on to her son, who worked for many years trying to complete it. When he became gravely ill, he exacted a promise from his sister that she would finish it. When she completed the task in 1997, we had a family reunion where this wonderful legacy was made available to everyone who attended. I have carried pictures from that book in my mind's eye for many years. Those images portray the life achievements of my great grandfather and my great grandmothers, and they have created a lens through which I have viewed my personal goals and choices over the years.

That lens has helped me see the world the way I want it to be, and it has influenced me to make choices that have encouraged and supported me as I take that journey.

While writing the personal story of the intergenerational family in my dissertation project, I reflected on my own family's educational journey and decided to include a summary of it here in order to give the reader a broader picture of my experiences and

perspectives. I have included some historical, demographic information to give the full richness of how our family's educational choices were made, because I believe that the children of each generation should know the roots of their founding and the activities that have contributed to their development over the decades. I also believe that preserving the legacy of families through written narrative can add deeper understanding, deeper interest, and deeper inspiration for the next generation.

I feel compelled to begin with one of my most influential ancestors. He was born a slave, but grew up to be one of the leading Freedmen in East Texas. My great grandfather was the son of a Negro slave woman and a Caucasian man. He was born in 1848 at the height of slavery in the Old South United States. His name was Horney, Mobile Box, Red River, Cleaver, and his name reflects the place of his birth, which was on a boat called the Mobile Box that was floating on the Red River at the time he was born. He was commonly known as Horney C. Cleaver. His mother was Sarah Cleaver, an African American slave, and his father was Charlie Hobbs, a white slave owner. Much of the information I've learned about Rev. H. C. Cleaver came from family Bibles, news articles, pictures, and oral history that my father told us. I also recalled stories that were shared at family reunions, during summer vacations spent with my grandparents, and from listening to my cousins over the years. We don't have many details concerning the plantation in East Texas where my great grandfather lived with his mother, two brothers and a sister, but his father, Charlie Hobbs, did include Horney C. Cleaver in his will and left him with his own land and some other inheritances. These bequests made him one of the most prominent black men in East Texas, and after his death many

acquaintances came forward to pay tribute to his leadership and to his supportive involvement in the county.

In an article regarding Horney Cleaver's obituary, Mr. P. W. Walton described Rev. Cleaver as being intensely interested in the advancement of his race through the preparation of its youth. Walton noted that Rev. Cleaver was the first Negro to open a school and teach in Nacogdoches, TX, after the emancipation of the slaves, and the small cabin where he established his school was near Banita Creek in Nacogdoches. He was a minister of the gospel and intensely interested in the life of the church as well as in other phases of race growth and development. It was said that Rev. Cleaver exercised painstaking care in training his children to work, because he saw this training as a fundamental way for them to make their lives a success and a blessing.

Walton also notes that education had no greater friend and advocate than Rev. H. C. Cleaver. He served as a teacher, trustee, and strong advocate and promoter of educational facilities in keeping with the demands of the people in his community. Horney Cleaver received part of his education at Prairie View Normal School in Texas. The definite date of his attendance is not known... that school today is known as Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University, located about 46 miles east of Houston, TX. When three of his daughters... and one son.. attended the same school. In those days it was known as Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College. One granddaughter and a great grandson graduated from Prairie View after the college became a University, but many of his grandchildren were graduates of Prairie View College, receiving their bachelor's degrees and master's degrees there. Horney Cleaver had great pride in the school, and would have liked more of his children to attend.

However, for most of them, finding work, getting married and raising a family took precedence over higher education, (The Cleaver Family Heritage: A Configuration of Time p. 15)

Prairie View A&M University was founded in 1876, and it is the second oldest public institution of higher learning in the state of Texas. Horney Cleaver's children attended this black university because the laws of those days did not allow them to attend the white institutions.

#### *Lillie Cleaver*

We have very little information about my grandmother, Mrs. Lillie Cleaver. We know that she was the 10th of 13 children born to Horney Cleaver and Eunice Burrow. She attended public school in Nacogdoches, TX, for her elementary and secondary education. After attending Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College, she married Walter Cleveland Greer in December 1910, and they made their home in Center, TX. Her life there revolved around raising their three children, supporting church activities, and participating in numerous community programs.

#### *Walter Cleveland Greer*

W. C. Greer, my grandfather, was from a family of carpenters. His parents had been slaves, so his generation was the first to be able to work independently and to make personal choices about where to live and how to take advantage of the freedoms granted after the emancipation of slaves. He worked at the mill just across the tracks that divided the white and the Negro parts of town in Center, and his talents as a carpenter allowed

him to provide for his family so that W.C. and Lillie Greer were one of the most prominent Negro families in Center, TX.

#### My nuclear family

##### *Walter Cleveland Greer Jr.*

My father is the youngest of three children, and he attended a one-room schoolhouse in Center, TX, along with his brother and sister. After finishing high school, he was drafted into the Army where he served during World War II. When he was discharged, he went back to Texas to complete his bachelor's degree in industrial arts at Prairie View College. His bachelor's degree allowed him to teach at the local high school there, and he later took a job as an instructor for the Department of Defense at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, CO. He used his military training to teach courses in avionics, electronics, and weaponry to the enlisted men. He also authored several avionics career development courses.

Dad's brother, Dr. Booker T. Greer, was a dentist and an entrepreneur. As a life-long learner, he was always looking for ways to apply the experiences and training he received. He graduated from Mahare Medical College at 17 and went on to become an accomplished dentist and an influential community activist in Houston, TX.

Dad's sister, Massie Lee Greer Dix, was a teacher at the local elementary school in Palestine, TX, and was also a social activist in her community. She encouraged parents to send their children to school in spite of farming and ranching schedules, and she worked with civic groups to improve social and cultural conditions for African Americans in Palestine, TX.

*Shirley Bailey Marshall Greer*

My mother is the 10th of 11 children. She was born in Pueblo, CO and both of her parents died within a few years of each other, leaving her an orphan at the age of three. She lived with one of her older sisters for a while, but was then sent to the Colorado orphanage in Denver where she was raised until she was adopted at the age of 14. The children at the orphanage attended a church school on the grounds of the orphanage for elementary school, and then went to Denver Public Schools for middle school and high school. She was adopted at age 14 and moved with her new family to Pueblo, CO, where she graduated from a public high school.

My mom and dad met in 1943. They were married shortly after his discharge from the Army in 1945 and moved to Texas. Dad taught in the local high school and Mother attended a private institution, the Madame C. J. Walker School of Cosmetology, and worked in Dibil, TX, for a few years.

Like other African American families trying to find their way in the decades following World War II, my parents knew that education was a priority for moving forward, so they always emphasized school for their three children. They moved back to Colorado in 1950, and my dad took a teaching job with the Department of Defense. My mother attended the Madam C. J. Walker School of Cosmetology while she was in Texas. It was a private school that allowed her to begin a career in the local community. Later she studied with Dr. Justina Ford to receive her Colorado Licensed Practical Nurse certification. While she was continuing to raise her family, she went to school at Emily Griffith Opportunity School to work on registered nurse certification. This school was an

extension of the Denver Public School system. She later graduated from Metropolitan State College with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing.

*Walter and Shirley Greer*

My parents, my siblings and I have lived and attended school in Colorado off and on throughout the last 50 years. I have a twin sister and a brother, and we all attended public schools for our K-12 education. The elementary public schools that we attended were neighborhood schools, and by nature of the housing patterns in Denver, the schools were racially segregated in the 1950s and 1960s. During our high school years, we took public transportation because there were no schools within walking distance.

Getting on those buses to travel across town allowed us to see the differences between schools in different parts of the city. The discrepancy in school buildings and facilities between the neighborhood schools for African American families and the neighborhood schools for students in white neighborhoods was surprising. The school grounds in other neighborhoods looked nicer, the buildings were in better repair, and when we had the occasion to go inside we found that the books and equipment in the classrooms were more current and in better working order. Our family's participation in segregated public schools in Denver was controlled by the neighborhood in which we lived.

Additionally, our attendance in public school and not private schools or religious schools was controlled by our financial condition. While both of my parents worked, their earnings were devoted to providing our home, food, and clothes, and there was none left over for school tuition; therefore, we went to public schools throughout our entire K-

12 education. We were aware that our schools were primarily African American, but we were not fully aware of the reasons why. The Denver Public School (DPS) system was segregated and eventually came under court order for desegregation.

The petitioners, Keyes, brought about the actions that resulted in the desegregation order when they sued DPS for desegregation of the Park Hill area schools, and the core city area schools in Denver. The Supreme Court of the United States found that there had been deliberate racial segregation, and ordered relief of the situation (413 U.S. 189).

Justice Brennan delivered the opinion of the Court.

This school desegregation case concerns the Denver, Colorado, and school system. That system has never been operated under a constitutional or statutory provision that mandated or permitted racial segregation in public education. Rather, the gravamen of this action, brought in June 1969 in the District Court for the District of Colorado by parents of Denver schoolchildren, is that respondent School Board alone, by use of various techniques such as the manipulation of student attendance zones, school site selection and a neighborhood school policy, created or maintained racially or ethnically (or both racially and ethnically) segregated schools throughout the school district, entitling petitioners to a decree directing desegregation of the entire school district (Keyes et. al v. School District No. 1, Denver, CO, Supreme Court of the United States No. 71-507).

While I was personally unaware of this lack of choice while attending DPS schools as a student, those conditions effectively eliminated my family's ability to access school choice models within the system. And as I have learned through this research study, similar conditions affected the participant family's decisions about school choice several decades later.

By the early 1970s, the DPS system was under court-ordered busing for desegregation. By that time my brother, sister and I had completed our participation as students in DPS, and we had graduated and gone on to college. However, the blatant,

purposeful, intentional denial of access to the full menu of academic opportunities even in having a choice to attend any public school in DPS has interfered with, delayed, and in some cases stopped the successful academic achievement of friends, family, and classmates.

### *Ina*

Ina is my twin sister, and she was the most individualistic and vocal of our three children. Public school education did not work well for her, but there were no options such as charter schools or alternative schools available to meet her learning style at that time. Ina is a free thinker and learns best when she is allowed to explore options to facts, rather than just memorize and respond. She is an abstract thinker and would have benefited from a charter exploratory school, which allows students to learn by doing projects and applying curriculum through application. However, Ina's determination carried her through, and she did complete college and obtain advanced degrees. She extended the process for a period of 20 years before earning her bachelor's degree in social work. Her first college experience was at a small private school in northern Colorado. She left school after one year to marry and raise her family. After that she went back to complete her undergraduate work at University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), in Las Vegas, Nevada. Within three years she completed her Master of Science degree in social work, also at UNLV, and then she and her husband enrolled at the University of Phoenix and completed their EdD degrees in educational leadership.

## *Walter*

Walter is our younger brother. He was a gifted child, entering kindergarten when he was 3-1/2. School was interesting for him and he had no problem with the academic work or socialization with older children. But the regimented structure of the public school system did not meet his individual learning style needs. I believe that he would have benefited more from a Montessori-style model, which often lets students self-select their academic program through demonstrated interests and allows a somewhat time-free structure during the academic day. Or perhaps he would have thrived in a small, private school where students are grouped by ability, interest, and talent in order to allow self-pacing in achievement. I am not sure that those models were established in the United States, and I don't believe that our family would have been able to afford either one even if they had been available. Walter graduated from high school at 17 and then attended a small public college, where he majored in electrical engineering because he wanted to do the kind of work my dad had done. He had the same interests in electronics and expanded his analytical thinking skills to include computer engineering and programming.

He left school early to start a family and began working for IBM. After a few years he enlisted in the Air National Guard and continued his technical training in electronics. Though he did not obtain a degree, he has persevered with classes and specialized certification training in technology, with a special emphasis on computer programming and maintenance. His advanced studies have centered on computer engineering systems such as those used at IBM and at Cannon.

### *Johannes*

My husband, Johannes, took a different perspective on the priority of education, and did not pursue advanced degrees beyond his associate in general studies. His family's expectations were that all five of their children would finish high school and prepare themselves to be self-sufficient, contributing members in the community, and all of them have achieved that goal. Johannes went to neighborhood schools, participated in sports, worked at a variety of jobs, and graduated without falling into some of the traps of gangs, drug use, and problems with the police that many young African American males encountered growing up in Denver. Shortly after his high school graduation, he was drafted into the Army and stayed in the Reserves for 20 years before retiring. Most of his college level work has been accomplished through military training courses and advanced business certifications. His emphasis in moving forward has been in the area of industrial sales, where he has worked for over 30 years.

### *Wanda*

Compared to my brother and sister, I was considered the serious student, and I did almost everything I was told to do at school. My homework was done faithfully. There was never a thought of not doing extra credit assignments, and for me, following the rules was a priority. The public schools we attended had rigid attendance policies, strict dress codes, and regimented curriculum guidelines. I am a concrete learner, and the ordered, inflexible, rote-style programs in DPS provided the structure I needed for academic achievement. The public school structure worked well for me because I made a conscientious effort to fit into the mold. I controlled my interactions with my friends

because I didn't want to be singled out for misbehaving and wind up in the disciplinary system. I measured and weighed my choices about doing what was expected and achieving high grades because I wanted to avoid being labeled as a non-achiever. And I identified the behaviors that got me rewards because I wanted the favorable recognition. My choices allowed me to be placed in the "A" academic tract.

During the 1950s and 1960s, students were "tracked" in DPS schools, and once a certain behavioral group identified us at a certain academic level, or, we remained there year after year. I did well in that model, and I took some advanced classes. But when it was time for junior/senior college counseling, the guidance counselor told me not to worry about going to college. He told me to marry my boyfriend and start a family. This was in direct conflict to my parents' goal for me, which had always been that I go to college after graduation. I did some deep thinking about my counselor's discouraging advice, and the outcome was that I did go on to college with scholarship money left to me by my great aunt.

My preparation for college was consistent and perpetual. The message I received at home was that I should always do my best in classes so that I would have good grades, and those grades would qualify me for admission to college. Learning for learning's sake and enjoying the process was a secondary expectation, but the primary goal was to be prepared for the next higher education step.

My first college was a small religious private school in Kansas. Sterling College is sponsored by the Presbyterian Church USA, and the student body was around 600 the year I attended. I stayed for one year, and then needed to earn more money for school, so I returned to Denver and attended a public state school, the University of Colorado at

Denver part-time while I worked at the campus bookstore. After saving enough money, I transferred to the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) in Greeley, CO, where I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in education with an emphasis in biological studies; six years later I earned a Master of Arts degree in curriculum and instruction from UNC. I continued my graduate work at the University of Denver, a private institution, where I earned my Colorado administrative certification in education. And now I am completing my doctoral program at Colorado State University, a public institution.

### *Our Children*

Our three daughters, Shirelyn, Charlene, and Shaunda, attended public schools from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in DPS. They were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools during the time that the system was under court-ordered desegregation. Part of the application of that ruling was that African American and Hispanic students were bused to predominately white schools to achieve integration, while white students would be bused to predominately African American and Hispanic schools to achieve integration. Our girls would ride the bus for an average of 30 minutes to school each morning and another 30 minutes home in the afternoon.

Geographically, our neighborhood schools were paired with neighborhood schools on the other side of the city. The primary elementary grades were within walking distance of our babysitter. That was a comfortable arrangement because the presence of white students in the minority neighborhood school meant that the curriculum opportunities were upgraded from what they previously had been. But for upper elementary grades, our girls had to ride the bus an average of 30 minutes to school, and

30 minutes home each day. This cut down on the learning time, and for some students created disciplinary problems because of lack of supervision on the buses.

The busing plan allowed Shirelyn, Charlene, and Shaunda opportunities to expand their studies because DPS no longer tracked students, but we still faced some issues of equal access to some of the upper level programs within schools such as the Gifted and Talented Program, the Computer Magnet Schools, and the International Baccalaureate School. As an educator at DPS I was able to stay abreast of the curricular changes and the course advances in the district, and I made sure our girls were enrolled in the upper level programs.

Looking at our family's experiences in DPS from 1953 when I entered as a student to 1994 when our youngest daughter graduated provides a picture of how racial segregation has affected choice options for my family. I worked an additional nine years after Shaunda graduated from high school, and I saw how DPS came out from under the court order for desegregation and became a unified school district. Students returned to neighborhood schools, which were mono-racial in many cases with one racial ethnic group living in the majority of homes. This housing pattern might have had the effect of resegregating the neighborhood schools if DPS had not converted to a unified district. The unification allowed students to attend any school within the district if there were space available by grade level, and if parents could provide transportation to and from school. Many families in the schools where I worked during that time now had the permission of DPS to choose schools they wanted to attend, but most could not do so because they did not have transportation to send their students to schools out of the neighborhood.

This reflection of the patterns that changed and reformed over the decades clarifies for me why I have such a passionate interest in the opportunities that are available for families to participate in school choice options. I have experienced the process over time and have become aware of how the access to choice educational programs has been manipulated by social mores, and by systemic patterns, for my family and for the African American family in this study.

As a result of the insight I gained about our experiences in Denver, I understand now that many of the decisions I made for our girls about their elementary and secondary schools were subconscious. As an educator, I was able to draw on my involvement in the school system to learn about choices and options, and I made sure that we took advantage of the finest opportunities that were available.

When our girls got older and became more aware of our goals for them, they joined us in the decision-making process. In middle school they were old enough to help in the planning for their schooling after graduation. I emphasized they should find a college that had the program of study they wanted and that also had an environment that they thought would be comfortable for them. We took trips together to look at different campuses, and we were able to make informed decisions about where they would attend school for their undergraduate degrees and their post graduate degrees.

In writing about this study, I wanted to include their perspectives about how they saw the process of choice in education while they were growing up. I interviewed each one of them and asked what they remember about their perception of choice in education and what influenced their getting from one academic level to the next. So I have included

a quote from each one of them that gives her personal insight about things that influenced her in making decisions about education.

*Shirelyn*

Our oldest daughter, Shirelyn, went to a private historically black college for her undergraduate work, and then went to a public state university in Ohio for her M.S and PhD. The financial opportunities she earned through scholarships, fellowships, and grants allowed her to have both a private and public school education. She included this observation in her educational story.

My mom is an educator and a college graduate with an M.S. degree and she is currently pursuing her PhD. She has been the biggest influence in my educational career. She made sure that my sisters and I received plenty of conventional and unconventional educational experiences. In addition to school and related field trips, we were members of all sorts of clubs and organizations. Over the years, JETS, Rhorer Club, Vacation Bible School and the Ethnic College Counseling Center (ECCC) were just a few of the places that exposed us to the potential pathways to our futures. We would also do things like take trips downtown on the city bus so we would know how to ride and find our way if we ever needed to. We participated in dance classes, had instrument lessons, and saw plays and musicals. Attending college was always a goal. Everyone from my parents to my grandparents and aunts and uncles talked about me, my siblings and cousins going to college. It was an expectation and not an option.

I was aware of some of Shirelyn's reflections, but her statement about grandparents, aunts and uncles is especially powerful to me because it points to intergenerational influence in setting expectations and in finding support for reaching educational goals.

### *Charlene*

Our middle daughter, Charlene, went to a state-supported historically black university, North Carolina Central University, for undergraduate studies, and she attended Oklahoma State University, a state-funded public school, for her M.S. She titled her educational statement:

#### *From Diapers to a Master's Degree in Forensic Science*

My mother has stressed the importance of education for as long as I can remember. As soon as my sisters got home from school, my mother made sure that our homework was finished. There were several late nights or early mornings when she was by my side helping me, or waking me up to complete an assignment. Average grades on assignments were unacceptable. We were encouraged to do well in school and taught that 'Cs' were not good enough. I owe my success of being on the honor roll almost every semester and being enrolled in accelerated courses to this. Throughout my journey, I have learned that education is important to reach my goals. Also, I've learned that through "working smart" and remaining focused, anything is possible. I am grateful to have a mother who is an educator who recognized the value of education and instilled it in her children.

Charlene and I have some similarities as students. Her understanding of what to do to succeed and how to move forward in school became part of our family infrastructure. We both finished our master's degrees at the age of 30, and it made a special educational twin year for us.

### *Shaunda*

Our youngest daughter, Shaunda, also attended Bennett College for her Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. She has worked in mental health care and also in commercial architecture and design since graduating in 2000. She is more analytical than spontaneous, and her comments here are succinct as well as revealing.

The person who had the most influence in my life has been my mother. From the time that I was old enough to understand school and the concept of education, my mother has stressed their importance. My mother was an educator in the Denver Public School system for over 30 years. Because of her constant interaction with children and young adults, we were often exposed to and informed of the latest issues affecting African American students and education. We were taught at a very young age that there will always be obstacles in life, but that working hard and working smart can overcome them. My mother also taught us to look at the broader picture and to strive for excellence. By this statement I mean, don't always take things at face value; there may be more to learn or gain from any given situation.

My mother also understood the importance of exposure. We traveled to different parts of the country at an early age to learn the differences of cultures and lifestyles. She also insisted that we attend a historically black college or university located on the East Coast because she knew that the culture of growing up in the predominantly white culture of Denver, CO, would not adequately fortify the history of our culture.

I am very grateful to my mother for her vision and her strength. I attribute my success in my life to her guidance.

Shaunda was the most resilient of our daughters. She has always been a risk taker and she feels that she has a good foundation for whatever she wants to do next. I feel that she has been influenced by following her sisters' leads as well as by my guidance.

Raising our daughters and considering their education was an intentional and purposeful activity. They have been, and continue to be, good students, and they are comfortable in their current lifestyles. Each of them has a good job, they have their own homes, and they feel that they have found a niche in society where they can contribute and be rewarded.

## My personal view of educational opportunities

Looking back on my teaching and administrative career in DPS from 1971 through 2003 when DPS was under court order for desegregation, I have had an epiphany experience. As an adult I can look at a segregated school system that I participated in as a student for 12 years, and then, as a teacher and school principal, I can see the same system as it operated for 20-plus years under court-ordered desegregation. I believe that this coming full circle, figuratively speaking, has given me an emotionally tainted view of the possibility for African American and other minority families to have fair access to quality schools for their children in the Denver system.

I mention my epiphany experience here even though this project does not allow me to expand on the phenomenon of school segregation more fully because it is too complex to include at this time. It does, however, seem to be the basis of limitations in the case of the intergenerational family in this study as well as it was for my family. The fact that my family was not able to go to choice schools, and that the patriarch of the subject family was aware of the opportunities of choice schools, creates a bridge in the experience of educational options in our parallel stories. Perhaps the subject of school segregation could be the focus of other studies relating to school choice opportunities for African American families or for other ethnic and racial minority families.

As an African American woman, I have embraced the opportunities that have come my way during my career in education. I had chances to move up by taking classes designed for leaders who were looking for greater opportunities for success. On one occasion I took classes in how to design and create middle schools instead of junior high

schools. My participation in this pilot program gave me insight into how systems are planned, implemented, and changed within the public school system. By sitting on various boards such as the State Accountability Board and participating in the Black Alliance for Educational Options, I gained a broader perspective of programs that were available to different groups of students and parents. By working with professional and community groups such as the Society for Independent Teachers and Parents, the Association of School Principals, and Jack and Jill of America Inc., I was allowed to stay in touch with the heartfelt needs and concerns of parents and student.

I was surprised after attending a school district meeting when one of my father's friends came to me and said, "You're Greer's daughter, aren't you?" Yes, I am. "Well, we've been watching you and we think you would be good in administration." This comment surprised me, and also said to me that I was not really in this journey of advancing my career all-alone. I found that people, some of whom I really didn't know, had goals for me, and that those goals were similar to my own goals. It was a good feeling, and it was a validation of what I thought my potential was. It was also a verbalization of the ideal that one generation still looks out for and exerts some influence on the next generation, even for people who are outside of direct family relationships.

I did go from teaching to being a student advisor, assistant principal and principal in the same school system. The challenges I experienced became opportunities to learn about people and opportunities to influence the school system from the inside. Those challenges also shaped my thinking and my perspective about how to be more effective in informing the students when I taught, and for helping the parents with whom I worked. I

would like to point out two of those challenges to give a deeper understanding of my journey.

On one occasion, I was being considered for a position on the School Improvement and Accountability Committee (SIAC). I was the only black teacher on the ballot, and after the tally was taken, I had not been elected. My disappointment was deepened when one of the tellers came to me and said, "I just want you to know that they changed the vote. You won, but they wanted the other person, so they changed your numbers." I reported this conversation to the principal, and he called the tellers into his office for a discussion. They admitted their actions and the correct outcome was announced. When asked why they changed the vote, the answer was that they had never had a black SIAC member before.

Several years later I was applying for an assistant principal position, and after the interviews were over I was told that I had done very well, better than the other candidates, but that somehow there was not a position for me after all. I continued in my teaching assignment for the remainder of the year. And just three weeks before the beginning of the next school year, without any further applications or interviews, I was given an assistant principal position. This process may have evolved because of the networking I did and because of the people I met in the course of my work. But more probably it had to do with the unwritten processes and procedures within the district. At any rate I believe that the connectional relationships helped move me forward.

My promotion at that time was due to several factors. One was that I had created a goal for myself, and took classes and attended training programs to learn as much as I could. Secondly, I met people who helped me move up by making me aware of various

opportunities as they became available. Thirdly, I was aware of the changing political and racial climate and I worked hard to make my colleagues more aware of equality issues when decisions were being made about hiring staff and about supporting students who were striving for more access in school programs.

What I've learned is that the wheels of progress turn slowly and sometimes stop, but being skilled and prepared allowed me to stay in the game. And I've tried to pass that along to my daughters, my students, and the parents with whom I have worked. I've retired from my educational career now, but I still carry my perspective. I find that I am still involved in personal learning and that I am still studying the processes and the environments for educating children and families.

When I began my PhD program, I was interested in working with adult learners. I chose this particular focus of study because many of our parents came to me while I was a principal of a small elementary school to ask for help. They wanted to be able to work with their children at home, and to assist them with their studies. These parents felt uncomfortable and unfamiliar with the academic material, and some of them felt that they were inadequate to help their students with homework because they had not been successful in school themselves. Their desire was to provide as much assistance as possible to their children so that they could be better prepared to succeed in school than they had been. And the specific request they made of me was to help them learn, so that they could help their children learn.

I was able to initiate a few programs such as an after school English language class for parents, and we sponsored specific theme nights where students and their parents would work on math together. We also had family read-in nights where moms

and dads came with their students in their PJs and read favorite books from the school library. But there were other needs to be addressed that had a more specific adult focus. I initially planned to open an adult tutoring facility, or teach in a community college where I could address specific adult learning strategies.

As I worked toward the goal of teaching adults, another opportunity presented itself in the form of my being able to open a private school for underserved students. This was the school voucher movement in Denver that was established under state law in 2003. The use of vouchers was proposed as a method to allow parents to send their students to a school of their choice using state allocated educational funds. In Denver, the proposed voucher plan consisted of allowing students from low-income families, or students attending schools that were rated unsatisfactory on state accountability tests, to obtain a voucher and take it to the school of their choice whether public or private. So with the possibility of having tuition money provided by vouchers, I found that I could pursue my interest in opening a school for elementary students.

I worked with several educational partners and completed the application process for the state, the school district, and with the Internal Revenue Service, so that we would be ready when the legislature considered the proposal for vouchers in Colorado. It passed in the legislature but it was devastating when a challenge was raised by the school district and the teachers' union, and the Colorado Supreme Court decided the voucher law was unconstitutional because it took away local control.

With that ruling we lost the funding for our school, and my dream for a private school is on hold again for now. But I decided that I could continue to pursue one aspect

of that program, which was school choice options for families, specifically, African American families and students.

So my focus moved from creating a specialized school for underserved students to looking at how some of those students and their families made choices from the menu that currently exists. That menu includes public schools, charter schools, private religious schools, and home schools. I've reviewed these school models as they are defined in the literature, and then I've taken the specific experience of one intergenerational African American family as they made choices from this menu.

## Prologue

I brought the previous information forward in order to show how I came to the next steps in my journey in discovering how the matter of school choice options had worked for two African American families.

All that I had learned through my experiences was in the forefront of my thinking when I met the patriarch of the family. Rev. Cornelius Thomas came to our church as a temporary supply pastor because our former minister had been called to active duty as an Army military chaplain. I had spoken with pastor and his wife several times during the previous six months. Some of those conversations were about the private school that I wanted to open, and the problems that were surfacing because a district court judge had overturned Colorado's school voucher program, saying that it illegally took away local control of education. I had shared my plans and my concerns with Rev. Thomas' wife, Esther, and she expressed an interest in helping in any way she could. She was also interested in having her grandson attend the school as one of our first students.

Rev. and Mrs. Thomas were familiar with private schools as they had helped their daughters select small private schools when they lived in Boston. I asked Rev. Thomas if he could support the idea of our church building being used to house a small private elementary school, and he replied that there were certainly some possibilities for a venture of that kind.

We talked about the Colorado Opportunity Contract Pilot Program that Governor Owens signed into law in April 2003, and Rev. Thomas said that he was familiar with the concept of students being able to have choices and options when going to school. He and his wife lived on the East Coast when his daughters were growing up, and they made

intentional choices to send them to alternative schools outside of the public school system.

As I listened to him describe some of the conditions of the schools, and of the neighborhoods in Chicago and in Boston, I was intrigued. I wanted to learn more about the journey that he and his wife took as they ferreted out the best options for schooling for their daughters, Ruth and Stella, and I felt a connection with what I had been trying to create by opening a small school for underserved students.

Rev. Thomas described the school that Stella chose when it was time for her to go to high school. He and his wife had made financial sacrifices so their daughters would not have to go to the neighborhood schools that were in some turmoil because of the civil rights movement that was occurring in 1960s. Some of the schools in the area were not in good physical repair, and the books and other materials were sorely outdated. In some instances the students had to ride the buses to school, and there had been some violence with fighting, brick throwing, and threats. Rev. Thomas said that he and his wife did not want their daughters to go through that kind of experience, so they sent them to private schools that were smaller and focused on education rather than being focused on the upheaval that was taking place in the public schools.

I considered the options I had since I was not going to be able to open a school, and I thought about the stories that Rev. and Mrs. Thomas told me regarding decisions they made as to where their daughters went to school. And I considered the stories they shared about what they wanted for their grandchildren's education. As all of these personal stories came together, I began to see the possibility for this study.

My original goal had been to find a way to help students and their families learn about options for obtaining an education and about having options where they attended school. One way of doing that was to show how one intergenerational African American family already had taken that journey and been successful as a result of their decisions.

So I conducted interviews with three generations of the Thomas family. I began by interviewing Rev. and Mrs. Thompson. I then interviewed their oldest daughter Ruth and her children Rachel and Wilbert. Then I interviewed their youngest daughter Stella, her husband Samuel, and their children Emmanuel and Carolina.

## The Patriarch

From time to time people have come into my life and have left their footprints on my mind, and sometimes in my spirit. Rev. Cornelius Thomas was one such person. He is the patriarch of the intergenerational family in this study. By stature he has a medium build and is tall, being well over 6 feet. His stance is straight and proud, and he carries his age of 80 years with joyful dignity. There is humor and a touch of challenge in his dark brown eyes that are warmed when he smiles, and the deep rich ebony of his skin glows with energy.

I first met him at our church when he came to serve in a temporary position. I was curious about him, and I had no idea about the extra treasures he would bestow to the church community and to me beyond the sermons and spiritual exchanges as part of his role as pastor. His tenure with us was a brief two years, and during that time he shared many of his beliefs about the scriptures, about our church's role in the spiritual community, and about our role as the only black Presbyterian congregation in the 10-state region of the Rocky Mountain Synod. He challenged us to think about what it meant to be representatives of the African American race in this place and in this time. While doing interviews for this study I learned that one of his primary beliefs was that all of us had a responsibility to be present and to be strong representatives for African Americans in every life activity, especially when it came to taking of advantages of social and educational opportunities.

Another theme that was entwined throughout Rev. Thomas' work was that he believed that we as individuals, and also as a collective, always must be mindful of who we are in this world, and of what our roles and responsibilities are while we are here. His

perspective was that we should be mindful of opportunities that come along, and that we should be prepared to respond to them in order to better ourselves. He believed that we should leave our families and the world better off because of our choices and because of our participation in life's opportunities. And as I discussed earlier, Rev. Thomas' family's experiences with school choice became an opportunity to share some real life activities with the broader community.

In preparation for this study, I had several conversations with Rev. Thomas and with his wife, Esther. They both agreed to help me.

Rev. Thomas became ill toward the end of his work at our church, and he decided to retire because of his health. He already had left his position before I sat down with him to begin planning for the pilot study, and we decided to conduct the interviews at his home.

During our first session I asked Rev. Thomas to begin by sharing his earliest memories about learning. I wanted to know about his awareness of how he started his formal and informal education. He smiled and chuckled a little at the warm memories.

I think one of the earliest things that I recall is grandmother M. She gave me a 'thing-a-ma-jig', a round thing with letters on it with a row in the middle of it and you put the correct letters in, and you could put the correct letters in and you could spell things, and I must have been 4 or 5 years old. And that stands out in sharp relief in terms of my learning experience and I got that machine, toy, it was a toy, but a learning toy, so if I was 4 or 5 years old, it had to be 30 or 31 or 32,33, well not 33 because that was when I began first grade, but that was my earliest.

And the second thing that stands in sharp relief was that in the first grade, and it was an all black school there in the hills of Kentucky. Mrs. Miller, no kin to us, but Mrs. I. H. Miller had been my mother and daddy's teacher in that same school, but I remember her showing me what my name looked like on the board, She brought each one of us up and showed us, this is your name and this is how you spell your name, well not how you spell it, but this is what it looks like, but these were two of the early experiences I remember. That's going back a long time.

One valuable element about this retrospection is that it shows the vividness of Rev. Cornelius' memory. His presentation almost painted a picture of the spelling toy that his grandmother gave him. His earliest recollection of learning is all about a family process where one generation actively taught the next generation. Rev. Thomas' expression that his memory stands out in sharp relief shows how deep this experience was, and how it has influenced his being excited about learning throughout his life. Another powerful image was formed when he talked about seeing how his name looked when it was written on the board. That statement demonstrated how he connected his self esteem to his excitement about learning. That connection was conveyed to me as much in his intense expression and tone of voice.

During that first interview, we also talked about the environment of learning during his elementary and secondary years. In describing the physical environment of the school Rev. Thomas told about a setting that was reflective of rural schools in the 1930s and 1940s.

Well, I would say that in the school that I referred to in the earlier commentary, the school was not kindergarten, but first grade thorough 12 in one building because all the black folks went to that school. And you had, if I remember correctly, you had the first grade with Mrs. M. and half of the second grade and then in the second grade I went to another room. Mrs. B. and half of them were still in that first grade room but it was no longer Mrs. M., Mrs. M. was no longer there, it was Mrs. T. and uh and you could learn, especially if you were in the class where the class was a year ahead of you, you could listen and watch what they were learning and you could wind up a little ahead if you wanted to. And I always did that, I always listened to what was going on especially in those grades, let's see, one and two then two and three. I had another Ms. B., I was the only one in there, I mean we were the only ones in there and then in the four, It was all four and half the five so you could learn a lot about the five. When I got to fifth grade I went to another room and H. M. M., my aunt, was my teacher and I was a fairly good student. I was a good student in fourth and fifth grade. I was a good student. Yes, yes, yes! School was exciting you know when you read, what was it Tom and Jerry, ah Dick and Jane, those little white children playing on the scooters and what not. They were meaningful for us because we could learn how

to read. Well, I got A's and B's and it was important that you got A's and B's because you had to take that home.

These portrayals laid out the parameters of the physical building space of the schools and of the homes and businesses of their small town. The laws of segregation and the racial climate set boundaries and limitations for the way Rev. Thomas' family could live and for the way they could access the educational resources that were available. The community was all black, and one durable aspect was that in spite of segregation the teachers expected all of the students to learn and achieve to their highest potential. They supported them so that they could reach those goals.

The schools that were available to the students in 1931 were public schools, and segregation was still a strong part of the social climate in the southern states of America. We discussed where Rev. Thomas' family educational goals came from, and we discussed how they were shared from one person to the next, and from one generation to the next.

For my family it was important for us to be learning. There were three of us and we had to be doing our homework. And we lived in a shotgun house, with a light bulb in the center, and we had to do our homework at night.

Rev. Thomas' family set the expectation for learning and for high achievement, and they instilled each child with the responsibility to gain as much as he or she could from their educational opportunities. The structure to support those expectations was put into place at home, but there were also enrichment activities in addition to the homework and the regular school curriculum. Rev. Thomas told me that there were some events that came as unexpected opportunities to move forward. One of those particular happenings

supported both his educational advancement as well as his social advancement when he was in high school.

One of the highlights of my life was that I was able to be a delegate in 1944 or 1943 to the national convention of the NAACP in Chicago. It was the first time I had ever been above the "Cotton Curtain" to go to Chicago. We went to Chicago and Mrs. C, and who was the other person, somebody else, and I was 16. Boy!! That was the biggest thrill.

This trip was an important activity in his educational development because it opened a door to new opportunities outside of his small community. Leaving the segregated boundaries of his hometown allowed him to interact with people from around the nation and that experience opened his mind to new ideas and possibilities in his future. Later in the interview he talked about going back to Chicago for his seminary education.

We backtracked a little and I asked about educational traditions in his family; I wanted to know how choices were made about the schools that he and his siblings attended. He gave a great deal of credit to his grandmother who directly shaped his thinking and provided a foundation for him to make decisions for his own family later on. He gave me a look into his relationship with his grandmother and her influence on him.

Grandmother M., my grandmother's mother, had been a slave you know, and that was a big thing. Well, she was my grandmother, I was her only grandson, now you know where I stood, and uh she was 4<sup>th</sup> grade educated. Now grandmother M. around the corner had been a teacher and had taught some of the 'freed men' down in Alabama. She'd gone to Knoxville College and Knoxville College was a Normal school then in the 1890s.

And so I had that experience around the corner, grandmother M had taught school at Wytompka, I've forgotten the name, in Alabama before she married granddaddy. And then she married my grandfather. Who was a coal miner and they moved here was from Knoxville. He was from Knoxville, and she was from the Knoxville area, and they moved over to Kentucky so that he could work in the mines, and she stayed home and had all these babies. Had nine children. But still in the middle of that, education was important. Aunt H was the oldest and they

sent her to Knoxville high school and college. And my daddy was second and he was the only one out of the nine who didn't go. It was no question. You know my daddy had finished high school. My mother didn't finish she dropped out as a junior.

Rev. Thomas saw his aunts and his uncles as role models. He knew that it was possible to go to college because all eight of his father's brothers and sister finished college, and he knew that he was expected to take that path too. While we were talking, Mrs. Thomas found pictures of his grandparents and brought them to the table. As Rev. Thomas looked at the pictures, he shared that at one point he was planning to work in the coalmines just like his grandfather did, but the war, and some very specific family decisions about college, changed those plans and he never even set a foot in the mines.

It was one of those things that happened about education. The war began in '41, so I was a freshman in high school, and in the next couple of years being in the service became an alternative for some of my peers. Going into the Army. My buddy W. when we were sophomores, he told me 'I'm going to go into the Navy'. I says what? I couldn't understand that. And then the next year, my classmate J. said he was going to join the Army; then my junior year my buddy E. And when the war came people began to migrate north to Detroit and Ohio and places like that. And I remember one time when we were trying to get my mother to say we ought to go up North so that we could get jobs. And my mother said no we're staying right here. And that was the best decision we ever made. We'd have been a different class of folks.

But when the war came my buddies went to the Army and the Navy, but that wasn't an alternative for me. It wasn't an alternative, and we just knew that I would go to college. We talked about Kentucky State, and we didn't talk about Knoxville College as much, and it's much closer over in Tennessee, its only 50 some miles, but it was a little more expensive. But we knew that I would go to college.

This microscopic look at how his family followed specific educational paths is important to this study because it shows how powerful the influences were on Rev. Thomas' peers and on the generations of his family. There is also significance here in the

fact that this family had the ability to choose schools they wanted to attend after completing their K-12 education even though segregation was still in place in many areas. Some of the colleges and universities were considered because of the curricula they offered. Some were considered because earlier generations of the family had attended there. In some cases the schools were considered because of their proximity to the family's home. Each of these considerations is a demonstration of how school choice options were being accessed in the 1940s and 1950s. So these are examples that indicate that early on there was an awareness of using school choice in this family and Rev. Thomas continued to build on this awareness when he started his own family.

Rev. Thomas did go to college at Kentucky State University, a public four-year university, and the factors that influenced his school choices at that time were broader and less family oriented. There were financial concerns for his family because his sister was in college at the same time. So he dropped out to teach school and to help the family with finances. Then he was drafted into the Army during the Korean War and his education was put on hold again. I asked if he ended up at Knoxville College, "No, Kentucky State and then after the Army I went to Talladega." In explaining the chronology of his college years he said,

I dropped out at the end of two years [Kentucky State]. See, I had to drop out because there was not money enough for me to go and for my sister to go. So I had to drop out and work. See my father became an alcoholic, and my mother was doing maid work, and we didn't have money, so it was my turn to help in the process, and so I dropped out. And taught school in a one-room school back in the hills of Tennessee. I did that for two and a half years. And then came back home in a few months, and the Korean War was going, and I went to the Army, I was drafted. And it was during that period, during that period in the Army, because of some experiences, that I made up my mind to go to a different school with a different reputation; Talladega College in Alabama.

Rev. Thomas' explanation of how he dealt with the financial shortfall for his sister's college tuition is an example of how his family stepped in to help one another achieve their goals of graduating from school. He took his turn to work so that she could study, and he made the sacrifice in stride. This ethic of sacrifice and support became part of his life as he raised his own children. It was another example of how one generation influenced another.

Another event in his life that influenced his choices in education was his Army experience. It became one of those life-changing journeys, both educationally and spiritually. He had not enlisted as a way out of the segregated situation in Kentucky as some of his classmates did, but the political situation did cast its net over him and he was drafted. I asked him to tell me a little about the Army experience and how it changed his goals.

Well, when you go into the Army, when you're drafted, I was drafted at the time, and you may have been reading about the furor between Truman and MacArthur. MacArthur wanted to go bomb China, and I was a draftee somewhere in California, they had taken us to California, and all of us cheered when Truman fired McArthur because we didn't want to go to China!!!

And then the war in Korea kept going and we were shipped to Korea after, just very inadequate training and what not. And a lot of my buddies who were in the war earlier were killed because they were taken into outfits where they had to be in combat. But I was in an ordinance outfit, and when I got to this outfit, it had been an all-black outfit at Fort Knox, and when I got there they had begun the rotation, and me with two years of college, I was the second best educated enlisted man in that outfit. The other guy was an Ohio State man, and so I had a good job. Kind of a job, an office job in the motor pool, and keeping records over the vehicles and what not.

And during that Army period I began to see the inhumanity of what people were doing to each other. And what we were doing to Korea, even those that were our allies. And you know it was mind-boggling. And it was there that I began to struggle. And after going through the notion that I would continue to be a teacher, I knew that I would get out of the Army and finish college. I knew that I was going to do that. I decided to go into the ministry.

So I came home, and I was discharged in August of '52. But before I was discharged I began to inquire to schools about finishing my bachelor's work. And I'd written to Ohio State and I'd written someplace else, but I heard about Talladega College long before, so I wrote to them. And they answered right back and said that I could be accepted.

So I got out of the Army, and went home in August, and school was starting the first of September, and shared with the family that I was going to Alabama to go to school. Well the people didn't, there was only one family, black family, in my town that knew about Talladega. And my mother said why don't you go to Berea? Berea had opened up for black folks then. Berea opened up in '49 or '50 after they'd closed in the early 1900s. And I said no. I didn't want to go to a white school. And ah, my other family from Carolina, they said why don't you go to Johnson C Smith? No. I don't want to do that. I'm going to Talladega. "Oh, Tuskegee." No. Not Tuskegee, Talladega. Oh, Tallahassee.

They knew Tallahassee. The coach at Tallahassee had grown up in with my parents. Jake Gaither, and so Tallahassee was known. Well, you want to go to Tuskegee? No! (we both laugh) They hadn't heard of Talladega except for one family. So I said, you know I'm going. I'm 24 years old. And I was paying my own way. And so I went to Talladega. And it is a small predominately black school.

This exchange between Rev. Thomas and his family gives an insight into how the family experiences were passed from one to another, and it is an expression of how strong the expectations were for meeting the family traditions. Rev. Thomas' family had traditional schools that the young people went to for higher education. They were schools that were attended by aunts and uncles, and they were schools that the family knew would train Black students. These were schools that the family trusted to help them give their students the support they needed to reach their higher academic goals. The conversation and suggestions expressed here further demonstrate how one generation tried to affect and direct another.

In spite of the recommendations and requests to the contrary, Rev. Thomas held to his decision and enrolled at Talladega College. While he was completing his

bachelor's degree, he made some adjustments in the direction he wanted his life to take. He considered his family's wishes as he began to bring his own interests to the forefront. His attendance at Talladega was one of those profound life episodes that he could identify as making an incontrovertible mark on his life. And this pivotal event was a direct result of his intentional decision to choose a different school that he felt offered the curriculum he wanted, and would give him the environment he wanted for his training. He explains:

And it changed my life. You know. It changed the whole direction of my life! Going to that school. But you know that was a decision I had made. I won't say that the Holy Spirit wasn't in it but I majored in psychology with a minor in religion. And I opened my mind to a near classical education with a little bit about art and a little bit about music, cause that part of the curriculum at that school, that I hadn't had before. You know, I learned about who the artists were, and who the painters, the great painters were, and things like that, you know, became a part of my life ever since.

This passage provides a statement of Rev. Thomas' awareness of the consequences that come from deliberate choices that are related to education. In this case his choices worked to provide him with the new curriculum to open his mind and to help round out his training. He discovered information that he had not had access to before and it was a leap forward into a new world of languages, subjects, and ideas. This study points to several examples like this one where the student gains insight by being exposed to elements at the school of choice. Those elements became unexpected benefits. He continued to explain the impact of going to the school of his specific choice. He introduced the men who guided him and who opened new doors for him as he was deciding about the next step in his education and in his career.

And it was through the professor that I had, who has since died, that I had, he knew I was going to seminary. And I just thought I would just go to Baptist seminary somewhere. But then they began to talk about the Congregational

church. And that was the affiliation of that school. And the professor, my college president, was an ordained man in the Congregational church; the first black president of a school. And this other professor was Anglo, but he had gone to school in Chicago and they encouraged me to apply to Chicago Theological for my theological education.

Well, I did that, and I also applied in Boston to Andover Newton, and I also applied to the school in Rochester, the Baptist school in Rochester. But the school in Chicago, I heard from them, and I knew that I would be near kinfolks, I had kinfolks there, and I wanted to go to a big city. Having gone to a small school out in the woods, I wanted to go to the city, and Chicago was it, and ah, so I went to Chicago. And enrolled in September on the big University of Chicago campus.

There were four schools all there together. And it was different, you know. There were some things that I was behind in. I didn't know much and they required certain achievement to get in and I achieved high levels in testing before I went in the arts, but in terms of some of the subjects in the social sciences, natural science, I was down, because I had never had them. I had biology at Kentucky State, and I hated it. Yes, you know, frogs, and worms, and whooo! So I had to take a course in undergrad there at the university of Chicago. Biology, and one in social science you know, to make up because I was behind. And I took that biology course, and I went, it was in the summer of '55, and we started dissecting fetal pigs and things, and I said No. This is not what I need to become a full human being. But the social science course; I studied under Riesman, you know, one of the Lonely Crowd and all that. That was very helpful. And so you know, I struggled with a couple of the courses. But I made it through. I made it through.

The choices Rev. Thomas made about the schools to attend and the specific parts of the country they were located in governed the path of his life from that point on. His family had a vision for his college education based on their previous experiences, but he wanted to go in another direction and knew that he would be able to do so because of the exposure to new ideas, and new options that were presented to him while he was serving

d in the Army. One of those options was a new awareness of his concern about what was happening to the African American race in the United States, and that awareness triggered a desire to do something to help resolve the negativism and the inhumane treatment that was going on.

My dream in terms of my life when I first enrolled at the seminary was to get an education and then go back south to serve a local church, as a preacher. That was my dream.

Now then, getting mixed up with the Congregational church that was different. I still could have gone south, but it was different because there I was in the church, and the church at that time had 1,400 members. It was a large church. It was almost a mega-church then, it's about dead now, but running and working with those folks in that denomination, it was different from what I had expected, you know, in the Baptist church. And so I said, okay, I'm going to affiliate with this denomination. So I joined it, and not only was I working in the church, I was still a Baptist, but then I joined the denomination, and began to go through the denominational requirements that would lead to ordination. Then the pastor and I began to talk and why didn't I join that staff as the assistant minister. And I said okay. And then I was ordained there in June '58. And installed there at the same time as the assistant minister. You know, working with youth, doing the education, doing the Christian education, doing the youth work. And doing part of the pastoral care.

And I began working at a Congregational church in Chicago doing my field work. My fieldwork for the first quarter I was doing survey work for the Baptists in a community that was changing from white to black, and I was doing interviews of families who had just moved into that community. And that lasted just a quarter, and I had to continue to do fieldwork, and I went to this Congregational church. And then began to work with some of the youth stuff and doing my studies....It was about what they had endured and all of that. Cause there had been some problems with the whites giving up their homes and all of that. There was a little bit of violence, but not much.

This passage contains two specific themes that were repeated in later sections of the study. One theme was that when you have a dream, it guides the decisions you make for yourself and for your family. A second theme was that people are sometimes required to respond to the influences of the educational and social environment around them. Rev. Thomas accepted the suggestions that his professors made, and as a result he moved into new positions in the ministry. These were positions that he had not considered before. He also took advantage of the new opportunities that were made possible because of his earlier decisions. He did not return to the South as he dreamed, but he did continue with

his goal of serving in the ministry by staying in the Midwest and on the East Coast and helping with civil rights issues there.

During his last year of seminary, Rev. Thomas had some direct experiences with racism within his own seminary while he was writing his dissertation. He said that he began to be sensitive to different things that were going on with the race problem and with the civil rights movement. This expression of his individuality is important in this study because it shows how Rev. Thomas began to exert his independence through his schoolwork. And this expression of his independence continued to be a central part of his thinking and of his behavior as he raised his family.

I began to articulate it in a different way. Not that I was not sensitive before, but I began to articulate it in a different way. And when I wrote my ordination paper in 1958. This was after King. You know King had done stuff in '55, and all the furor. There were some people, some fellow clergy, after I read my paper, who said I was becoming bitter because I brought up the race issue. And I couldn't understand that with all of the other stuff that was happening in other parts of the country. I couldn't understand that, but I stood my ground.

Well, my stance was that blacks had to begin to be conscious of who they were. And that's what my paper was about. You know, consciousness. We didn't say consciousness then. But it was that movement that was taking place in the world and in my own journey, and they felt that stance. You know, you emphasize your Blackness, you were not talking about being isolated, but you were talking about being interdependent. And that was a term that I kept using.

Yeah. Well the world was changing. The whole world was crumbling right before our eyes, When King, and when Rosa Parks set in, that just opened up the whole floodgates. And when King began the movement down there, and began to talk about the assertiveness of black folk, and so on; not that it hadn't been present before, but there it was. And so there we were with all of the Jim Crow stuff that we had accepted so freely, you know, it began to crumble. Just right before our eyes. And I wrote that in my paper. But I still had trouble with some of my colleagues, but we still had some colleagues at my ordination services who were on my side. They knew where I was coming from. So they began to argue with each other. And that was all right. But that's where I was. And being liberals, at one point the white liberals really felt that for blacks to be accepted they would have to take on all the stance that the white people took on. You have to become 'whitimized.'

As Rev. Thomas explained the division among his colleagues in reaction to his stance about Black people becoming more self aware, and expressing a new kind of consciousness, he was also sharing how he would later make decisions regarding school choice for his daughters. His statements here speak to the determination he had in choosing the direction for his life and for his family. Later we will see other examples in the study where his stance by choice had a great impact on his wife, children, and grandchildren.

Mrs. Esther Thomas was a student at George Williams College in Chicago when she met Cornelius Thomas. They had both moved to Chicago to go to school, and they both had extended family already living in the area. Esther was in college, and Cornelius was in seminary graduate school when they met. They dated and were married a year later. Marriage and family have been a central part of Rev. Thomas' life, and his children and grandchildren are the central part of this study.

Now, there is one thing I left out in this. Esther and I met. We met in '56. She was going to college and I was going to seminary and we met through some mutual friends, and then we married the next year in '57, August '57. And we lived in student housing, that last year of my seminary and the first year of our marriage.

When the opportunity presented itself, Rev. Thomas began working in the ministry in Chicago. The work led him to change his denominational affiliations, and to alter his plans about where to live when he'd finished his education. His training had opened new doors for him, and he had options that had not existed before. His advances in education came at a time when the Civil Rights Movementt was escalating, and Rev. Thomas found that part of his new job was to help with the transition as the population of the neighborhood changed and as the social standards changed.

I graduated and then began work at this church and began to be sensitive to different things that were going on. Different school boycotts were going on. The Chicago boycotts, the Willis Wagons, and our church was involved in setting up some of the classes when the schools were being boycotted. So I had begun to be a little more sensitive; all those years in Talladega, more sensitive to the whole race problem.

He continued his work after graduation in 1958 and found that the unrest caused by the fight against racism in the secular community was invading the consciousness of the church. As a black student in a predominantly white school he had brought a perspective that was alarming to some of his colleagues and others just denied that the church had any responsibility to respond to the civil discord. Rev. Thomas struggled to maintain both his credibility and his independence in the mainstream culture of his religious institution while working to educate the minority parents and students with whom he was working.

He worked to help them understand the history behind the changes that were taking place for blacks and whites in Chicago, as well as in other parts of the United States. The serious reformation that was brought about because of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement challenged him to step forward and to help with the complexities of the changing world. His interpretation of the impact that the Civil Rights movement was having on the culture both locally and nationally spurred him on to challenge the systemic boundaries that were in place. He became a civil rights activist because he felt that he had no other choice.

And I began working with kids. I had a very active youth group at the church. I had a junior high youth group, and I had a senior high youth group, and then I had a college age youth group; people who were going to college locally and were still going to church. But my main emphasis was my high school youth group because I had 30 or 40 kids.

Most of them probably not but three or four that were in private school. We counted at one point had a youth group of 40 kids, and I think there were six high schools represented in that group. Cause blacks had begun to move out, you know, further south, and they would come to church, and we would meet on Friday evenings. And I bought a station wagon so I could take kids home. An old green station wagon. I'd load it up. And that was a good experience for me and for them. But that was the opening, and I afforded, tried to afford experiences where black kids could interface with white kids, and we did a lot of exchanging; Youth exchanging programs. We'd go different places and people would come to our church.

It was just our efforts in working with the youth group was the development of the whole person. And what does it mean in terms of development of young Black persons. Does it mean socially, sexually, and all that. We did programs in dealing with all of those things. And also the whole issue of race consciousness was a major part of who we were. We knew that. Serving in an all-black church, we knew that. We did our best to emphasize the positive things about that. And this is '60, '61, '62, '63, '64. and you know how that period of time was. And so we, I guess we were successful. But I enjoyed that.

But then in '62 some other stuff began to happen and I began to be involved in community stuff, black community stuff. It was the same time I was doing this education stuff. And we dared to do, you know Jesse Jackson was a student and was part of that, and I was serving a church on the weekends, a small black church. And one of the highlights of our church at that time, it must have been later on. It must have been '65 or '66; Martin Luther King came and spoke at our church. It had never been filled up, and has never been filled up since. And that's where Jesse made his debut. Jesse stole the show. It wasn't his show, but he stole the show. We were close friends, close friends.

One of the significant points here is the powerful connections that Rev. Thomas had with national leaders of that era. While Rev. Thomas was carving a path to create more opportunities for African American students to attend the University of Chicago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Jesse Jackson were also inspiring him to take the next step to educate African Americans about the movement for freedom to choose where they lived, where they ate, where they went to school. It was because of these men, and others like them, that the move to integrate public schools gained such momentum across America. He shared how he was moved to action while still working for the church.

We had a program that could be after school for children, or during school for children, but they would come to a nearby church; those that chose to. And it was a protestant education program.

We didn't call it a church school. We developed a curriculum where kids could come to learn the protestant ethos. That was all over the city, mostly white churches, black churches. And I had a staff person who did all that training. They left school around 2:00 one day a week. So that they had an hour that they would come to a nearby church. We had to get parental permission, and they had to get staff. It was kind of exciting, but it was trying. And then we did a whole program that was in place when I went there, and it was teaching ecumenical teachers how to teach. We did that at a local college. And that was self consciously Christian. And we did that at a college out in Naperville. And that was good and we enjoyed that.

There were educational options available to the population based on where they lived, and on the resources that were available to the community at that time.

The schools were largely defined by the racial ethnic makeup and were located in lower income areas of the city.

But we began to be organized into community stuff, and one time the people, in terms of where we lived, we lived right on the edge of class and the ghetto. You know our church was right over here in the ghetto but you cross 47<sup>th</sup> street, and there was a different model in terms of the housing and all that, and I lived over there. They tried to get me to run for city council position, and I said uhn. That would require me to get a new wardrobe, I'd have to get a lifeguard, I'd have to get somebody to guard my house, and to protect my children. We had children at that time. And I said NO. Cause Daley was, Old Daley, not the one that's in now, but Old Daley had his grip on it with white aldermen and black aldermen, all that. But I gave a lot of time to community organizing. You know, to try to help empower people.

Rev. Thomas continued to be a teacher, though not in a classroom. As a community organizer he helped people understand what was happening with civil rights, and he helped them learn what they were entitled to in terms of access to community resources, to quality schools, to freedom to choose venues for shopping, eating, and traveling.

Rev. Thomas helped members of the community to understand that education is the key to self-improvement. And in the discussion of school choice options he was

demonstrating his freedom to choose quality educational programs. The guiding belief for him and his wife was that his daughters should be in a school that allowed them to excel and be safe physically and emotionally. The schools they chose were therefore related to the work that they were doing, and the schools met the criteria they set.

Well, we were always involved in terms of trying to address the issues of the local school. Now we had made a decision; our family, given where we lived, and looking at the quality of education, that we would send our kids to private school.

Ruth was born in '59. Seminary had a little private school when they were three and four years old. And then Esther became involved in the Montessori school in the same block where our apartment building was. And so Ruth went there. She went there through fourth grade. And then she went to another private school that was still in the community, but about five blocks away. Then Stella went to Montessori and there is 4 years difference between them. And Stella was there when we left, when we moved. And we left Chicago in the winter of '70. Ruth was still in the other private school. Howard St. George was that school. And Stella was in the Montessori.

I asked him to tell me about the conscious decision that he and Esther made in reference to their daughters attending private school rather than the public schools that were in their neighborhood at the time. I wanted to know what they were looking for that they felt they could not get in public school

Well, I was looking for a place where they could be somebody, and also where learning was really emphasized, and not some of the harshness that some of the schools had to experience. Not all of them had to, but some of the harshness that we determined was harsh. And so we decided that we would make this sacrifice. I wasn't making much money. And they [public schools] didn't have the same materials that they had in the private schools of course, but we didn't have the CSAP and all of that kind of stuff, but we determined that the schools in the neighborhoods where we were living were just not what we wanted for our children. And we determined that we would pay for it.

I explained to him that his family's decisions were unique among the African American families I had studied, including my own, and one of the attractions to

selecting his family for this study was that they seemed to have an unusual awareness of the fact that choice was available, and it could be accessed with the right determination. Their daughters' education experiences covered the late 1960s and early '70s, and not very many black people, in the research that I have found so far, were thinking about choosing the school that offered the best education and provided the safest environment. The few who were aware of the lack of quality in schools did not feel empowered to make the decision, the conscious decision, to choose better schools, and they felt they did not have the financial resources to do it. I wanted to know what made his family so novel.

You want to know where do these decisions begin to emerge from or what informed these decisions when they began to emerge. I don't know. One, you could say it's a class thing. Yeah. Or it could be the best alternative. Now one of the alternatives we found in Chicago in terms of the public schools was really reasonable Catholic schools. They really began to mushroom and parents were sending, you know in every parish the schools were mushrooming with enrollment of black students. And that's where a lot of blacks became Catholic because parents had to go to class and all that mess. But that happened all over. And I didn't feel that I was going to send my kid to a Roman Catholic school. No. It wasn't my alternative. It wasn't my choice. However, when we moved in '70 we enrolled our kids in an Episcopal school. It was a tie to my religious ministry that influenced our choice.

The reflections conveyed in this reveal more about Rev. Thomas' independent spirit. His first answer was that he didn't know where the informed decisions came from but as he reconsidered, he identified two possible sources for his strength of conviction. First, he suggested that his parents and grandparents may have been from the class of people who had always chosen education over careers in hard physical labor, valued education, and insisted that each child obtain full training. The ancestors who had been slaves stressed that education was the most important way to remain free.

Secondly, he recognized that making the choice for education in private schools was the best alternative for reaching the goal of providing a quality education for his two

daughters. The options available to them included public schools, Catholic schools, and private schools. At that time the public schools were not physically safe, and they did not afford the materials, the curriculum and the environment for the degree of excellence that Rev. and Mrs. Thomas wanted. The Catholic schools were not viable options for them because even though financial support was being given to African American families at that time, the religious doctrine of the schools did not fit with the Thomas' spiritual training and beliefs. Private schools became the best alternative at the time that choices were being made about schools for Ruth and Stella.

The interview with Rev. Thomas provided a rich background for the family's story about educational options. He communicated his vision for the kind work he wanted to do to improve his quality of life as well as the quality of life for his family and for African American in the broader community. My conversations with him made me eager to start my interviews with the rest of the family and I decided my next interview would be with his wife, Esther Thomas.

## The Matriarch

Mrs. Esther Thomas is a joyful woman with a ready smile and a wry sense of humor. I learned about her independent spirit in my early conversations with her at our church fellowship programs and it was her enthusiasm for finding educational options for her grandson that helped this study evolve.

I first met Mrs. Thomas when she came to our church with her husband and her grandchildren. They were warm and friendly, and I looked forward to seeing them on Sunday mornings. One of our customs during worship service is to "Pass The Peace," and Esther was always very open and receptive as we walked around the sanctuary greeting and blessing one another.

I was attracted to her kind personality, and I sat with her several times during the church Fellowship Hour. We talked about a number of things and often the subject of education would come up because she and her husband were helping their daughter raise their grandchildren, Rachel and Wilbert.

Mrs. Thomas told me that Rachel was in the seventh grade and was attending a charter public school at the time. She was having a pretty good educational and social experience there and she was specializing in theater arts. On the other hand, Wilbert was in the fourth grade at a public elementary school and was facing some challenges with his grades and with social behavior. I mentioned that I was in the process of trying to open a private elementary school, and Mrs. Thomas expressed an interest in that project because she was searching for a school that would offer Wilbert an environment where he could have better success with his grades and behavior. She said that both of her daughters had attended private schools, and she would be willing to give it a try for Wilbert.

Mrs. Thomas' interest in finding a good alternative school for her grandson's education led to our having more detailed discussions about school choice options in Denver. She was very interested in the process I was pursuing in my efforts to open a new private school for underserved students in the Denver metropolitan area. She became a board member on my planning committee and we met on a regular basis for several months to try to get the school up and running. We were making good progress toward that goal, but in the end our efforts were defeated by political and legislative judgments just two short months before we were to open. At that time, the Colorado Supreme Court handed down a decision that ended the opportunity for students to use state funded voucher money to pay for tuition to attend private schools. Mrs. Thomas had really been hopeful about the prospect of finding a good school for Wilbert, and I know that she was as disappointed as I when we decided that we could not open our school as planned.

We did, however, continue to converse about finding schools in the community that parents could access so that their children could have a better opportunity for success when they found that the traditional public schools were not a good fit for their students. Rev. and Mrs. Thomas worked with Wilbert's mother to find another school for him to attend, and they settled on a small public charter school that was not too far from their home. They were hopeful that this school would be a better fit for Wilbert than the public school he had attended the year before.

I was interested to learn about her continuing efforts to find ways to help her grandson find a school that fit his academic and behavioral needs. One Sunday after church I asked her if she would be willing to share some of the processes that she and her

family had used over the years to find ways for her children and grandchildren to attend quality schools that met their educational needs. I asked if she would be interested in working with me as I did a study about school choice options for African American families, and she said that perhaps she would after she learned more about what I had in mind.

After talking to Esther, I wanted to further clarify my goal for my study in my own mind, and I went back to my colleagues and professors at Colorado State University with a sketchy idea for this new project. As I explored the topic with them during our roundtable discussions, the details of this study began to evolve. The result of my conversations on campus and of my conversations with Rev. and Mrs. Thomas was that even though I was not able to open a school of choice, I could still learn about school choice options for African American families by studying the Thomas family's experiences.

I met with Mrs. Thomas again and asked if I could interview her as well as her husband, daughters, and grandchildren about their experiences in choosing alternative school models and she said she would talk it over with them. A few days later we talked by phone and she said that her family agreed to participate. So we began to schedule times for each person's interview.

I would like to backtrack here and give a more detailed explanation about the sequence of how these events developed. The discussions above occurred about a year before I was actually ready to talk with Mrs. Thomas and the rest of the family. It was at that time that Rev. Thomas became ill and decided to retire from our church for health reasons. I felt an urgency to interview Rev. Thomas before talking with the rest of the

family, so I decided to do a pilot study with just Rev. Thomas. By doing a pilot study I was able to field-test my methodology before working with all of the other members of his family, and I was able to use my pilot study with him to make a formal proposal for my full project. After completing the pilot project, I was ready to begin talking with Mrs. Thomas. Our first interview actually took place about a year after my conversations with Rev. Thomas.

Mrs. Thomas invited me to her home one afternoon in early April. We sat at the table next to the kitchen, where I could smell dinner cooking on the stove. The feeling was warm and comfortable as I reviewed a little about my journey to do this dissertation.

When I talked to Esther at church the week before our first interview, I shared that I had gone to public schools myself, taught in them, and had been an administrator all in the same public school system. I explained that I had a real affinity for public schools because I had turned out okay, and so had my husband and daughters who went to the same schools I had attended and worked in. I was a real supporter of the system, but I did learn during my tenure that there were times that some public schools did not work for all children. And that was why I was interested in learning about her family's decision-making processes when they made choices to attend home schools, charter schools, private schools, and religious schools.

I wanted to know what those other school models offered to people and how children and families were finding success through those programs when the public schools were too crowded, too strict with discipline, or not diverse enough in their teaching strategies for all types of student learners.

I went on to say that I did enjoy talking to her and that I had looked forward to having her grandson in my school and maybe there might still be an opportunity for the school to happen, but right now I was just going to concentrate on studying and writing about their family's participation in other school models. I also told her that studying the three generations of her family would be a unique and intriguing opportunity. It would allow me to share their stories about how they accessed schools outside of the public system as they searched for the best quality programs for their children and grandchildren. I also explained that I wanted to be able to share their experiences with the greater community as a resource. My intent would be that by reading about their experiences, other families could learn how to decide what children needed in a quality school. I also felt that other families might learn more about how to access alternative school models as they read this study.

Additionally I shared that I wanted to know how all of those individual decisions that she and her husband made about choosing schools for their daughters and grandchildren had developed. I wanted to know how the decisions came together in their family and how they were passed down through the years. And I also wanted to know about the sacrifices, concerns, and how she found the answers. She started by sharing her earliest memories of her own schooling.

Well, one thing, you didn't go but to two schools, one was Winda Phillips, and as I can remember I started there in kindergarten. It was about three or four blocks from my home, and living across from an orphan home, and I don't know why, but my social life really centered around the orphan kids that went to school there, and I don't know whether learning was emphasized or not. It seemed like I never knew why I was in school. But I went and I experienced the orphan kids going there being ostracized by the so called middle-class black people, and so I became kind of their friends, and in school, our teachers were teachers who had taught there for years, and so you knew who your kindergarten teacher was going to be before you got to school. And I recall trying to learn things at school but it seems

like I was always getting in trouble. . . . . just you know, always getting in trouble, saying the wrong thing. And by me being the color that I am, which was considered 'high yellow', I wasn't really accepted by everybody. But the orphan kids, they never questioned that... we were always good friends.

Esther's comments here touch on several themes of this study. One of those is the concept of neighborhood schools that are situated close enough to their homes so that students can walk to them. This arrangement by the school system kept students and families in designated areas and provided limited choices, or in some cases, no choices in the types and varieties of schools that students had access to. Esther noted that in her hometown there were only two schools that African Americans were allowed to go to, and all of the families knew exactly which one of those they would attend. She extended this observation to the children who lived in the orphanage across the street, and also included the other middle-class blacks who lived in her community.

Other themes of the study that she mentioned refer to the concept of social class. Here I am defining social class from a financial perspective, which Esther labels as upper middle class, and also from a color perspective, which makes skin tone a very definitive barrier in some situations. Esther was from an upper middle class family and may have had equality with her classmates on the financial level, but she was not accepted by some of them because of her skin color. She says she was not accepted by some of her peers because of her complexion. 'High Yellow' is a racial term that is used in some areas of African American culture to refer to black people who have a very light complexion. By light, the term means that the skin color can look as though it is barely tanned, and go all the way to having no tan at all, and therefore the person appears to be white. Esther's discomfort at being ostracized because of her very light skin color led her to seek friendship from other students who may not have been in the upper middle class. The

children she mentioned were also being ostracized for being different, but in this instance the difference was because the children in the orphanage did not have families of their own and did not have the financial status of the upper middle class.

Another theme of the study that is found in her statement is that she had an ability to self-identify the kind of student she was in terms of learning and in terms of how she felt about fitting in at school. She felt that she was a troubled student because she couldn't figure out what to do or why she was there. This ability of self-identifying was also reflected in the stories that the other family members told later in the study.

Esther's feeling was that she was not a successful student and that most of the teachers in the school did not know how to help her. She said several times that she never seemed to know what to do and didn't know why she was in school. It was not until third grade that she did have a teacher who recognized that Esther needed challenging work so that she could feel connected and engaged in learning. At that time Esther felt that there was a lot of success in her schoolwork and a lot of uplift in her feelings of self-confidence. I asked about Esther's perception of belonging to school and her understanding of how and why things happened to her while she was here.

But I remember trying to learn things, but it just seemed like I could never learn things. I just wasn't into learning anything. And by the time I got to the third grade, this teacher understood me, and it seemed like she realized she needed to keep me busy. Very, very busy. So obviously, the bottom line was that I was bored, I think, because in the third grade she had me doing so much paperwork, and I was just doing it right; and she let my parents know that my biggest problem was that I wasn't being kept busy. But, that was my best time in school, in the third grade.

We continued talking about her experience as she moved from elementary school to junior high school and high school, and Esther shared her memories about the racial

climate during the 1930s and 1940s. The segregated schools were part of the confusion and misfit of her experience when she was going to school.

Fifth grade teacher was okay. She kept a tight, rigid class, and she kept people very busy. The whole class was kept busy. And then it got to a point where the whole school was so overcrowded that they were mixing the classrooms where the fifth grade and the sixth grade were coming together and schools were getting overcrowded and so I was just getting further lost.

We moved, and that's when we were able to start getting into the white community, which meant that we were going to their old, dilapidated schools, and getting their dilapidated equipment, and that was the sixth grade. And I seemed to have wanted to know more history in that grade. But I don't recall me concentrating that much or learning that much; I didn't get in trouble, and then I started really getting into sports. And I began to be very good at baseball and just enjoyed it and that began to take up a lot of my time.

She was living in Kansas City, MO, in the 1930s and 1940s, and she continued with sports in high school, saying that she was quite outstanding in girl's basketball. The sports became her connection to school and they helped her build a bridge to better achievement. She found a reason to go to school and do the work that was assigned, and this was important because her grades had to be acceptable in order for her to stay on the team.

Being part of the school team in the classroom or in sports is one of the basic elements that is needed for students to feel connected to school. Another of the themes that this study has revealed is that there has to be something or someone that children identify with so that they can feel okay with school.

Mrs. Thomas saw herself as a person who was just going through the motions in the process of going to school. She did not feel that she experienced true connections with most of her teachers and she did not feel that they understood her. This feeling of being disconnected and misunderstood was so powerful that it stayed with her and

influenced the choices that she made many years later when she chose a career. In the mean time, she completed her high school studies and she gave in to the pressure from her extended family, who insisted that she should continue her schooling by going to college. Her father had died when she was 17 or 18 and her extended family made several attempts to find a successful school environment for her after she graduated from high school.

In my heart, I really wanted to be a good student, and I liked to read, but it looked like when I'd get to school, my brain would shut down and something, I don't know what it was, I just could not motivate myself. I never thought I was to go off to college, cause I went off to college and didn't do well at all, so I got kicked out there. I got sent to two colleges, because they [my family] wanted to impress the people. Your child must not be at home, they must go off to college, and I had no idea. I should have been home going to a junior college, until I could get myself straight, but I didn't so I finally, they finally, the other relatives, finally got me to Chicago. And I went to college there, and finally got through college. I majored in physical education.

Then it seems like after that, things kind of started getting better, but, as I know I've jumped around, on a lot of things, but I can't remember anything too good when I was growing up, other than making a whole lot of mistakes, and I never understood why I just couldn't be like the other girls in the Episcopal church, whose families were all doing very well, who understood school and studied, and I never knew why I was really in school, basically!

Mrs. Thomas gave a fairly candid look at how she navigated her way through a very difficult experience during her elementary and secondary school years. Many of her teachers were not able to help her find the activities she needed to internalize the sequences and the academic processes she needed to be successful. Mrs. Thomas found a connection through sports and her extended family. They had a vision for her. They knew that she would go to college.

As we continued talking we touched on the racial climate in Missouri while she was growing up. She lived in a segregated neighborhood and attended segregated

schools in Kansas City. I asked if she ever had the opportunity to attend integrated public schools.

It was a segregated town. It was just like a southern city... Uh, there weren't but two [Black schools] Winda Phillips. I can't think of the other. Oh Dunbar. I think that was a vocational black school. But I went to Winda Phillips. And then when the barriers started breaking down, there was Booker T. Washington.

I tell my grandkids I think our having to walk 19 blocks to school and 19 blocks back home also saved me. And they wanted to know why, and I said because the white conductors would not pick us up. And sometimes we'd be standing on that corner freezing; trying to get to school, and pretty soon, the community people started coming out with their cars and taking us to school. Because, as I look back, the walking really didn't hurt us; it was okay in one sense, but it was not fair in another sense.

No, schools didn't start getting integrated till around '51, '52 or whenever the civil rights movement began. That's when they started trying to do this. But what I've heard. I was not there.

Racism and segregation in public schools played a very big part in this study. The systemic nature of segregation made the challenges of participating in choice school almost insurmountable. Mrs. Thomas' family life was not very stable and even though her parents were committed to their children going to school, they did not provide a great deal of support for her and her brother.

My mother was not a person who could take charge, and things. And all I can remember was that she was always coming home sleeping all the time. My daddy, he was an Episcopal minister, and he was not paying the bills. He was drinking a lot, he was drinking an awful lot, and in those days, black people hid things; and so, that kind of stuff was to be hid. He was all right on Sunday, and so we moved to this little, small apartment, and my mother began to start working. She was 10 years younger than he was. And she was a musician, and she got a job as the pianist for the high school there. But seemingly it was just kind of downhill for my family after I got to about the seventh grade, and things were getting even further crazier for me, but the sports was the thing I think that saved me.

So it wasn't a good family life either. It was bad; real bad. And money was very, very tight. We just didn't have the things other kids had. Even so, him being an

Episcopal minister, I was to adhere to that upper middle class; High Yellow middle class [standard]. Our church was High Yellow Episcopal as they said. You know High Yellow middle class. That kind of light brown that was the thing in the '40s.

Well things just weren't getting any better for us at all. So, if we had just been the ordinary family we would have been shoved to the side; you know, ignored. But by him having been a black Episcopal minister, no matter what he did, he was still considered, and we were still considered, having to be respected. And at that point when I was finishing high school, my daddy became very sick, and at that time they didn't know anything about treating high blood pressure, and of course his liquor didn't help, and so I finished high school in '48, and he died in '49.

Mrs. Thomas spoke reverently about the hard times she had growing up, and her words carried a great deal of emotion as she explained her family's circumstances. The strength she exhibits today was forged by her journey through those difficult and painful situations.

Children have difficulties learning in school for a variety of reasons, and many times those difficulties are not directly related to their ability to learn and to achieve academic success. Esther Thomas' story was not unusual for many African American students who found themselves in families and homes that did not function well. From my experience in education, I observed that students who find themselves in difficult environments struggled to focus on math, history, and science because they were distracted by their worries for mother, daddy, and living up to the expectations of the neighbors in the community.

This study revealed that one of the challenges that affected this African American family in their journey through school is the lack of support from parents at home. In this case the family was self-classified as upper middle class because of their racial complexion. But their financial resources and their living conditions were not typical of a

white upper middle class family. Mrs. Thomas was not specific, but she said that her family did not have sufficient financial resources to give the children books, the other children had. The void that this produced created a distraction and a lack of security and self-esteem for Esther and for her brother. Esther acknowledges that these conditions contributed to her never quite knowing her purpose in school, feeling confused, and thus not doing well academically. These conditions also contributed to her not being able to give herself a solid academic preparation for college.

I wanted to know a little more about Esther's parents, and the members of her extended family. We talked about their educational backgrounds and career experiences. I asked if both her mother and dad had formal schooling.

Yes, [dad was an] Episcopal minister. He went to a formal school, and my mother, she went to Fisk University. And at that time, if you just did two years you could come out and teach. But it was just never clear to me what I was supposed to do in life until finally I got into Chicago and finished school, and then things began to start making sense for me.

Who were the people in Chicago? Did you know them before you went there for college?

They were cousins, they lived in Chicago, and everybody was getting tired of trying to figure out what to do with me. So they got me into Chicago. I have a grandfather who we used to go to visit in Chicago. My mother's father lived in Chicago, and we used to go to Chicago every summer. So Chicago wasn't a bad place, and because we went there every summer I pretty much knew my family there. But everybody was at their wit's end as to what to do with me. And finally my cousin, George Williams College, which was a YMCA college, and a physical education college in Chicago, and they decided, maybe if she goes there, it would be okay. I think finally I began to be okay, but I was making some mistakes there too, but they weren't as traumatic, and finally I finished there. And then I met Cornelius when I was around 23 or 24 when I met him in Chicago. He was going to the University of Chicago Seminary and got his degree. I met him at a party, and that was pretty much how that went.

Esther was able to analyze how variables like segregated living conditions, sparse financial resources, and a demoralizing racial climate affected her success and lack of success during her K-12 years in school. Her reflections about her education and her analysis of how personal circumstances impacted her from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade brought a picture of a painful existence for a young woman. And it was her skill in sports like baseball and basketball that helped her make it through school and the hard times at home with her mother and father. Her connection to one or two good teachers helped her learn what she needed to do to work her way through her challenges. She learned that she needed to be kept busy and to be understood as an individual. Later in her interview, Esther referred back to these elements when she talked about her career and children.

As Esther began to understand how circumstances of racism, poverty, and family instability can play a major part in a child's ability to go to school, she began to think about what she wanted for her own children. As parents, we want conditions to be better for our children than they were for us. Esther wanted a good solid family with financial stability, and safe, quality schools for her children.

Well, we did make choices with our daughters because at that time the schools were going through such an upheaval and Boston schools were terrible. So we put them in private school. And which they said they hated. But at that time Cornelius was involved in getting those schools desegregated properly.

It was pretty rough. It was pretty tough, and vicious. But, and so the schools were not that safe, we felt. So our two girls went to private schools. And they found out that it was just as racist. They saw a lot of racism in the private school. And they said that their children were never going to go to a private school. And then, because we sent them to private school, of course they went on to Cornelius' college, which was at Talladega, to give them that broader experience.

The Thomas' daughters did not have the same positive school experiences that their mother and father had while growing up in segregated communities in the southern United States and on the East Coast. Their parents had been in situations where families knew the teachers at the school from one generation to the next. Many of the students had teachers who knew their parents as well as their grandparents and cousins. These teachers became quasi-extended family members through years of interactions with one another. Even though the schools in Tennessee and in Missouri lacked some of the fine new resources that could be found in the white schools, most of the teachers in those schools cared about the students and wanted them to succeed. The teachers were determined to teach the students and help them understand that education was what they must have in order to succeed. Their goal was to make sure that students got that education no matter what, and they taught them that getting a good education allowed them to have choices about their future.

This custom of insisting that every child be educated was paramount in a large portion of the African American culture at that time. It came about as a result of the restrictions that were placed on African Americans during the period of slavery in the United States. Slaves were not allowed to learn to read under threat of severe punishment and sometimes the most severe punishment was death. The families in this study as well as many others in their communities were fewer than four generations removed from being slaves. The freedom to be educated, to learn to read, and to gain an education was hard won, and families took full advantage of being able to go to school and learn. Through the generations it became a duty for every family to see to it that their children were educated.

But I look back now and think. I kind of feel that maybe desegregation was maybe the worst thing we could have done. Because those teachers knew us, and they knew our families, and you were going to get it no matter what. She wasn't going to be using no psychology on you. You were going to get it no matter what. And I kind of feel like, as I look back, that that could have hurt us a lot. I don't even know if there is a thing called integration, really. But all cultures seemed to have had their own thing.

We lost a lot. But the schools, you miss that feeling because, we were still a black school primarily when our schools were able to cross that line and get into their [white] old schools that they had moved out of. And we still went to our black schools, but it [integration] was affecting them, there was something different that those before us who went to the other all-black school. They seem to have had a better foundation, a better knowledge of stuff.

Esther's comment here refers to one of the consequences that developed during the process of desegregation. Desegregation was supposed to provide equal access to educational opportunities for all students, no matter what their race or ethnicity.

Therefore, when the physical environment was changed so that African American and white students were sitting together in the same classroom, one facet of desegregation was accomplished by removing the separate by equal schools. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas carried the memories of segregation and desegregation with them when they made plans to send their daughters to school. The things that were important to them in making decisions about schools for their daughters were that they be safe, and that they receive a high quality curriculum.

Ruth is their oldest daughter and her first school was a preschool located on the grounds of the Chicago Seminary. It was a small private school that was convenient because of its proximity to their housing on campus. Ruth's sister, Stella, is four years younger and she also attended the preschool for a while. Then both girls attended a private Montessori school for their elementary grades and continued with private schools after the family moved to Boston. Esther did not go into great detail about these private

schools but each of her daughters tells more about them during their interviews later in the study.

Our conversation then moved to Esther's grandchildren. She has two granddaughters and two grandsons. Ruth's children, Rachel and Wilbert, live with Rev. and Mrs. Thomas. Stella's children live with their parents in another state.

The stories for each grandchild are explained in more detail later in this document, but I have introduced them here because Mrs. Thomas has influenced them. She has guided her children and her grandchildren in making choices about schools. In some instances she took charge of the grandchildren's care when their parents were struggling, because she did not want them to go through the kind of confusion that she went through as a child. Esther wanted her granddaughters and her grandsons to have a better family experience and a better school experience than she had. And she was willing to give them and their parents her time, attention, and support as she counseled them about making choices when looking for a school. She helped them to be discerning about where to go to get the things that she wanted them to have in their education.

I asked what experiences in her own schooling had influenced the choices she made in working with her grandchildren. How did you get so wise in terms of knowing what your daughters needed and in knowing what your grandchildren needed?

I don't know. I just guess I didn't want them to go through life confused like I was. And I guess in all the experiences I had because I worked in these settlement centers, Early Childhood Education, I was always over the programs, and I enjoyed working with all these mothers who were having all kinds of problems. In fact I worked at Warren Village when I came here. But prior to that I was always in a settlement center, and enjoyed the Early Childhood Education, and working with the little kids, and the mothers.... Seeing mothers who become pregnant and have children and who are confused

and down and out and all of this kind of stuff, and I enjoyed that. Twenty years of that. And in Chicago they were always putting me, my school, Erickson Institute for Early Childhood Education, opened up and I got a scholarship, that was when Ruth was about four years old, or something like that. And I was good with it, and I didn't care much about the books. I felt like I knew enough when I was working with kids, and they started sending me out to these very troubled areas, and when I would straighten out these classrooms, and get things going like they wanted them. But I enjoyed working with the kids, and with the parents; and talking to the parents. And you just get to know that because someone doesn't have the money and they are having a baby, I saw smart young girls, and saw how smart they were, and you just learn that a person has to develop from that mistake that maybe they made, there is still plenty of room for development and growing. And so maybe that's all part of this.

The testimony shared in this passage is integral to this study because it shows the depth of the Esther's commitment to take the lessons she learned from growing up in a fractured family and apply them to the situations that occurred later in her life. She carried the experiences she had growing up deep in her heart. She did not want her children and her grandchildren to feel confused about why they were in school as she had. She wanted to help provide them with an understanding of how schools were designed to help children learn. She wanted the children to learn how to connect with their teachers so that they could feel that someone understood them and cared about them.

One example of how she was able to use her experiences in childhood to help other students and their parents occurred when she was working with the Erickson Institute. She developed an instinct for surviving hardships and that instinct helped her in her work when she was assigned to assist young families who were struggling to make it. In her position as director she worked with young mothers who found themselves in fragmented family situations. She was required to help them find their way out of confusion and into clarity while she was working at the Early Childhood Education

settlement centers. Her desire to help families create wholeness in their lives and leave the confusion behind became a priority. And that desire directed her and helped her to be very effective in her career.

Esther felt that her work with disadvantaged single mothers and their children was enjoyable and rewarding. She mentioned that she wanted to help people avoid being in the same situation that she was in growing up, feeling confused and unsure of her purpose for being in school. She was guided in her work with families by her goal of trying to help people understand their circumstances, and help them know that they could change them. She wanted to help them realize how to work through their challenges and how to find suitable solutions.

A second situation where she used her expertise in helping families occurred many years later and it centered around her oldest daughter, Ruth, who found herself in difficult circumstances after she finished her PhD in chemistry at Talladega College. Ruth and her husband had two small children and she needed some help getting to the next phase in her life. She was struggling to regain her equilibrium after a grueling study program and being a parent with two small children. Ruth decided to come home to her parents to give herself time to regroup. I asked Esther to talk about some of the direct influences she had on her daughter's and grandchildren's family life and education.

After Ruth, you know, got her PhD, which is hard; and having these children, and she was not ready for that. And they decided to break up. It was a good agreement, and she came on here. I retired on Friday, and they come walking in here with the kids on Monday. And I just never had a chance to really retire.

And I started really just taking over. And they were with me, and I was taking them to school, and picking them up. I enjoyed it and we got this good schedule going, and I enjoyed it. And as I look back I kind of miss it. But I enjoyed it, but it was also a lot of pressure. But I was not going to let those kids be hurt. And I

was not going to let them experience anything but consistency and love. And I knew that would help them a whole lot.

Rev. and Mrs. Thomas made a conscious decision to assist in raising their grandchildren while their daughter was working things out for her own life. The direct influences from Mrs. Thomas were that first; she did not want her grandchildren to experience the lack of family support that she had experienced, so she gave the love and the consistency that she missed as a child. She worked with her daughter to provide structure for the children similar to the way that she had worked with the mothers at the Erickson Center during her career. Secondly, she helped her daughter learn how to manage being a parent and have a career at the same time. She used the skills that she learned in her career to build a strong family unit for Ruth, Rachel, and Wilbert. The Thomas' decision here to step in and to provide a vision for success and a plan to achieve success is another example of how one generation supports and influences another generation.

Rev. and Mrs. Thomas raised their daughters and consciously chose schools for them. Now they are helping to raise two of their grandchildren and have had essential roles in selecting schools for them over the past decade. Mrs. Thomas shared some of the thoughts and discussions they had when choosing schools for Rachel as she was leaving middle school and going to high school.

But, as I look at the grandkids I would not have wanted to see them in private school either. Now, Rachel, we were able to get her into Denver School of the Arts [a public charter school], and that was good at that time, and all that. And it was great. Really great, and she stayed excited about things, and of course when she got to the eighth grade she was beginning to not really enjoy her stagecraft that much, she would like to get into another school. Well we felt like she wasn't that ready. And we will let her go on to East High this time. We feel like she needs to broaden things, and just kind of learn about people in a different setting.

And I think East High might be the answer for her. But schools, I would never recommend private schools. I just would not.

I was looking at some of the choices she is making for her subjects and she's getting a chance to take accounting. And I said that is great! That's better than any education you can get. If you do well in accounting, you've got that background. And she's going to do her painting, and her art, and chemistry and something else, but her subjects are good, and will give her a good foundation and that's what we're after. We said if you keep taking that accounting, you'll have a job. And she can't take that course anywhere else but East High. East High so far, it looks to me like it is as good as it's going to get! And I'm sure they're some flaws, but they say their teachers remain there. They don't leave that much.

Mrs. Thomas said she would not recommend private school for her grandchildren because of some of the experiences her daughters had in the private schools. She was not aware of them at the time, but her daughters did not have the same positive connections with their teachers that she had with some of her teachers and that her husband had with most of his teachers. She felt that the racism was felt more intently in the small close environment of the public schools her daughters attended, and she did not want to repeat that for her grandchildren.

I asked about Rachel's experiences with school choice. She was in public school until she was in sixth grade right and then went to DSA, a charter school. "Yes, she went to Pioneer Charter, then she went to Carson Elementary, a public school. She did all right at Carson. But Wilbert didn't handle Carson too well. Rachel is the kind who would do all right. You know, school is not an issue with her."

And I asked the same question about Wilbert. He was at Pioneer and Carson also?

Yes, he went to Pioneer Charter for one year. And then he went to Carson. And he spent the years there until that last year and we took him out. And put him into the charter school, Highline, and that really wasn't a good choice, I think he's smart. But I think he's a child that if he's not kept real busy, he; things get out of hand for him. But he's beginning to come into an understanding of what he ought

to be, and what he ought to do. I see him developing now. I kind of think he fought growing up for awhile. I just think that he has refused to try to get some real feeling for education or for controlling himself and things like that.

Esther is very thoughtful about each of her grandchildren. She is familiar with their similarities in things like being smart and being inquisitive, but she also recognizes some differences in them, as Rachel can take the process of schooling in stride and does not struggle in interactions with her teachers. Wilbert, on the other hand, enters into a competition with his teachers and wants them to see his perspective rather than allowing himself to just participate in the structured programs of the classroom. The important message here is that when Esther, Cornelius, and Ruth are making choices about schools, they look at the individual strengths and weaknesses of the schools and then compare those with the needs of each child to come up with the best fit.

It is important to note here that not all of the schools that Rev. and Mrs. Thomas chose are outside of the public school realm. A very significant revelation here is that the Thomas family was very open in their perspective about quality school programs and utilized the options that gave them the results they wanted without being chained to one school model or another just for the sake of the perceived superiority. Their participation and enrollment in alternative school models is not based on the belief that there are no quality programs and no quality schools in public education. Rather, they participated in school choice options as a way to meet the individual needs of their daughters and their grandchildren and were inclusive in the school models and the school systems.

I also believe that there are some good quality programs in public education. But when public education does not work for a student, I believe that there should be an open and equitable process for accessing any school that a parent or a student feels would meet

their needs in a better way. That has not always been the case, and there is a continuing need for school systems to find ways to address learning styles for its full student population. I find verification for my beliefs at unexpected times and in unexpected places. One such occasion happened last week as I was working on this presentation.

I was sitting at the Blair Caldwell library editing my dissertation, and a young woman in her late 20s was sitting at the table across the room from me. She was already seated when I came in and I noted that she too was working on a project with her laptop computer. She stayed there for about three hours. As she packed up to leave, she came to my table and said, "Excuse me, I just wanted to say that you were my principal when I was in junior high school and I wanted to let you know that I am doing fine."

Of course I smiled and engaged her in a short conversation and thanked her for stopping to talk with me. Her words brightened my day the way an unexpected ray of sunshine does when it suddenly comes from behind a cloud. This beautiful young lady is a financial consultant and helps companies with their fiscal design programs. She is a product of public schools in Denver and they were a good fit for her.

Incidents like this one always make me think of the poster I saw many years ago at Teacher's Helper. It says, "A teacher never knows where their influence stops." Though the author is anonymous, the message is profound, and I think that the teaching and learning process continues for many years beyond the classroom experience whether in public or in choice school models.

I would now like to move to the children themselves and share their perspectives about the schools they attended and how they felt about the choices that were made for

them in terms of their educational environments. The first interview is with Rachel, Cornelius' and Esther's oldest daughter.

### The Oldest Daughter

Dr. Ruth Ada is Rev. and Mrs. Thomas' oldest daughter. I had learned a little about her from Mrs. Thomas, but I did not have the opportunity to meet her in person until it was time for our interview. We talked by phone and she invited me to meet her at her mother's house one day after work. She chose a seat in the living room near the window and I noted how calm and poised she was. I began by talking about my dissertation story and I shared some of the things that I had learned from her parents and children during their interviews.

Dr. Ada appeared to be a quiet, reserved person with a direct and open gaze. She is a community college professor in the chemistry department and I thought at once how much confidence her students must have in her as they take her classes and she leads them through the intricacies of college-level chemistry.

My first question to her was a request that she tell me about her first memories of learning and of going to school. She was born in Chicago and she began by talking about the nursery school there.

It was the nursery school at the Theological Seminary in Chicago. I believe I was four, four or five. It wasn't a daycare because I don't think they had daycare back then, as a labeled daycare. As far as I knew it was a pre-school. I remember painting. Just being in a room with children, but I don't really remember the specific activities at that place.

I went to kindergarten at a school that was near the apartment that we lived in. It was called the Montessori school, and I don't remember the first name. I always knew it as the Montessori school, and it was within the same block as our apartment building. And I believe that's where I was in kindergarten. It was very

new. The teachers were from the Netherlands. So it was a new style. This was the early '60s, and it was a new style of learning. I believe our school was more interactive than the traditional school. Although I don't remember specific activities, I do remember a lot of activity. Like tracing letters, learning how to write.

I asked her to tell me a little more about the neighborhood the schools were in. I wanted to know if she thought her parents had particular reasons for choosing the nursery school and the Montessori school, and if she thought they were private schools.

I think so. Actually one of my earliest memories was the Welby House by Frank Lloyd Wright, because I saw a picture of it, and I said I remember that house, the architecture of it, and sure enough it was right across from the building that the nursery school was in. So that was one of my earlier memories, you know, of the buildings in that area, so it probably was more than likely private because it was associated with the seminary.

I also asked her about the racial makeup of both schools. I wanted to know how many African American students were in class with her.

You know, at that point in my life I didn't notice. So I really couldn't tell you. And then now, it was Chicago so more than likely, I know that there were at least four or five African American students with me in both instances. When compared to Denver there are more African Americans.

Dr. Ada's recollections here touch on two of the elements that are found in other areas of this study. The first element is that of neighborhood schools. Both of her earliest institutions were in close proximity to her home. And one unique difference in her neighborhood schools and those of her parents' neighborhood is that these were private institutions, not public schools. The special circumstances that allowed her parents to select these schools had to do with Rev. Thomas being a student on campus and being able to benefit from the connection between the nursery school and the seminary. Another of the benefits the family had was the opportunity to take advantage of the new Montessori school model that had recently come to the United States from the

Netherlands. This school used new theories and new techniques for teaching children in elementary grades, and the Thomas' willingness to send their daughters there was another example of their philosophy to search for the best schooling available.

A second theme discussed here is the selection of a private school instead of a public school. We have already mentioned that the proximity of these schools to the family's home is one reason for the choice. Another reason was that the nursery school was connected to the Seminary. In this case, the connection with the Seminary helped provide the option of not going to a public school. Rev. Thomas mentioned a third theme in his interview that was presented earlier, and that reason is that he and his wife wanted their children to be in private schools rather than in public schools in Chicago.

Well, we were always involved in terms of trying to address the issues of the local school. Now we had made a decision, our family, that given where we lived, and looking at the quality of education, that we would send our kids to private school.

I asked Ruth to tell me what she remembered from the schools she attended in Chicago.

I was there [Montessori] until I went to a school by the name of Harvard St. George in fourth grade. So I was there kindergarten through third, or something like that. I was there for a few years. It was private. It was racially mixed. No violence, it was quiet.

My fourth grade teacher was Ms. Lockhart. And the subjects that I liked, I remember specifically reading, I guess I don't remember anything else. And that was the fourth grade; in the fifth grade was Ms. Fuchs, and I remember math because I was having problems with, well I didn't have problems, just with fractions, I remember they were very challenging. So I remember math in fifth grade. And then we moved mid-year fifth grade to Boston. The school I went to in Boston was the Advent school. Which was a private school associated with the Episcopal Church.

She called the Advent School a private, religious school. "Yeah, because we had to go to Mass on Wednesday, but religion wasn't emphasized, but it was present."

The pattern of selecting private schools continued for the Thomas's even after the family moved from Chicago to Boston. Ruth's enrollment at the Advent School was the first private religious school in which she and her sister were enrolled. One significant addition to the schools discussed so far is that as a result of this choice, religious teachings were now part of the curriculum for Ruth and it is a subject that would not have been found in the public schools.

As Ruth continued talking I asked her to tell me more about the different neighborhoods her family lived in while they were on the east coast, and she explained some of the differences between Chicago and Boston.

Well, the geography of Boston; it's a very old city so everything is very close, not like Denver. So we could really walk to the school even though it would be a long walk. So it wasn't far away, but it was another neighborhood, if that makes sense. Because every couple of blocks on the East Coast back then was just a whole different neighborhood. There were different dynamics, different groups of people. But the physical area was small but we could walk. I could walk to the Advent school. Generally, I guess somebody drove me, but we could walk through the Boston Gardens to get home. Which was another completely different area even though it wasn't that far. 'Cause that's going through the downtown area, because the Advent school was on Beacon Hill, near Beacon Hill, which was not far from my father's office at the time. But we could still walk to his office at the time.

Then we talked in more detail about the differences in the neighborhood residents and about the schools themselves between Chicago and Boston.

Well, it's changing, so you had a mix of professionals, 'cause some of our neighbors were professional people, and then some of our neighbors had been in the neighborhood for like 30 years. And then like across the street there were rooming houses and then in the next block there were rooming houses and prostitution. But see in the '70s, it wasn't like it is now because we could sit out on the steps. This was before drive-bys, so we actually knew some of the prostitutes. You know, they were neighborhood people. They were just part of the way we grew up.

It wasn't, I mean you know, it was a bad thing, but it wasn't... dangerous, it was just what they did, and we would just sit out on the steps in the summer and see them working, but it was just a part of our lives. You know, it was just the community; kind of like Spike Lee's community in 'Do The Right Thing.' Kind of like that where people actually sat out and you just have all kinds of people. And people knew them. You know them because you see them every day. That was our community, and then where the school was, was more upscale. White homes, white people lived in those homes.

Well, like where we lived, at that point, around where we lived, it was still rooming houses, so it was still a lot of poor people in the area. So it was a diverse community, but it's poor. And that was our neighborhood; they weren't really homeless people though. They were poor people. And then maybe a few blocks down there was an apartment building where maybe welfare, I don't know what you call it, a friend of mine lived there, so that was low income apartments. And then further down, was the combat zone. Where all the strip clubs were, so all that was not far from where we lived, that was part of downtown too, but it was the bad part. And then my school was in the better part of Boston Gardens with historical monuments, things like the state of Massachusetts Statehouse was on Beacon Street, which was not far from my father's office. The trail that Paul Revere rode was marked on the street. So all of that was mixed together with famous churches, some of the old churches, and I can't recall the names right now, you know, where Ida B. Wells might have spoken, it's very historical, well its Boston, one of the oldest cities in the country!

At that time, it was early, we're getting into early '70s now, so they had just started busing, and there was a lot of violence associated with the public schools in Boston. They had a very bad reputation. [Academically] and socially, overcrowded classrooms, antiquated books. Actually a book was written about the Boston public schools, I can't think of the author's name, it started with a Z. So it was a big deal how deficient the public schools in Boston were, except a few of them, which were; Boston Boys and Girls Latin School. That was beginning the seventh grade.

The important items in this section are connected to several themes of the study.

By beginning with the locations where Ruth and her sister, Stella, grew up shows an environment that is very different from the quiet hills of Kentucky and from the inner city of St. Louis where their parents were. Chicago is described as the financial and cultural capital of the Midwest and Boston is one of the oldest cities in the nation. It is also the

site of the first public school established in the United States. These two Meccas of the United States were ripe environments for the changes the nation was going through during the civil rights movement. Ruth is aware of some of the turmoil and upheaval of the era from a child's perspective. And that is how she has explained her understanding of where her parents chose to live and how they chose schools for her to attend.

As we continued looking at the changes we recognized another important element. That was how the citizens in Boston were reacting to busing for school integration, and the violence that developed because of the resistance to this change. Mrs. Thomas refers to this violence as a key reason that they chose to keep their daughters out of the public schools.

Another significant element in Ruth's story is her dawning awareness of what being Black meant in that community, and of what it meant to her personally. She remembered having a vague awareness of what was going on but not completely understanding it. I wanted to know more specifics about the cultural and racial climate at the schools in Boston. Ruth told me that it was much different than what she had experienced in Chicago private schools.

That's when we started at Advent, and we stayed at Advent and after the Advent school, I went to a school called Beaver Country Day, which was way away. I had to take the subway, and that was at Brookline, Massachusetts. And I went there for a few years, and that is where I started to understand racism, at that school. There were blacks, but it was like, black people were here and they hung together, and they didn't mix with the white students, and many of the black students came from like, Dorchester, Mapan, Roxberry, which was black then. I don't know what it is now, and many of the white students who came from Newton, you know, the suburbs, Brookline, were well off. So it was like at that time they were giving scholarships so black students could go to a private school. So I was kind of caught in between. I wasn't on a scholarship, but I didn't fit in with the white children from Brookline, and Newton, and I can't think of the other suburb, but you know, in that area.

So I was kind of caught in between, so I started hanging out with the black students, because I wanted to be black. 'Cause you know in the '70s, there was black culture, black music, white culture, and white music. Now days it's kind of fused together. All the young people kind of listen to the same Hip Hop at parties. So when I was coming up it was, the O Jays, Temptations, Michael Jackson, those artists. And so black people had, we had our own culture. And it wasn't mixing with the white culture. So it was a bigger difference back then. You're talking '72, '73. So civil rights, Martin Luther King who had just been assassinated just a few years before that. And the whole black consciousness was just coming up in the '70s in that period, 'cause I started wearing an Afro.

In this passage, Ruth discusses financial condition and cultural community experiences in a way that is different from what has been presented earlier in this chapter. She talked about her specific experiences with racism in her school. She expressed how she felt caught between the two groups of students because she was a Black student who did not need a scholarship to attend the school. She explained how she began to learn more about the black culture and how she wanted to be Black. The phenomena she talked about are found in public schools as well as in private schools, and they make a difference in whether students fit in or not. In this instance Ruth described why she felt that she did not fit in at the private Beaver Country Day School.

Fitting in is an important concept for students. Mrs. Thomas talked about feeling that she was not accepted by some of the students in her school, and here Ruth talks about feeling that she did not fit in with either the black student group or the white students at Beaver Country Day. The White students did not accept her because she was Black and the Black students did not fully accept her because she was in a higher financial category than they were in and she did not live in their neighborhoods.

Sometimes students are described by characteristics that do not have anything to do with their academic talents or abilities. Here the student's financial status and their

cultural and community experiences weigh heavily in defining the differences between the ethnic racial groups. Ruth also talks about the characteristics that have to do with the subtle nuances of language, clothing, and community experiences.

What the characteristics have in common is that they describe and define the students who belong to one group or another, and Ruth points out that her family circumstances served to put her between the two main black and white racial groups because her community experiences are not the same as either group. She is also between the two groups financially because she is not as well off as the white students are, nor is she in need of scholarships like the black students are.

I asked about her perception of being different and how she handled the problem academically and socially with those dynamics going on. I asked if her being in private school, if she thought that she experienced it the same way that she would have had she been in the neighborhood she lived in, or in one of the black areas that she described.

No, it probably would have been more black students, because it was a small group of us. And so, so you have your Black Student Alliance, or some kind of organization. We were like 12 or 13, so I think we were really trying to define ourselves within what was going on in society without fully understanding what was going on in society. You know, being aware, but not being totally aware of what was going on. 'Cause see back then you didn't have the TV that you have now, you didn't have the Internet. It was Ebony, Jet, Ebony, Jet! So being black was limited to the people you saw. You didn't see too many images on TV and of course when you saw them, they weren't you! You know, it was just the '70s. Black people were beginning to come into their own. Like I said, the Afro was making a huge statement. Cause when you had an Afro, like my grandmother was like, what are you doing? Like you're crazy. You know, it was like '74, '75 we started; you wanted to find yourself.

Because racism has been such a significant part of African Americans being able to access schools of choice, I wanted a clearer understanding of how Ruth saw this situation from her students' perspective.

Yeah, so I was trying to reach out to the black community because I hadn't been around a lot of black people. Well, I wasn't conscious of it. Black people were in my classes but I wasn't conscious of being black. It was a reaction to being treated as an outsider by some white students. And out of that reaction comes, oh I'm not one of you, and I'll never be one of you, so I'm going to be with my own. And all of that is within the social context of what was going on.

That's pretty heavy duty. I mean, 'I'll never be one of you' so I'm going, I think that level of awareness at that age is really pretty profound. What were some of the things that were going on in school that might have been a positive that helped you get through those years that you were there?

I think probably the small classrooms, the actual education and the learning; you have very good teachers, it was very rigorous. In one of the classes we read the narratives about ex-slaves, those kind of narratives those books that came out that talked about people struggling, in the 1800s with color, with being free. I can't remember the names, but if I see the names, I remember the story; you're familiar with them. So I got exposed to that. I had a Spanish teacher that was very political, I'll put it that way, cause she always talked about Chile, and the rebellion in Chile, and that dictator, I can't remember his name it's on the tip of my tongue, that got overthrown and we'd talk about on and on and on about South American politics, and I learned a lot, well I felt like I got a lot that I would never have gotten in a normal school. And the classes were so small the teachers were free to talk. And I had a teacher who had us read a book about China, and the rise of the communist party in China, so I learned about China, and I still talk about that to this day. Because I have an office mate who is from China, and so he is surprised that I knew as much as I did. I was like yeah, I know a lot about what happened in China. Cause, the teacher, we read a book about the position that was helping Mao Tse Tung and their struggle. So he was on Mao Tse Tung side even though it was a European physician, so he wrote a book. I can't remember the name of that book. But it was very profound, and I always remember that.

So that school was THE EXPERIENCE that I remember the most, that I would refer back to the most because of the things the teachers could talk about without anybody coming in and saying, oh you can't talk that, you can't talk about religion, you can't talk about this. And then the one thing that happened to me; I had a biology teacher, now this is after my super black days, so I'm very conscious of being African American at this point you know, and I'm with other people who are conscious as well, so it was OK. Still in the 70s. And one teacher said, I didn't do too well on a biology test, and she told me that I could never do biology. She actually told me that, and that's what made me major in science; her challenge, and I tell my students that. You know, somebody told me

that I couldn't do it, but despite what they said, I can do it, and I'm not bad at it. I sure did. I felt at the time she told me because I was black. Now maybe she was saying it as a student, but that's the way I took it. You know, and I didn't challenge her at that time; I just remembered that statement. And it kind of became a part of me, and I remember that initially when I went to college I wanted to do something in science, and so I kind of muddled around until I ended up with chemistry as a major. You know, because one thing that I did get in those environments was the need to excel.

Ruth's candid recount of the events that happened at Beaver Country Day School is powerful. The emotion that she attached to these memories caused me to feel like I was present with her as she recalled having discussions about Chile and of reading about the political conditions in China. As she talked she was reliving the intensity of reading the narratives of ex-slaves, and then of being told that she would never be able to do biology because she was Black. So while this private integrated school provided a very high-quality curriculum, it also continued to reflect the prejudice and the racism that her father was working to correct in the broader community.

Even though the beliefs of the broader community were present in Ruth's school, she was not denied high-level discussions and exposure to global information just because she was African American. I have concluded that having the ability to attend Beaver Country Day School gave Ruth some advantages that she probably would not have had if she were attending her neighborhood public school in Boston. She received the benefit of small class sizes and was able to receive attention from the teacher. She talked about having well qualified teachers who enriched the curriculum beyond the standard. And perhaps the elements of high quality education in a safe environment helped to balance out the prejudice and the racism.

Ruth continued her reflections about being categorized and challenged by her teacher and she talks about her family's response to her experiences that included her choices about going to college.

So I went to college and I still didn't have that drive, and then I finally went to Talladega where I was with people who kept saying excellence, you can do it, hard work, study hard, that kept going over. That was like a mantra when we were there, and that's where I turned it around, and said you know I'm going to excel, and I did start excelling in my classes, and enjoying it. So I graduated at the top of my class. Talladega I have to credit with that.

The students were so poor they were working their butts off to get out of poverty. A lot of the students I went to school with, they were from rural Alabama towns. Very, very different from where I came from. You know, there were a few of us from, there was a handful of us at that time whose parents had gone to Talladega, so we came from an urban setting. And then there were those who came from like Opelika, Utah, outside of Montgomery, Philacago, and they were very, very poor so they were working very, very hard to get out of that. So that whole atmosphere at Talladega was you can excel, you can do it, you can be the best, you are the best.

Ruth talked about how expectations for getting an education are shared among her family, and how family members supported their students so that the bottom line goal was met even though getting there was not easy. I asked how her father's influence impacted her in terms of choosing Talledega College.

Through influence because they said that I had to go to a black college. That was that. I had no choice. So I went to Fisk, and I kind of got lost in it, I think because I was so young. You know, 17, 18, away from home, I probably was too young to be away from home. Some people are ready, but I was not ready. And then by the time I went to Talladega I was ready, I was determined, and I knew what I wanted to do.

I was going with the intent of doing the best, very best that I could do, that I knew that I could do, with that drive to really excel in my classes. Hang out with the A students, you know, and be a part of the sorority. And do all the things I felt like I was supposed to do. And I had fun doing that. Now mind you, we had a good time, we had a very good time, but at the same time, had a fantastic organic chemistry teacher, a wonderful inorganic chemistry teacher, so they really stand out in my mind, a great German teacher. At the time my boyfriend and I were

majoring in the same major so we took the same classes. It was like a small group of us and we were kind of competing with each other to get As. So we made ourselves very academically competitive. So I went on to grad school, and they went to medical school.

Ruth never attended a public school because her parents decided that she would not. So she took the information that her parents shared with her in making those decisions and her experiences from the private schools that she attended from nursery school through college, and is now making educational decisions for her own children. She explains that the history of making decisions about choice schools in her family has had a definite impact on her thinking and on her decisions in her journey from private school student to public college professor to a parent making decisions for her children's schooling.

Well, it's playing out now because they [son and daughter] don't have the choice. 'Cause I have to send them to public school because I can't afford private school. So we do research, my mother and I. And like for Rachel, we knew she had to go to a good school, and we had heard Denver School of the Arts was suggested to us at her elementary school. So she had no choice. She had to audition, and mama helped. Because they have to have a portfolio for their audition, with all their artwork. So all of us, it was very much a family affair.

And as for Wilbert, I visited the school of Science and Technology. So when I went I was so, so impressed with that school. The students, they had demonstrations in the classrooms. And you know, it was like a breath of fresh air to see students who are enthusiastic about science. 'Cause I teach science, and I'm a typical science teacher, I'm jumping up and down trying to get people to be interested, come on it's great, it's great, you know. And with them, they were just like, yeah, we're doing this, you want to see this, and they were doing all these different experiments, so he no longer has a choice. He's going to be put on that list. And if he gets chosen then he'll go. If he doesn't get chosen, then he'll go to East.

In this quote, Ruth's perspective about choice is that it is the parent's prerogative to choose the school that has the appropriate curriculum for the child, and that the child

does not necessarily have a choice. This is a little different from what Ruth experienced with her own parents who let her choose which junior high school and which high school she would attend, as long as it was private. But the bottom line is the same from generation to generation, no matter who is selecting the school. The school of choice must have a high quality curriculum, and it must be a safe environment for the student. Her parents expressed Ruth's perspective as they made choices, and this same perspective is expressed again later in this study.

As an educator herself, Ruth has an awareness of school models that are in place, and because of her environment growing up, she was aware that as African Americans her children could access the school model they wanted just as White students could.

## The Oldest Granddaughter

Rachel, Ruth's daughter, is a quiet and observant person, and she seems to be comfortable with both children and adults. She is 15 years old and is attending a magnet public school, but she plans to enroll in a public high school in the fall. I met her at church, as with the other members of her family, and came to know her just a little better when she spoke during service. I observed her in her role as worship leader and noticed how confident she seemed to be as she read scripture and announced the hymns. Her grandmother told her about my study and I made an appointment to meet with her one day after school.

We sat in the Thomas' living room and she helped me make sure that the tape recorder was working. I explained a little about my study and then I asked her to tell me about her earliest memories of school.

Probably just like learning the alphabet, learning how to write numbers. Basic things. And I probably learned that from parents and teachers, like daycare teachers. But I remember my grandma teaching us more and keeping us in practice after school or during the weekends or something. I think she brought workbooks, and yeah, just used her knowledge and write our ABCs on paper and copy it.

Rachel and her brother, Wilbert, are close and they did some of their studying together. She is two years older than he is, and when they were younger they would sometimes do their homework together at after school. This example of family togetherness is similar to what Rev. Thomas spoke about when he and his sister and brothers sat at the table in their home and did homework every day. It is a repetition in the pattern of support for this family.

Next I wanted to know what Rachel recalled about some of her early memories about learning in a school outside of her home.

I went to regular school first. I just remember going to Pioneer Charter School and kindergarten. Then it was like after school until my mom could pick me up. It was the Hope Center. It was like after school. I don't really remember much, but we learned a little bit, but I'm not really sure.

This reflection points to the fact that Rachel has had experiences with school choice models from the beginning of her formal schooling. Pioneer Charter school is an Early Childhood Education (ECE) through sixth grade school. She was enrolled there from ECE through second grade. The curriculum emphasis at Pioneer is Success For All (SFA) a school-wide, scientifically researched-based school reform model. This model also includes Character Education as well as Everyday Math, Writing From the Heart, and Writing Wings academic programs. After her second grade year the family made a decision that Rachel and Wilbert would leave Pioneer. Mrs. Thomas mentioned that the school environment began to change after a couple of years. There were more disciplinary problems that seemed to distract the children, and some of the academic programs did not seem to meet the same standard, so Dr. Ada, and the Thomas's moved the children to Carson, which was the neighborhood public elementary school.

My next question to Rachel was about the things she liked about her school and the things she did not like about them. I asked if she remembered her favorite classes and activities.

I think it was drawing mostly. I used to do it a lot. Just regular sketching, and not painting, I don't paint. But we played games, and at that school you had to wear uniforms. I learned a lot at that school. I learned more at that school than at Carson.

I asked her to tell me more about the uniforms the students had to wear at Carson. She said that the uniforms were one of the things that she did not like about the charter school.

It was like, blue blouses for the girls, like jump dresses and white shirts, or white shirts and blue pants for the boys. I think kids should be like able to wear whatever they want because I don't know, I think you should be able to express yourself by the way you dress. No because some people think uniforms are ugly and stuff. I just think you should be able to wear whatever you want even though like some kids might get made fun of by what they wear. But it's something you have to learn from.

Rachel did not like the fact that students could not express themselves through their individual clothing styles. But from my experience, one of the goals of a school that requires student uniforms is to help remove an area of conflict or division among students, and clothing is one element that can affect the environment of a school because it can lead to teasing, stealing or other kinds of bullying. Students who cannot afford certain brands and styles of clothing may feel that they do not fit, or they may feel that the other students do not accept them. By requiring that students wear uniforms, the school neutralizes one of the differences between students and removes the financial stigma from students who cannot afford high priced or name brand clothes. Wearing uniforms levels the playing field as far as clothing identity is concerned, and the uniforms give everyone in the school a sense of being included.

I continued talking to Rachel about Pioneer and she outlined the daily schedule.

I think we read in the morning, out loud. Oh no, I think we read to ourselves in the morning for like DEAR time, then we had nap, then I think it was snack, and then we went to gym or music, or whatever class we had that day. Then go to lunch, recess then come back and she would read to the whole class. DEAR time is a reading program where student do individual reading and they keep track of

the number of books they read in an effort to reach a goal that has been set by the school district.

She did not give a lot of detail about the school day and did not refer to any problems or any great successes, but she talked briefly about moving from Pioneer Charter to Carson public elementary school. She did not say why her mother and grandparents decided to move them to Carson, and she did not say that she objected to the change. I asked her to share some of the things she remembered about the environment and about the schedule at Carson. We also talked a little about the student body and I asked what she remembered about the number of kids in her class, if there were about the same number of boys and girls, and if it seemed like there was diversity at Carson.

It [schedule] depended on the teacher. It was either like. I don't really remember, but I remember in the middle of the day it would always be like writing, and math like after recess and lunch. It would be lunch then recess in fourth and fifth grade I think. We had a really good principal for the first year or the first two years. Then the rest we had a new principal and everything just changed, and it wasn't like as well organized and fun.

Rachel's understanding of how the school day was organized and of the work that was expected by the teachers is another example of her matter-of-fact participation in the school process. As the participants have talked about being successful in school, they have said that the school process means that students are able to go to the school building and participate in their classes with academic success. They are able to interact with their teachers in a productive way and are accepted by enough of the student population that they don't feel ostracized or bullied. Mrs. Thomas said earlier that Rachel did not have any problems adjusting to school, and that she was able to take the process of learning in

stride without any great upset. In this way, Rachel seems to be like her grandfather who did not mention any great problems or concerns about going to school while he was in Kentucky or Chicago. They both embraced the process and did well in their studies.

I wanted Rachel's perspective about diversity in school and I wanted to know if she felt any of the prejudice that was mentioned by her brother and that her mother had experienced in her private school. She talked about a different kind of student diversity at Carson.

It was like a lot of hearing impaired kids at Carson, and like maybe a quarter Mexican, and Hispanic, and not very many African Americans, cause there were a lot of white kids. There were a lot of Hispanics and more African American kids than white kids. And then at Carson there was a little bit of like Asian kids. They [hearing impaired kids] were in the classes, some of them were in the classes with us, or in some parts of the classes with us, and at other times they would be in their own special classrooms.

Rachel shared some of the items that were unique about her public elementary school. One requirement of public schools is that they accept all students who live in their boundary area no matter what their academic or their physical ability. In the case of Carson Elementary School, the Board of Education had designated it as a center school for hearing impaired children, and that particular student population was prominent in the regular classrooms as well as in their own specialized classrooms. The center school concept means that there is a school within a school, as well as a mainstream model for all of the students, and the specialization services of each center school is determined by the school district. Center schools are usually housed within a regular public school and they are governed by regular school policy as well as by special education guidelines. After completing the fifth grade at Carson, Rachel went on to middle at the Denver School of the Arts (DSA).

I did a little reading and found that the Denver School of the Arts is a magnet public school. It is the only comprehensive secondary arts magnet (grades 6-12) in the Rocky Mountain region. It offers a challenging and rigorous academic program, and students engage in intensive studies in Creative Writing, Dance, Theatre, Instrumental Music, Stagecraft and Design, Video Cinema Arts, Visual Arts, and Vocal Music. DSA is committed to fostering a lifelong love of the arts in a culturally diverse, academically challenging environment.

I asked Rachel to tell me a little more about DSA.

You have to like audition, or you have to be interviewed to get in. Or in some way you have to pay. I think that's what a magnet school is. Oh no wait, students at DSA, they had to audition. There were different art forms, there was orchestra, band, vocal, dance, stagecraft, cinema, visual arts, creative writing, and drama. Stagecraft and design. You don't really do anything, but there's different productions that go on, and you help them build sets, do light designs, set designs, paint. You do everything, and then there's costuming, so you do everything. You do everything. Yeah, they have concerts and you get the costumes and get the lights, that's what stagecrafts do.

We had to make a two by two by two-inch paper cube, and you had to draw this costume that was standing in front of you. You had to describe it. And they asked, you had to have a portfolio to give to them. And they asked you what your experience was in like designing and drawing and stuff, and that's all.

By going through this process Rachel demonstrated her talents and her confidence in theater arts. She was accepted at the DSA and took advantage of the novel environment there to pursue her interest in the arts. Rachel's answers here also show that she is capable of analyzing what makes a good fit for her as well as what does not help her in school. She described one of her design projects for me.

Like this year I designed for the pop show costumes. First you get a page full of all of the people who are going to be in it. You measure people, every single person. And in the pop show there's different choirs, so you have to sort people by different choirs, and different lengths, or different measurements. Then you sketch, or there's different songs, and you have to figure out which people and

which choirs are doing those songs, it's a lot of work. And then you have to sketch out what you want for that song. If you want people to bring in some stuff to add to it, or whatever, and as you sketch it out, you get a general idea. Then you go to this place called disguises, and you can rent out a bunch of costumes, then you bring it over here. And you put stuff on racks by people's names, and tell them a list of what they should have for each song. The song itself, because like for Thriller, it was an '80s, And you have to figure out what they wore in the '80s, and then use your sense of idea to use what you want, or what you're used to. And try to incorporate it all together.

Rachel was very successful at DSA and thrived on the challenges of her program.

She told me that she felt she had learned a lot in that area and that she was ready to move on to a more traditional school environment, so after talking to her mother and her grandparents, she is planning on going to a public high school in the fall.

As I look at connections between the generations I have found that one of her family's innate qualities has been their ability to see the strength in a solid school structure and curriculum program. They are able to identify where the support of the teaching staff has been strong as in the Black schools before integration. They have been able to determine when the teacher's expectations for their achievement have been low as with Mrs. Ada in Boston. And they have been able to see when a lot of support is needed from home as with Mrs. Thomas and Wilbert. I believe that the family's willingness to focus on each individual school situation to see where the strengths and weaknesses are in terms of their individual needs has allowed them to seek alternatives within the educational system in order to achieve greater academic outcomes for each person.

## The Oldest Grandson

Wilbert Ada is 13 and the oldest grandson of Rev. and Mrs. Thomas. I met him when he came to our church with his grandparents and he was very willing to participate in this project. Both he and his sister Rachel live with Rev. and Mrs. Thomas so we conducted our interview at the Thomas' home.

Wilbert is currently attending a public middle school but has been enrolled in different schools over the past three years. One was a public elementary school, one was a charter middle school and one was a public middle school. I asked Wilbert to tell me about his early education, and he started by talking about a typical day in his charter preschool where he attended Early Childhood Education classes.

Like we would come in early in the morning to do the warm up, like do the coloring patterns and counting, and then we would do other things, and then after we did recess we had nap time, and then at the end of the day, that's when we would play with our toys. That's when our parents came to pick us up.

We got to draw pictures and paint. There's one right there. [on the wall] I was five years old. In ECE it went from 9:00 to 12:00. And then in kindergarten it went all day. 9:00 until whenever it ended. My mom or grandma drove me. Sometimes my grandpa would drive my sister and me. Everything was cool at that school.

The decision to move Wilbert to a new school was made because he was not continuing to experience success. His grades were not as good as they had been, and his behavior was getting him into disciplinary sessions at school. The charter school the family chose was not in the same neighborhood as the family's home. So it was not chosen for the convenience of its location. It was chosen to provide a new environment and a new academic focus for Wilbert so that he would have the opportunity to get back on track for academic success.

Charter schools are often established around a central theme. This particular charter is about five miles from the Thomas family and its theme is centered on Character Education and Literacy. Wilbert and his sister attended Pioneer Charter School for two years and then they went to a public elementary school that was near their home. By attending a charter school for pre school they began their participation in school choice education programs from the very beginning of their schooling.

When Wilbert left Pioneer Charter School he went to Carson, a public elementary school just a few blocks from their home. I asked him about some of the differences he noticed between Pioneer and Carson.

I had Ms. Caulkins, the gym teacher, and the art teacher. "It was weird cause I came to a school full of white people, and I wasn't used to that. Cause I was used to being around a lot of black people".

He continued by saying that the kids at Pioneer were mostly Black and Mexican, and that he did not know if the difference in the racial/ethnic population made a difference to him in his studies. "It's not that I didn't feel uncomfortable, it was just a lot of White people, you know."

I asked him to tell me more about the differences of being in a school with Black and Hispanic kids, and white kids. Do they learn in different ways? Does it feel different in some way? Do the students use a different kind of speech when they talk? "Yeah, like Black and Mexican kids, they talk a certain way, and you know, White kids, they talk another certain way. We all talk different ways. Like White kids, they use dictionary words." He was explaining that the children learn from one another as well as they do from their teachers, and he emphasized that children within the same culture learn the

cultural expressions and those expressions may be different than those of children in another cultural group.

I wanted to know more about his understanding of these distinct cultural differences in language, and I asked him if he knew why kids spoke using such different words. He gave me an example of some of the slang he used at school.

What's up, fool? And a white kid would be, hello, how are you? What's up means hello. What's up means what's happening, you know, and hello, you know. They're both greetings. Like how, well, some white people, well, all people say bye, bye. But we say peace. That's a way of saying goodbye.

Wilbert demonstrated the depth of his understanding about communication with his peers. He is able to understand the language that the White students use even though that is not the language he chooses to use himself, and this understanding speaks to his ability to assimilate into the culture of the public school if he chose to do so.

I then asked him if he thought that people learn to talk that way in school, or if they bring the way that they talk with them when they get to school. Is it something that they have learned at home over the years?

Like you know, maybe one kid was watching TV and maybe he started talking like that at school, and got his friends talking like him and they got the whole school talking like it. Or maybe some people just watched TV and they just picked it up. I got it from my friends.

We talked about his friends and about their influence on him because I wanted to know if most of his friends were Black kids and if they were talking slang, then would he learn how to talk like them, and his answer was yes. I also asked if he wasn't around many white people, or didn't have them as close friends, would he talk like them? And he said, probably so.

These observations are significant to the study because they are similar to the ideas that his mother had when she was trying to be like the Black students she went to school with at her private school in Boston. And they are similar to what his grandmother said when she was trying to find a group of students who accepted her as she attended elementary school in St. Louis. The similarity here for each of the generations is that all of these students were seeking to find a comfort level and a level of acceptance among the students in their school. Each of these family members was able to do so to a certain extent while they were attending private schools and public schools. From a student perspective, the feeling of acceptance and having a comfort level are measures of the school being the right fit. As this family discussed schools that are right for their children, they considered acceptance as one of the criteria when making the choice.

Another element of the study that Wilbert mentioned here was the curriculum, which he found challenging in some ways and boring in other ways. I asked him to give me details about his subjects and about the kind of student he felt he was. We talked about his studies and he shared that his grades were not that good for a while and then they got better.

Well, I did like math. Yeah, but I would always get the problems wrong. So I'd have to stay in during recess. 'cause I tried to figure it out. I mean, I liked fractions for a little bit, but, you know, I liked basic times tables like  $2+2$ ,  $4+4$ ,  $1+1$  and all that stuff. I don't like that complicated stuff like  $4.5$  divided by  $7.500$ , that kind of stuff. And  $E=MC^2$ . I don't get that stuff. Well, I do it but I don't like it.

I don't even remember report cards back then. Cause I don't ever remember, cause I would hear on TV, like when I would watch Arthur, and he would come home and say, Mom I have an A, and all that stuff, but I don't remember that stuff. I started remembering report cards in fifth grade. Cause, you know in fourth grade I was still at Carson, you know, and we didn't do a lot of work. We

barely got progress reports, I guess cause I don't remember. But on the math tests, I would always flunk, so that's what I remember about getting bad grades. And then when I went to fifth grade there was a lot of work. And then I remember progress reports. Cause like, cause I was used to being at Carson, so I was used to not doing a lot of work, so I started out like getting D's and all that stuff. Then I brought it up to C's and B's and A's.

Wilbert explained that he thought some of the reasons for his grades were because his teachers did not like him or were not good teachers; then he said that in some of the classes were pretty easy and that he was able to get good grades. This reflection is similar to what his grandmother said when she was struggling in school. The role of the teacher, especially for students who are struggling, is essential in providing support and clarity for the learning process. Mrs. Thomas referred to Wilbert's learning style and his needs when I interviewed her.

We took him and put him into the charter school Highline, and that really wasn't a good choice. I think he's smart. But I think he's a child that if he's not kept real busy, things get out of hand for him. But he's beginning to come into an understanding of what he ought to be, and what he ought to do. I see him developing now. I kind of think he fought growing up for awhile. I think he really did. I just think that he has refused to try to get some real feeling for education or for controlling himself and things like that. I think he wanted to stay the little mischievous child and I told him, you're getting older, and you're not looking cute at school. You've got to straighten it out. Nobody admires these little silly things you do, but I think that he's deciding now that he wants to grow up.

I mentioned earlier that Rev. and Mrs. Thomas were taking a direct role in Rachel's and Wilbert's education. This is one specific example of how the grandparents talked with their daughter to identify the concerns of his schooling, and then did research together in order to make changes in the schools that Wilbert attended so that they could help him find success. Mrs. Thomas identified her grandson's characteristics and saw where his elementary school was coming up short in addressing his learning style needs.

He needed direct attention from his teachers and he needed an environment that was less distracting. The family gathered literature, visited the school, and then chose Highline Charter School thinking that perhaps the small size of the school with four hundred students in Kindergarten through eighth grade would provide a more focused environment for Wilbert. They also wanted to see if the Core Knowledge curriculum would help Wilbert focus on his studies. There was no satisfactory change in his adjustment to school, so the family put him back into a public middle school near his home, and they continued monitoring his progress very closely.

At this point I would like to say just a little more about the Highline Charter School, which is located just a few blocks from the Thomas home. It is a tuition free non-religious school. It meets the state content standards and it is accredited by the school district. The theme for the school is Core Knowledge, and the online description for Highline says that the curriculum is based on the theory that students should be contributing members of American society and that they should be culturally literate. To that end students are provided with a solid, content-rich education that prepares them for higher-level learning. Mrs. Thomas mentioned that Highline was not a good choice for Wilbert, but did not elaborate on the reasons why. The family made the decision to choose another school for Wilbert at the beginning of the following year.

I asked Wilbert what he thought about having to change schools. "I don't know. I think they thought I was getting in a lot of trouble."

You mean that your grandparents and your mother thought that you were getting into too much trouble? "Yeah. And then I went to Highline, which wasn't any better. I still got in a lot of trouble."

I wanted to know if Wilbert had an idea of why he was getting into trouble in school and not doing well with his schoolwork.

I was bored. It wasn't easy, I don't know. I just didn't feel like doing it. And sometimes me and my friends would just do things. Just to do things to have fun you know. 'Cause you know our school was like a warehouse. They had high ceilings and then the walls weren't good, so the classrooms were connected together. So we would throw pencils over the walls and a couple of them hit teachers. There was] no roof over the classroom, so that's how we got to throw things. And then, we would get into fights too.

In my class it was pretty much full of white kids, except me and this other kid, and these two other girls. And I was mainly the one that got in trouble in that class cause I thought my teacher was racist. And I still think she is. She was always staring at me. Like with big ole eyes, like this while I was doing my work, and always bothering me. Like when she was looking at me I would call her a racist teacher to my friends, and she heard it, but she never said anything. She would just look at me more, and more, and more. And get madder and madder at me and try to set me up so I could get to detention. That's what I think.

There is a connection here between Wilbert and his mother in terms of the perceptions they had about their teacher's feelings. They both said that they experienced feelings of racism while they were in school. Mrs. Ada did not say anything to her teachers about her feelings of racism while she was in school at Beaver Country Day school in Boston but she did share her feelings with her parents. Wilbert, on the other hand, told his family about feeling that there was racism in school, and he also told his friends.

The theme of racism has taken different forms throughout this study. During the grandparent's generation, racism in schools took the form of segregated, separate but equal schools. In the daughter's generation racism was identified through the efforts of the civil rights movement and it was publicly defined by the violence that erupted in major cities as a result of forced busing for desegregation. In the grandchildren's

generation, Wilbert, for example, feels that racism is still present and is being expressed through the actions of his teachers in the classroom. Based on Wilbert's experience, the fact that students can attend almost any school they want has not solved the problem of racial ethnic prejudice.

Wilbert told me about the school that he is attending now. It is a public middle school not too far from their home. Wilbert said that he had made a decision about his behavior in school, and that things were going better. He said that he had decided to stay quiet and to stay out of trouble. He talked a little about how his school handles discipline and about his choices in his behavior.

Charter schools are maybe a little bit more strict. Carson wasn't that strict, 'cause they didn't suspend a lot of kids. But now in middle school, in public school, teachers just suspend kids for no reason. Like they can suspend you for accidentally cussing.

They [Highline] probably would have put you in detention for a couple of days. Like if you fight at Hill they're going to suspend you for three days, but in my case they only gave me one day cause I didn't hit him back. But they suspend you for three days, and they give you a \$200 fine. That is if you hit him back and it's a big fight. And at Highline they suspend you for two days, no fine and stuff, and at Carson, they didn't suspend me, cause we fought basically every day. Sometimes it was serious, sometimes it wasn't serious, you know. Like sometimes we would play fight.

I don't like suspension, it don't make sense to me. It just gets things madder. They said, like, whoever you are fighting, they said have you all do community service. I rather do that. Cause I've done it before. I'd rather do community service for fighting, and then apologize, for fighting to that kid, and so you all can become friends. That's what I think that it should be.

Wilbert told me about the next way that he changed in school. He said that he was beginning to like some of his classes and that some of his teachers were okay. I asked him to give me an example of a class assignment that he liked and he talked about a substitute teacher who had to solve a problem during math class.

My friend Alula was playing a prank on Kinser but she stole her bus pass, right. And so we had a substitute teacher and so he couldn't find any proof that Alula took it, but he finally came in and gave her the bus pass so we had a court up in the classroom. The teacher was the judge, I was Alula's lawyer and DeAndre was Kinser's lawyer. And I was the best lawyer, 'cause if he was innocent I would have won the case, but he was guilty so. And I liked that. It was pretty cool.

Wilbert told me how the idea for a court in the classroom came up. "Somebody yelled out, let's have a trial, and he [teacher] was like, that's a good idea." I wanted to know what Wilbert liked most about being the lawyer. "You get to yell. And you get to argue, you know." Wilbert seemed very proud of his accomplishment in the classroom court, and said that he might like to have a career as a lawyer. This activity may be the kind of unusual approach that catches his attention. It may be the beginning of a series of experiences that help him form that positive connection to school.

Mrs. Thomas told me earlier that she had talked with Wilbert about being a lawyer when he finished school and one of the things that she told him was that he would have to learn all about the U.S. Constitution. She went to the bookstore and bought a copy of the constitution so that they could sit down together and read through the whole document. Her commitment to helping Wilbert find a positive connection to school is unwavering, and she is hoping that this will be an area of interest that he will carry through high school and into college.

Wilbert explained to me what he thought about his family trying to help him do better in school. I wanted to know if he believed that they were influencing him. He explained how his grandmother helped him when he got into trouble at school by talking to him and by trying to explain what he should do and what he should not do. He also

talked with pride about how special he thought it was that his mother had earned a PhD, and gone to more than one college.

My mom, 'cause she has been to two colleges. She's been to the one in Tennessee, Penn State or whatever that was. And she's been to Tuskegee, the one in Alabama. And she got a PhD, and I think she went to college four years however long it takes to get a PhD, and I think she went to graduate school. 'Cause not a lot of people could say their mom's a PhD.

The value that the Thomas family placed on education has been passed along to the grandchildren and Wilbert is proud of the doctorate degree that his mother earned. His pride in her educational achievements is obvious, and he is glad about this high level accomplishment that sets him apart from his friends. I also wanted to know if Wilbert made a connection between being a student in middle school and going on to earn a PhD for himself. He said he knew that he was going to go to college, but that he did not know where yet.

The student perspective that Wilbert brings is important to this study because it gives insight into the elements that he considers to be important in a school. He has shared that he wants academic work that is interesting, and subjects that allow him to participate in a way that is natural to him. His high energy level makes him enjoy talking, arguing, yelling, and making his point. Perhaps a Montessori school model would be a better fit for his interests and for his learning style because the structure in a Montessori model is less rigid than the Core Knowledge model described at the Highline Charter School. When his mother attended a Montessori school in the '60s, it was a new concept in education. Forty years later, it has become an accepted alternative to traditional public school education. Wilbert and his mother and grandparents are expecting more success at the public middle school he is attending this year. The family

plans to continue monitoring his progress, and to make other adjustments if they feel it necessary.

### The Youngest Daughter

Stella is the Thomas's youngest daughter, and she lives with her husband, son, and daughter in Clarion. I met her two summers ago when she was visiting her parents and she brought her children, Emmanuel and Carolina, to the summer program at church. Mrs. Thomas introduced us one afternoon after the day's activities were finished. Stella smiles easily and has an open and energetic manner. She and her husband, Samuel, are homeschooling their two children and they are very much in favor of the practice of parents looking at a variety of choices for educating their children. It was two years after our first meeting before I had the opportunity to talk with her, and to begin interviewing her family. During that space of time Mrs. Thomas had spoken to Stella and asked her if she and her family would like to join the rest of them by participating in my research project, and Stella's answer was yes.

I sent an e-mail to Stella just after I finished interviewing Ruth's family. It was in the early spring of 2007, and I told Stella that I was planning to travel to Clarion in a couple of months. I asked if it would be convenient to schedule the family interviews at that time. We discussed the details and I made the trip in late spring.

Clarion was a new location for Stella and her family. Samuel received a promotion and became director of human services just a short time prior to my visit. The family was still settling in to their new home and I was very grateful that Stella arranged for me to fit into their busy schedule.

When I arrived in Clarion, I stayed with my daughter, Charlene, who was in her second year of graduate school at the university there. She helped me with directions to Stella's home, and I was able to work on my interview transcriptions in her home office during the evenings.

When I arrived, Stella introduced me to Emmanuel and Carolina. A family friend was helping them set up a trampoline in their new backyard. I learned later that this trampoline project was part of the children's home school recreation program, and that everything that went on in and around the house was part of the home school curriculum.

Stella began by telling me what she recalled about her earliest education memories. She was born in Chicago and that is where she began her story.

My first memory is at a Montessori school in Chicago where it was center based, where they had centers for different types of educational activities. And so we would rotate through those centers. And I had an African American teacher, I don't remember her name but I remember the environment being really friendly. It was a friendly, creative environment. It didn't feel structured, though there was structure, but it didn't feel structured.

It was in Chicago in the Hyde Park area where it was a middle class mixed area so yeah, it was African American and white, probably half and half. Maybe 40-60; 60 percent being Caucasian. And it wasn't far from home. I do remember that. It was in close proximity to where we were living at the time in Hyde Park.

Stella is four years younger than her sister, Ruth, and she attended the Montessori four years after Ruth was there. I was interested in hearing if Stella, being younger, had a perspective that was similar to Ruth's and I asked if she had any idea why her parents chose that school for them.

I'm sure that they had talked with people. They were pretty active in the community in terms of politics and civic activities, so I'm sure that they talked to somebody, or people that they knew who recommended that school. So it wasn't just on a whim because it was nearby, but because there was a good foundation of what the school was offering for their students. And they had moved to that area

more than likely because of the schools. They had been in one section of Chicago and I know it probably wasn't a real very low income section, but Hyde Park at that point was where blacks were coming in and integrating that area, and it was a middle class area, so more than likely the schools also had that type of population. And then in the middle of first grade we moved to Boston and we went to a parochial school, and that parochial school was first grade through sixth grade.

Stella's reflection provides an insight into how she understood her parent's thinking about school, and how she understood their actions in making choices in housing, and in deciding what schools offered good programs for their children. Her explanation about the choice of this school was similar to Ruth's, and the girl's stories have similarities even though they were not always in the same school at the same time. Stella provided a recollection of how she understood school choice early on. She said that public schools were never an option for her and for her sister. She believed that her parents moved into certain neighborhoods so that the girls would have access to certain schools. When she was ready to go to high school she talked to her parent and to her teachers about the schools that were available for her. There was a menu of school models to choose from and her choice was different than her sister's choice. Stella held on to her understanding that choice was available as she completed her own schooling and later began to make choices for her children.

Going to school in the middle class neighborhood of Hyde Park in Chicago, and then moving to Boston allowed Stella and Ruth to attend schools that had a good strong academic foundation, and Stella explained that the environment around their home was not as volatile as it was in other parts of the city. She also gave an insight into how the civil rights movement and the integration of the schools affected her as a child.

I was aware of the fact that there was something going on because my father was heavily involved. He was a minister and also worked for an agency called Project

Equality. And Jesse Jackson was a frequent visitor to our home, and we went to his home and played with his kids quite a bit. So in the conversations you could hear things. As a child I just knew things were going on. I wasn't sure what it was, but it wasn't directly in our neighborhood. And Jesse Jackson was not far from where we were, but you knew something was going on, and there was always conversation about this and that. There was just a tension in the air that I was aware of, and it's interesting, I remember my father would call and work late sometimes. He would call, and I would pick up the phone and mom would pick up the other phone and I would listen as a child does, and he would say, I'm working late cause I'm all tied up. Well, that transferred to me as he was literally tied up. I had an image of him being tied up.

Isn't that traumatizing! I never shared it with anyone until I was older. But I remember always being upset when he wasn't home. You know, because I had an image of him being tied up with a light bulb over his head, and I don't know where that image came from, but again, it had something to do with the conversations that I was listening to, and I knew something was going on. And he traveled a lot too. So he was gone quite a bit; a lot of unrest. And my mother at the time was affected by that; that she was home alone with two kids. It was affecting her to a degree. There was some sadness at times.

This information paints a very powerful picture of that part of Stella's childhood world. Her family's direct involvement in Boston's struggle during the civil rights movement created some fears and some sadness because of the intensity of the tumult. During Mrs. Thomas' interview she referred to this upheaval. She described how the circumstances generated by this turmoil strongly led her and Rev. Thomas to make decisions to keep their children out of the public uproar, and out of the schools that were in desperate need of adequate materials, of quality teachers, and of a peaceful environment. Stella commented on her parent's decisions.

I think the choices my parents made were intentional, so that we would not experience those kinds of things. Where they moved to in terms of having access to certain schools, even the move to Boston, and the school that was chosen was a private parochial school, so I never had that feeling that we were lacking anything, even though the parochial school was in a renovated mansion in Beacon Hill in Boston, so it wasn't a typical school building. It was renovated, there was always fundraisers going on, but you didn't feel you were lacking for anything, and it was a very creative environment that was fostered there. So for example for fifth grade we made our own desks. Yeah, we had a real creative teacher so

we made our own desks and painted our desks, and we used them the whole year. We made cubbies and stuff. Well, I never felt we were lacking. We just used what we had. We used the public gardens a lot for our gym classes. Where we had chapel every day was also used as the gym. But if it was nice out, we went to the Commons or the public gardens and played soccer, or on the esplanade and played. So the city was also our classroom.

Stella gives a very clear response about her understanding of the schools that were chosen for her and for her sister. And she brings in several elements of the kinds of schools that are presented in this study. She attended a private preschool, a private Montessori school, and then a religious parochial school. She felt that there was a great benefit from the school curriculums, as well as from the creativity used by her teachers and the fact that they school used the city itself as a classroom. She continued by making another observation about why these specific educational decisions were made by her mother and her father.

Well, education has always been an important part of our family's background several generations back. Therefore, as a result both my parents are college educated. My father has a master's degree, or M. Div. And he chose the administrative route in the religious world. So he was more of a bureaucrat within the denomination and an administrator of programs that helped people. And so as a result of their education luck, and of being in the right place at the right time, and of making use of opportunities that came their way, I think they became knowledgeable about information about certain schools. You know, so it's having access to, having privileges, or access to, maybe not privileges, but having access to information, and then using that information for their kids to give another opportunity that they may not have had.

They both went to segregated schools and in the '70s it was the drogue to put your child in an integrated environment because we had integrated; so that was the thing to do. Also when we moved to Boston, Boston public schools were in the middle of transitioning to what they called forced desegregation. And that's a very Caucasian term for desegregation. And buses were being stoned and things. And it was really, really tumultuous and of course my parents didn't want us to be part of that. Even though dad was on the front line protesting for desegregating the schools, and we received quite a bit of hate mail at the house because he was the executive director of the Missionary Society, but also active in political groups that wanted Boston schools, that wanted all children to have access to school. But they [my parents] didn't want their children part of that, and I can't

blame them. If they could afford it and not have to have their children in all that, you know, I would have made the same choice.

Rev. and Mrs. Thomas did make some sacrifices in order to achieve these educational goals. They are not a typical African American family in terms of making financial sacrifices so that they could pay private school tuition. Their independent thinking and their unwavering determination to provide the best that they could for their children stands out as the central theme for this family's participation in school choice options. Stella talked a little more about how her parents taught her and her sister how to be independent thinkers when they were old enough to share in the decisions about school choice options.

I graduated from the Advent School, and then I attended Windsor School, which is an all girls college prep school in Brookline, Massachusetts; very Blue Blood, very Brahmin. Boston Brahmin, that's a term that you would use. I think I chose the school because it had structure. It has a little bit more structure than what I had at Advent. Advent, there was a lot of freedom, and I think I wanted a little bit more structure, and still was looking for the close knit, closeness that Advent afforded me, but I knew that I wasn't going to be able to get any more. We only had 11 students in my class at Advent, and then we went to 45 girls, but it was all girls. And that was my choice. My sister chose another school. She chose a co-ed school. So we could choose our own school.

I would like to point out several things here because they are at the very heart of the decision-making process that is used by this family of independent thinkers. First, Stella and Ruth's attendance at the 'very Blue Blood' Advent school had exposed them to a level of society that they normally would not have interacted with. That is a form of enrichment and diversity that benefits everyone who is involved, especially in that time

of the civil rights movement where there were elements of mistrust among racial/ethnic groups.

Secondly, Stella talked about her understanding of what she needed for herself as a student in terms of the environment that is provided by structure, and in terms of an environment that is created by having a close-knit class. Both her mother and her sister spoke in their earlier interviews about having a sense of who they were as students and of what they needed from their schools.

And thirdly, Stella shared that both she and her sister were allowed to make their own choice about which particular school they wanted to attend after leaving elementary school at Advent. Their parents did not have a cookie cutter expectation that both girls would learn the same way and that they must continue to go to the same schools. I asked how it came about that the girls could make their own choices. I wanted to know the steps they took with their parents when it was time for the next level of schooling.

Well, the school that you attended, they knew that the sixth grade was your last year, so there was a preparation process, that your own school, the school had us go through and we would make visits to schools, scheduled visits with your parents, and then apply. We'd write essays and whatever, take tests, research schools, and Windsor wasn't the only school that I applied to, but it was the one I decided to go to. So it was a process as well as I can remember, just like you would for college. Public school was never an option. I never thought of it as an option, and it was never presented as an option. I believe there was one public school called Roxberry Latin that was considered a premier public school, but I never went to visit it. It was just kind of mentioned in passing. You didn't, from Advent you just didn't go to public school if you didn't have to. You went to Beaver, you went to Dana Hall, you went to Concord, you went to Windsor, you went to Bremmer May. There was like a string of private schools that you knew about because other people had gone to, and those were the options. Those were the schools that you chose. Ruth chose Beaver Country Day, and I chose Windsor. And that was it as far as I can remember.

This reflection shows that there was an expectation for individualistic expression from the family in terms of Stella and Ruth not choosing a public school. The Thomas held true to their first decisions that were made when their daughters were very young, that they would attend private schools. Additionally Stella shared that there were expectations that were set by the private school system itself. Students just did not go from Advent to a public school, and there was a process that was used to direct students to the next level of private schools such as those that Stella listed. So the two sets of expectations, one from the family, and one from the private school system joined together to further direct the girls to stay within the school choice program. I asked Stella if she had a sense of being treated differently because she went to private school.

Well, not amongst adults. I think you would get that if you met kids from the neighborhood. You know they didn't know who you were, you didn't know them, and you know, if you mentioned that you went to private school, you were over in this section and everybody kind of hung out with other private school people. But I think the one benefit Ruth and I had was that the agency my dad was executive director of had a summer camp. And it was a summer camp for inner city kids, but it was in New Hampshire, so we went to those summer camps, and so we mixed with kids of all races, all backgrounds, primarily inner city public schools, so we got that flavor, if you will, and made good friends from camp, and the friendships lasted beyond the summer, at least for me it did, and I think for Ruth, too. So I think that helped. So I think they really tried to balance it even if they weren't knowingly trying it balanced out anyway. And through church, and church always brings in a mix of people. So I had friends through church, and it was okay, and because we were in the youth group together it was okay and I was accepted because I was part of something.

The significance of this reflection is that Stella has identified the other side of the educational coin in terms of the socialization among children that accompanies the academic curriculum in schools. This socialization element means that there are meetings and interaction between peers. And though its importance is sometimes minimized, socialization is crucial to the development of well-rounded adults. It helps

different groups understand one another and provides a means for some barriers of misunderstanding to be removed. Schools have other areas of socialization outside of the racial ethnic definition. Stella talked about the financial tiers and the barriers that she encountered in school.

Now I think in the school I began to feel socially I was missing something at the school, because I wasn't in all of the social groups. And that's where the race issue comes in, where even some economic issues come in. As you become a teenager when you go to a dance, you may not get asked to dance, you know, if you're one of two African Americans in a group of white folks, white kids, and kids can be cruel, so that's when I was about 12 or 13 was when I began to feel that I was missing something from the school, but not from my life outside of the school.

I felt it in the school definitely, and really did not realize what I was feeling, I thought it was teenage angst, but when I look back on it now, I remember comments teachers made that probably were inappropriate, or a little bit derogatory but in a subtle way that adults can do towards children. And you don't realize what they're doing but they're chipping away at your self worth because they have a perspective about you. And either they think you shouldn't be there, or they don't know how to deal with you with respect, and they're not used to it. Now I hear Windsor has changed, and they even have a support group for black girls, which is good, because at that time they didn't, so I think some of us were feeling a little bit funny. When you're 13, your body is changing, everything is changing, you know, and then to feel more different when you already feel different and you are made to feel something, and you're not sure why.

Stella's thoughts about the economic and racial issues that she dealt with at Windsor are found throughout this study. Her experience of not being part of the social groups because she was Black is in the same vein of her mother not being accepted by some students because her skin color was not black enough. While the academic programs were strong and she had the opportunity to learn at a high academic level, the private school did not offer a completely positive and well-rounded opportunity for her. Her parents wanted quality educational programs, and they wanted the girls to be safe. The racial prejudice that she found in school was a reflection of what African American

children were facing in the community at that time. Stella gave more details about subtle and overt activities that separated her and her sister from the majority of the student body.

Well, like I gave you the example of the social situation, but just even parties I wouldn't get invited to. We were well dressed, but we didn't have 'the clothes' that the other girls had, or we didn't go overseas on vacation and things like that, you know where we took road trips down to Kentucky and to Chicago, you know, like everybody else we knew except those people. And we were in the car with no air conditioning, and that was the way it was, and it was okay. We had a good time, you know, but then when you talk about it, they say oh, well I went to Greece, and then you would feel like, gee. So I think there was a little bit of that. But I do believe that it was the times. My parents didn't know what was going on, and I think had they known what was going on, they probably would have done a little bit more at home to kind of offset some of that stuff. But again we were the first generation coming out of civil rights, and hey, my parents thought you are in the school, your teachers should be teaching you like they're teaching the others, but they weren't. Now, I do remember the Jewish girls, their mothers were up there all the time. And there was a reason; because they needed to make sure their girls were getting the same fair treatment as everybody else.

The results of the choices the Thomas's made were productive overall in terms of their daughters having access to the opportunity to receive a quality academic program in school. And having the right to access to the opportunity for quality education in the same way as any White child could was the crux of the matter behind the Civil Rights Movement. Having the opportunity was the key to being able to learn. But as Stella explains, she still had to struggle for fair treatment from the school even though she was enrolled in one of the most prestigious schools in Boston. And her sister shared similar experiences at her school, which was also one of the best in Boston. Stella explained why she thought that her parents were not aware of the prejudicial treatment that was going on, and that she felt they would have offered more support at home if they had known.

Well, when they came up, my parents were around teachers who cared about them. And they didn't know that there were teachers that did not care. Every

teacher they had made sure they learned, just about every teacher, and you didn't make it out of that school without reading writing and feeling good about yourself, and being happy and secure with the choices that you had though they may be few. And you knew who you were, and you knew you couldn't go here, but you also knew which person was watching out for you, and we didn't have that, but my parents didn't realize that those teachers didn't feel the same way about me, that you know the other teachers, that their teachers felt.

I asked her if she thought that the differences in the way teachers taught and behaved toward students was primarily the differences in the experience of north and south, or if she thought it was primarily the experience of public school and private schools because her parents were in public schools in the south.

I think it's an experience of race, black and white. I don't think it's a north or south, or private or public. I think that I may have experienced the same thing in a public school. Just being around other white teachers at that time.

I left Windsor after the 10th grade, and went to Bremmer and Mae, which is another, all girls private school, smaller and more like Advent and I loved it. I wasn't that happy at Windsor, it was just not, it just wasn't good. It was okay, but I did better at Bremmer. My grades were okay at Windsor, and I think that it was because of some of the issues I was dealing with whatever they were, I can't remember now. I went to Bremmer, loved Bremmer; I was going to be the student government president. Yeah, I got awards, and then dad said I'm moving to Signet. So the great trauma!

So I was at Bremmer Mae one year. People begged my father to have me live in Boston, and I had so many offers to live in people's homes so I could finish my senior year in Boston, which I really wanted to do, but of course Rev. Thomas would not have it! He just said, absolutely not. You're coming with us. I guess it was the distance, you know. I guess, I don't know. So we moved to Signet and I looked at some private schools, and it wasn't anything like what I was used to, so we opted for the public school, and that was actually my father's doing. He said Manual was fine. I graduated from Manual High School. And so it was kind of a, they made it okay. There were some family members who were saying, you're graduating from a public school, like it was you know, this bad thing, but yet Manual at the time, it was really a good school, it was one of the better schools, and everybody who lived in our neighborhood, which was a white Jewish neighborhood, was going to Manual. And with the AP classes, the advanced placement classes, I graduated from Manual High School in 1981. And with honors and all that, and it was a good school.

Several very powerful themes are revealed in Stella's account of her last years in private school before moving to Signet with her parents. The first is that even though she was in a high quality private school, the environment there was not a good fit for her. The size was too large, the economic issues proved to be a big distraction, and she was not a part of the social groups there, so she had the option to work with her parents and to choose another private school. Secondly, she wasn't happy with the size of the school and her grades were just okay, and her parents tried to help find a school where she could be happy. She was an active participant in that problem solving process. Thirdly, when she found a school that was much like the Advent school that she liked, she was only allowed to stay for one year because her father made a decision that the family was moving to Signet. This was a departure from the practice where Stella had a say in the school she attended but the decision process for the family was very much in keeping with her parents having the final say about her education. And the fourth item is that in moving to Signet, the family looked at private schools, but did not find any that were of the quality that they wanted, so Rev. Thomas decided that a public high school in Signet would be fine. The choice option is about finding the right school, be it public or otherwise.

A different social and political environment allowed Rev. Thomas to choose a public school for Stella's senior year. And though there were some questions from other family members who were aware of the Thomas's choice of private schools, the goal for him was still to find the best school for Stella. In this case it happened to be a public school and the departure from the private school system was a choice that he was free to make. Stella continued to do well as she prepared to go to college.

I had a really good education. Windsor was very advanced, Bremmer was somewhat advanced, and Manual was just a public school, and was not that advanced, but what I studied in my senior year I had studied in my sophomore year and my junior year, so for three years I studied the same thing. By my senior year I was just sailing through. I was not studying, and nobody knew it. But that became a detriment for me. When I got to college I had to relearn how to study, you know. So yeah, but it was a good, in terms of the social stuff it, I realized then I'm a very adaptable person. I had a good personality, I could make good friends, and that was important to me so I did that, and I did that well. I made sure I did that well, and I adjusted.

I don't know if academically it was good. It could have been more challenging. And I was in some advanced classes, so those were challenging. Some classes I wasn't in the advanced, I'm not sure why, I think it was a scheduling thing. But in terms of the activities that Manual had, I thought that was good. But academically I wasn't that impressed. But, you had to be resourceful to get it. Just like the kids from my neighborhood their parents would make sure they were in the appropriate college prep line of coursework. You had to be intentional in order to get it. You couldn't just let them decide for you. Whereas in a private school it's pretty much decided for you what you're going to take, because you are there to get a good college prep background. And I think that's the difference. You have to be more intentional and more resourceful for your education in a public school environment. And I don't think a lot of people know how to do that.

Unlike Ruth, Stella had a chance to attend a public school for some of her education. She had a chance to compare the two types of systems, and as a result of her experience she was able to itemize some of the key differences between public school and private school. She felt that all of her private school classes were high quality and that she learned a great deal all of the way through. It was significant that the regular classes at Manual were two years behind the education she had in Boston. It is also significant to note that a good quality of education could be obtained for students who were enrolled in the advanced classes at Manual. And in order to be enrolled in the advanced classes, parents and students had to be resourceful in order to access the higher quality education.

Stella knew what high quality classes were like because of her experiences in Chicago and Boston. The high quality was automatic in the private schools she attended.

What she found in Signet was that higher quality education was not automatically available in her public school. She found that she along with other students in her neighborhood had to be intentional and resourceful to get that good college preparatory background. She said that she was aware that a great number of a people are not aware that they have to be resourceful and intentional.

This is another key element of this study, because for African American families who have been in neighborhood public schools for their whole educational experience, they may not recognize that the regular education classes are not high quality. They have not been exposed to the advanced curriculums and so they do not know that they can do better. If they do not recognize that there is a deficiency, they do not try to find ways to access a better quality. They allow the school to choose for them, and for the vast majority of public school students, the system chooses regular classes that are not as challenging, and that are not as advanced, and that do not therefore, give the students the best preparation for college after graduation. I asked Stella to say more about expectations that people have as patrons of private school versus public school.

Well, you're assuming, you're paying that amount of money that you're going to get something that you're not going to get in a public school. That's my thinking. I would assume that if I'm going to write a check to a school, even today for my kids to go to, they better be getting something more than what is offered out here. I mean, though I probably could get a comparable education from the public school if I'm more resourceful, but it's not just going to be there. Yeah, I'm going to have to work at it, and ask those questions, and push for my child to be in such and such a class and so forth.

But I don't know if it is we as a people [African Americans] so much as it is people with distractions. I think people who have a lot of distractions in their life, whether its mental illness, whether its economic hardship, whether its drugs, environment, whatever, those are distractions, I call those distractions, and low income, the lower your income, I think the more distractions you have. I think the higher your income you're paying to not have distractions. You know, I pay someone to cut my grass so I don't have that distraction. So my weeds aren't

going to grow up and look shoddy and then I have that to worry about, and it'll make my kids feel bad to come home, you know distractions, so all classes all people have distractions. And so when you're distracted, you send your child off to school and you aren't thinking about the big picture. You're thinking about the next step you're going to take to put dinner on the table, or to keep the lights on or what do I need to do today to keep the lights on.

Stella's statement captures a whole realm of circumstances as she talks about the distractions of everyday life. Distractions steal time and energy from important tasks. And important tasks are prioritized each person's life. So by application of Stella's explanation, if a family has enough income to make sure that the basic needs of having a house, enough food, and appropriate clothing, along with medical coverage and transportation, for example, they do not have to worry about these things and therefore are not distracted by basic survival needs. They would have more time available to focus and to check up on what's happening at school and see the differences in the classes that are available. They could become more intentional and seek the highest quality programs for their student.

African American families who face income barriers are often distracted and kept from attending to their children's schooling because they are trying to obtain things needed for basic survival. So they leave the choices for class selection to the school administration within the public system. When the public system is still practicing racism toward African American students, they do not choose higher-level classes, or advanced college preparatory classes for those students. And if African American parents continue to allow the schools to make choices for them because they are too distracted, then African American students may continue to have the outcomes of low achievement, of high drop out rates, and of not being prepared for college. As an outcome, even if there

is not a shift upward in the economic level for African American families specifically, they should at least be made aware of how to access the high quality classes that are available in public schools. Because in the alternative, the key to being able to send students to private schools is economic. So parents must either be able to earn a high enough salary to pay tuition, or some type of scholarship program, such as the voucher program mentioned earlier must be available to the students.

After her reflections about Manual High School I asked Stella to tell me about making plans to go to college.

Well we were told, we were always told that we would go to a black college, so those were the parameters. Now what black college we could choose, however, we had a graduate of Talladega College who kind of said if you don't go to Talladega I don't pay. But he didn't say that, but he would say it and laugh to his friends. So my sister, she chose Fisk, and then transferred to Talladega. I looked at Spellman, Clark, and it was really cool because dad took us both at different times in our senior year, on college tours; as a privilege. I mean I know I was lucky because nobody was doing that, and he would arrange these preaching engagements. You know. He knew people all over the country so he would get people to pay for this and this and this, and we could get to Atlanta and Nashville, and wherever we wanted to. And he would say pick three or four colleges you really want to visit, after we'd gotten catalogues and did all that. And then we routed out a trip, and we would fly, I mean you know, it was truly a privilege, and I remember when I was giving a note to my teachers my senior year at Manual, and it was a note from my father telling them what I was going to be doing for a whole week, they were just blown over, so impressed, and very encouraging, so glad that this was happening. Of course the last school on the tour was Talladega College. And the timing was always interesting, because it usually would be coronation weekend so there was all these parties and activities, and of course he got to see his friends, but you got to see Talladega in the limelight, it was just bubbling. And you would think, oh wow, this is happening in the middle of Alabama, I'm going here! And Ruth was there. At that point I had gone from Windsor to Bremmer to Manual High School, and now I was entering college, so there were three years of major transitions. I knew my sister was at Talladega and I knew because she had transferred from Fisk, we were going to overlap a year. So I went to Talladega just so I could be with somebody, you know so the transition wouldn't be real, real hard, 'cause I really wanted to stay in Signet for a year, I wanted to go to Colorado Women's College, but they, they wouldn't, you know, 'cause I knew I wasn't ready. I was 17 when I started college. I was

young, and I just didn't feel like I was that ready, but anyway I went to Talladega, so that helped, my sister being there.

And again, we were Rev. Thomas' children, second generation Talladegans. Talladega was considered the Harvard of the south, you know, and so we had privileges. So that was why I chose Talladega, and he had gone there, and there was just some kind of comfort there, some familiarity, and it was fun, I had a good time too. I see why they said a black college because there you see role models of leadership and authority that they grew up with, and see, we hadn't really seen it. I mean you see it, but where you're just in a community where that's all there is, that is just so important, too. I mean, it really forms your psyche, and really embeds in your psyche and how you think about yourself and your body even, you know. Your body is beautiful. You know the way it's shaped, for years I didn't think my body was beautiful, and I thought something; you know my mother's body was very European, but our body is very African, or African Indian if you will, and it was the first time my body was celebrated, you know, truly celebrated. And I loved that about it. I'm sure if I'd gone to Africa on some foreign trip that might have been ensconced then, but definitely at a black college the beauty of all of us was really brought forth and I enjoyed that. And I really cherished it; I think I really appreciated it because I had been in some of those environments that it wasn't appreciated.

Stella's reference to environments is about the White schools she had attended, and being Black in those places was the reason that the social groups did not accept her. There was a complete difference in expectations of being accepted as a Black woman at Talladega, and it provided somewhat of a balance for the negative school environments she had in her kindergarten through twelfth grade private school education. Talladega provided a balance on the one hand with the continuation of the excellent academic programs, and on the other hand it provided a counterbalance for the prejudice she encountered because she was an African American girl. At Talladega she was accepted for the way she looked, the way her body was built, the type of hair she had. The environment at Talladega validated all of those things about her, and her need to feel that she was part of the social as well as the academic community there. This theme that the student must feel that he or she belongs and that the school is a good fit academically and

socially has been repeated again and again in this study. Now that Stella is a parent herself she feels that she has a great responsibility to know what is happening with her children while they are in school so that she can offer the support that they need.

Having quality classes and wanting to ensure that her children were happy and fit into the environment of the school were primary considerations for Stella and her husband, Samuel, when they began to make plans for their children's education.

Emmanuel is 10 and Carolina is seven, and both children are currently being home schooled. I asked Stella to tell me how the decision about home schooling came about.

My son was in the public school for kindergarten and first grade. And also pre-school; they have a four-year-old program, and this was in Muskogee, which is a town of about 35,000, a fairly large black population, and Indian. So it's African and Indian population with those mixed and also white and also white and Indian. It's in the Cherokee Nation, but there's a plethora of different tribes. So he attended first grade, and my daughter went to the four-year-old program in Muskogee, and then after that I chose to home school her also.

I chose to home school Emmanuel, my 10-year-old son, after I looked at a private school in Muskogee, cause at the time, that's where my husband was working. It was a Catholic school but we could not afford it, and they weren't offering any scholarships for non-Catholics. And, Emmanuel did great at school. He got awards and was an outstanding student. My husband began to lose his sight, and it was affecting our family in a lot of ways. There was anger, sadness, all the varying degrees of feeling.

So we decided to home school, found out that Oklahoma is one of the least regulated states in terms of home schooling. That can be good, that can be bad. It's good for those who are actually doing something, it's great. 'Cause you just don't have anybody knocking on your door. You don't have to send in any reports. But for those who are truly neglectful of their children's education, it can be really detrimental. So there's a wide range of the home schooling community in Oklahoma.

Stella is practicing the things that she mentioned earlier in her interview. She is restating that parents need to know what is going on in the school and what is going on with their child so that if there are problems and challenges they can be addressed and be

taken care of. In this case, the concerns for Emmanuel seemed to arise when Samuel began to lose his sight. His concern for his father was a major distraction for Emmanuel and the school environment wasn't a supportive place for him any longer. Stella's explained some of the steps she and Samuel took when they decided to home school Emmanuel.

My husband and I are independent thinkers. We're Unitarians, we're African American Unitarians living in the middle of Oklahoma, I mean it doesn't get much different than that, and you know, we're passionate about each other, we're passionate about our kids, we're both older parents, and we could see what was going on with Brooks. So we decided, let's home school, you know, I can do this. I've gone to graduate school; I've gone to college. I know I can do elementary education. You know, the books are out there, there's a lot of choices that you have, and how you want to educate your child.

So it worked and with the disability continuing to progress, and more things falling on my shoulders in terms of responsibility of the house it actually was easier to keep the children at home instead of shuffling everybody everywhere, You know, every morning, it was becoming very stressful, so we decided we would do this and try it out. My husband was really supportive, and continues to be very supportive of my style of teaching. We're relaxed, but we're disciplined. And Brooks has grown tremendously, matured tremendously, and we've all accepted each other as we are, and accepted the family as we are, and he's comfortable with that. He's no longer embarrassed. And he was going through a phase where he was embarrassed about his dad cause all the other kids, he was in baseball, and all the other dads were helping on the team, and his dad couldn't cause he can't see the ball, so it was little things like that, but now he's fine 'cause he knows his dad can do other things that other dads can't do, you know so. And his dad has shown Brooks that you still go on, no matter what the obstacles, he's still continuing to support the family. He has a church, he pastors the church part time. He has a full-time job, and he's an adjunct professor. So I mean, he's gone on, he's pushed it and I haven't felt sorry for him. And so I told him, you know you made these babies and you've got to support 'em. So, and he's wanted to.

He's had a reason to go on with the kids. So that's the gist of our home schooling, why we started it. Also, I wasn't real sure about the teachers in Muskogee Public Schools. I just didn't know anybody in Muskogee; I don't have a history in Muskogee, so there weren't teachers I knew, there weren't people I knew who I knew that they'll be okay. And I just wasn't really impressed with what I saw for the Muskogee Public School system

There is so much here in terms of the intricacies in Stella's family. Samuel's developing blindness, Emmanuel's challenges in school, and the requirements for Stella to assume more duties around the house, caused the family to make major adjustments. When they considered Emmanuel's unhappiness they knew that he was a good student, and he was doing well in his public school. Stella and Samuel were satisfied with the school curriculum and with the social environment there, so their choice to teach him at home was not driven by the conditions in the school. The choice was in response to the circumstances that were developing in the family.

Stella and Samuel are older parents and they drew on their life experiences to help find a solution to this unforeseen dilemma. Samuel's new disability did not prevent him from receiving a promotion in a new city, and from moving the family in order to take new job. They bought a new home, and had to adjust to a big city as well. Stella said that she and her husband were independent thinkers. That trait may have been helpful as they adjusted to these major developments in the family. The trait of being an independent thinker is one that her father mentioned earlier in his interview when he was telling his parents that he wanted to go to Talladega College after he got out of the Army. So Stella and Samuel went forward with their plans to participate in this unconventional educational model even though some friends and some family members were dubious.

When Stella and Samuel evaluated the situation with Emmanuel they realized that he needed a different environment in order to continue to be successful in his education. During that evaluation process Stella identified her own strengths and felt comfortable with her ability to teach the elementary school curriculum. She found a way to minimize the distractions that were becoming part of her life as a result of Samuel's loss of sight,

and she was able to make this choice because the family had an income that allowed her to be at home with their children.

Stella gave me a little more information about the curriculum she uses, the overall success of her home school, and why she thought it was a good choice for her family.

She also talked about some future plans for the children's elementary schooling.

My daughter, she fell right into it because we were already doing it and a lot of the activities we were doing were during school hours, so she said well, I want to stay at home too. So we've enjoyed the decision. Now that we're in Tulsa, we have a few more options. And we actually are looking at a private school, and one public school, so we may actually put them in school next year. For the mere fact I'm 43, I'm getting a little, you know, it's just wearing on me, and my husband has a lot more responsibility now as county director, so he needs me, the house needs me, and I don't know, we'll just see. We always make our decisions in the summer. We're always up in the air in May, and then come June, we know what we're going to do for the next year. But we wanted to emphasize African and African American history; and when I started home schooling that's what we did. We studied African American inventions. My son was totally enthralled with who invented what. We wouldn't have been able to have done that. We started violin, the Suzuki method, and our instructor is Suzuki trained, and she's a home schooling mom.

There's a lot of things we could do during the day that you can't do when you're in a public school. There's like one or two field trips, you're locked in a room, you can barely go, as a parent you have to sign in, and the doors are locked, and I found that very disconcerting. And not like the private school environment that I was used to where it was a little more open. It was much more carefree, especially elementary school. And like I told you, at Advent, the teachers I had were really creative, and we did a lot of outside stuff. We learned from our environment. We did a lot of walking, you know. We studied the architecture of Beacon Hill buildings, which is historically an African American community. You know, we studied scrimshaws that the sailors did with the teeth of the whale, and just things like that, that you just don't get in a typical public school. And now I know that there are great teachers, and I really do believe that there are some great teachers in the public schools, but they are so regulated now, with such, with such paperwork, that it's really hard for them to teach. And when I told his kindergarten teacher and his first grade teacher that I was going to home school Brooks, they both told me good. Because Brooks is the student we love to teach, we don't have time to teach. And that sealed it for me, you know, if their own teacher is saying good, you know, and we've had plenty of people tell us, you know, don't put them in the public school system if you don't have to.

Stella offered some thoughts about the reasons that she feels other families should look at their situations and not be worried about trying out a new idea or a new school model. Conventionality is good as long as it works for each person. If it does not work for each person, then that individual or that family should know that creativity and originality are options that can help people continue with a good quality of life, just maybe in a different way than they are used to, or than they expected. Her thinking is significant in this study as far as opening up the mind, raising awareness of how individual thinking and independent thinking are the first steps to problem solving and to enrichment. And she explained why she thought more people were not willing to work outside of convention, or they were not able to work outside of the conventional school system.

It's all in how you think about yourself. I think everybody's qualified to teach their own child through elementary school. I really do. It's very straightforward, the books are real straightforward, no matter what workbook you're using. But I don't feel people have been given the validation to even think independently, that you can even do it. Some people really were appalled and almost stopped speaking to me when I started home schooling my kids because they thought I was going against the law or going against what Martin Luther King had fought so hard for, you know. I mean, it was interesting some of the comments I got, and I thought Dr. King wanted everybody to be treated fairly and I don't feel like my child is being treated fairly, and if I have the opportunity to do this for my child, I'm going to do it.

My parents have always supported our thinking, and Claire and I are very independent thinkers, they brought us up to be independent thinkers. So knowing what they know because they are well read they see what's happening with many African American boys particularly, they were fine with that. The only thing daddy said was well, we'll see if it works. But you know, that's a Cornelius statement. So, we'll see if it works, what does that mean, you know? So anyway they see that he's intelligent, and that he can read. He's reading at 12th grade level, now he's reading one of my mystery novels I got from the library. If they're reading, I'm happy. But anyway, I do feel that people don't think. For some people school is like the law. And what the school says, and what the school principal says, that's like church and what the minister says. And I just wasn't brought up like that.

Stella showed a tremendous amount of courage by saying that the mainstream thinking was not the ultimate truth for her. She had enough self-confidence to believe in her own ability to weigh the educational situation and assess the outcome for her children. After she and Samuel made a decision to move away from the mainstream public school, I wanted to know if the curriculum she chose to use was a standard one for home school programs, or if she was using a combination of curriculum programs.

I've found that we've had to connect to other like-minded home schoolers. There's a large section of very Christian-based home schoolers. I'm not part of that. I'm part of a very secular group. Because, again, different people have different reasons for home schooling. So I have found a group of people where we are like-minded. We're home schooling because either our kids are real sensitive or they have allergies, or we just think we could do it, too. You know if the teacher sends me home, sends to me a memo that has serious grammatical mistakes, I just find that appalling. And I just said, I know I can do this. It may not be every day but they're gonna learn something.

The home schooling has actually made our family very flexible, because we have to tailor our time around Samuel. Getting him back and forth, and the church takes a lot of our time, even though he's part time, that's a joke for a minister, it's a full-time job, and the teaching. So we're much more flexible to accommodate him and his disability by home schooling than I think we would be if they were both in school.

It is interesting to note that there are wide variations in the philosophies and curriculum content among parents who choose to home school. Stella described a typical home school day for her family and reiterates that families have the complete choice of how they do their school during the day. She has tailored her lessons and activities with the children to fit into the bigger picture of the family's changed lifestyle. She has given a summary of the family day that is not separated with the children going off to school. She has fit the children's schooling into the day's needs that include taking care of her husband and managing the household.

A typical home school day, we're getting up, we get dressed, we have breakfast, we take Samuel to work, we come back. I usually have laid out the night before, maybe just some notes of what I want them to do. Usually it's math and reading. Those are the two requirements; no there are three requirements, math, reading, and music. That has to get done; it's usually three days a week, not every day because it just doesn't work out. Or we'll do music at 10:00 at night, but it'll get done. They have a number of pages, Emmanuel is required to do five pages of math in his book, and Carolina is required to do three pages of math; and they are very self directed, which I think is great. I sit with Carolina a little bit more than I have to sit with Emmanuel. Emmanuel and I will review the textbook, study it a little bit, talk about it, I don't even do half of the suggestions that they have in the teacher's resource manual. I just don't have to cause it's him, you know, and he gets it.

This section points to the standard curriculum that would be covered in the public school classroom. Stella points out the ease of individualizing the curriculum for her son, who understands the concepts and who does not have to go over the extra lessons suggested in the book because he does not need the reinforcement. From my experience as a classroom teacher I know that the textbooks and workbooks used in public schools often have included the extra work in order to give support for those students who need it. The extra work is also used to occupy the time of those students who finish early but need to be occupied while the teacher works with the mainstream group of students. So an advantage for Stella is that she can adjust the amount of time she spends on a lesson by how quickly or slowly her children master the concepts. This adjustment is difficult to do in a regular public school classroom where there are an average of 25 students with one teacher. The amount of time that is spent on lessons is a variable that cannot be easily adjusted within the school day for varying groups of students. Many schools address this issue for students who need extra help and extra time by giving extra homework for practice. Or sometimes the school year is put on an extended calendar for everyone just so the student who does not learn quickly can be accommodated. The rest

of the student body is required to go along even if they don't need the reinforcement, and sometimes this conformity is the cause of the boredom that Mrs. Thomas and also Wilbert spoke about earlier. The flexibility of the home school program allowed Stella to tailor the curriculum and the delivery. She describes the enrichment.

Then we'll, we might do some science, or we'll go on a field trip, or we'll go on a bike ride and we'll look at different types of trees. A lot of the learning is life skills training. We go to the store, and they're counting money. Or I'll ask them to figure out the change for something, or they're writing down the prices. I have a budget, so they're trying to keep me in my budget. They know how to shop, they know how to pick fruit, they know how to pick the right type of chicken, or they know how to pick out the toilet paper, the vegetables, and those sound so redundant, but when they get out there on their own, they're not going to be overwhelmed by so many things.

They have to sweep and clean the house; they have chores that they have to do. And we're done, if we start at 9:00, we're done by 11:00 with any academic stuff. 'Cause I have things to do, and it's okay because we have Campfire group that is all home schoolers, and it's multigenerational, and it keeps them very busy. Cause they're moving up to different levels. And what's cool about the campfire is their grandmother, my husband's mother, started a Campfire group in Sapulpa, OK; it was the first African American group in Oklahoma, so they're second generation. So that's kind of cool, and we really love that.

Here Stella is talking about the influence of one generation on another. Her husband was not home schooled, but her husband's mother worked with home schoolers by starting the Campfire group for African American children. An interesting aspect in this study is how one participant after another explains the influence of previous generations on their generations through direct conversations and decision-making. In Stella's case the influence was indirect by way of the organization that her mother-in-law started.

The computer is very important because I have different groups that I'm a part of and we're communicating. And there's the Tulsa Ed-Ushare group which is part home school and part other home schoolers that aren't real religious, just kind of secular or whatever; and we plan fieldtrips. We've made kaleidoscopes at a glass

factory, which is really cool and the guy was teaching them all about math and so it's just amazing, some of the stuff that we've done. The aquarium, zoo, so I try and do one activity a week, even if it's just writing down different names of trees along the bike path or something; just something outside. They are learning to cook, you know, Olivia loves to cook, and they know I need help, so they really chip in.

The connection that Stella has with other home school families and with community resources has helped her maintain the quality of education that she wants for her children. The enrichment programs mirror some of the extra activities that are available in some public schools, but the variety and the frequency she has arranged through her own home school curriculum is greater than in most public schools. As she talked I heard the satisfaction in her voice, and I was aware of the confidence she felt in what she was doing with her home school program. She was detailing why this decision has been right for her family, and she continued by looking at possibilities for each child in the coming school year.

But you know, the other option is to be in school for seven hours, and Emmanuel just dies at the thought, but Carolina I think, may go to school in the fall, Emmanuel may stay home. We may actually split it up. She wants to do the social thing. She really wants some friends. I mean she has friends, but she wants the social part of school. And school is conducive for girls; it's a very female oriented environment. It has become that. And also, for black girls, African American girls, they just don't have the problems that the boys do.

In addition to evaluating each of her children, Stella is analytical about her partnership with her husband in their role as home-school teachers. Her point of view focuses on the benefits of having Samuel's support and involvement in teaching the children. Stella is able to see the enhancements that Samuel brings to the children's lessons because of his eclectic life experiences. I asked Stella to give me some examples of Samuel's role in their home school.

Well, Samuel defers to me quite a bit, and he's very kind, and he's always saying what a good job I'm doing. But he in fact brings to it a perspective that I can't bring for the mere fact that he's much older than I am, he's 56, so we're both older so he's even older. He's lived overseas, he's a missionary, he's taught all kind of courses and he has two master's degrees, and he's a social worker so just that in and of itself, he just brings a different slant, a nuance to what he teaches, and what he says, and how he talks to the kids. So every question can be taken a little further. You know, well if you want to know this, let's go look online, well let's get a book about it, you know, I'm not sure, let's find out. You know, so we don't try to know everything. We just say well, here's the world and here's the Internet, here's the library you can find out about it, and we'll help you, and you can take it as far as you want.

What we had to learn after the first year was that every opportunity is a learning opportunity. And I think what school teaches you; it's almost like television that you wait to be told what to think. And so you have to reprogram your thinking, even as a parent you have to especially, if you've been in school, you have to reprogram your thinking and erase what you think it should be like. Because your home school, you should not replicate a classroom. And most people don't but you think that that's what you should. You should have the alphabet on the walls, and all this other stuff, but you don't have to do that. And the more you get away from all that you think it should be, the better the experience is, because you're not replicating, you're just doing. So every opportunity is an opportunity to teach. So every question can be taken a little further.

So we just kind of deprogrammed what we think, or how we were taught, and we're just doing it the way it works for our children, and most home schoolers are like that, good home schoolers. You know, you follow your child's lead. And in some respects that is considered unschooling, when it's a child led unit, but I've mixed it with a little bit of unschooling and a little bit of home schooling where I actually do want them to do the math, and I do want them to do the reading, and I do want them to do the music. I haven't done foreign language, and I should, I know I should do that. I want to, we want to, we haven't started yet. Both my husband and I speak French so we'll probably just do that, you know, that language that we know.

The distinction that Stella is making about the strategies they used for teaching Emmanuel and Carolina at home is a great example of what choice means in educational programs. The conditions she describes about extending the questions and taking the thought a little further do not exist in most regular public school classrooms, and they are not always found in smaller private school classrooms either. Stella also acknowledges

that her family used a process of discovery to obtain the best outcome for thinking and for learning. Some ideas and practices about teaching and learning have to be unlearned. Both parents and children have had to allow their minds to be free to learn without boundaries. Stella believes that their philosophy in using a little bit of unschooling will help them continue to be successful as they prepare their children for college. At this point I want to say just a little about the philosophy of unschooling. It is a term that refers to child directed learning. Children are allowed to decide what they want to learn, when they learn and how they learn. Their entire day and whole environment is learning, and it is a philosophy of opportunity and interest that is facilitated, guided, and supported by adults (Amy Bell 1998). Stella talked a little more about the next educational steps for her children.

I'm no longer uptight about getting them prepared for college. I know they will be. We had said that they would go to high school, probably in a private school if we can afford it. If not, in a very good public school, and making sure that they are accessing the college prep curriculum. And I just think it would be good for them to get that experience. And if they don't want to go I'm not going to push them to go, but I think they will be ready to go at high school. And most of the home schoolers who I've met who are older now, they were home schooled up through eighth grade. And then went to the high school. And typically that's what I'm finding. And they adjusted fine, and they went on to college. Or they opened up a business afterwards, or did something creative.

I just let them know I have expectations. And they're just seven and 10, so I still have a little bit more time before I start getting anxious, but I don't think I'm going to be very anxious. They're showing me that they're very bright. And I'm just not sure what they're going to do. But they don't have to be brilliant. They don't have to be these child prodigies. I just want them to be good human beings, being able to handle themselves out here in this world. I really want them to be good citizens, and that's what's important to me.

Stella's reflections show that she and her husband have a comfort level with their ability to teach their children elementary education. She feels that they are receiving a solid foundation in mathematics, reading, science, and enrichment activities. She is

seeing that the results of their home school program is evolving in a positive way, and she feels that it has been a good experience for her children as well as for herself and for her husband. Her future planning for their high school and college includes choosing the school model that fits them year by year. This open approach to thinking about the school environment is a key factor that has surfaced throughout this study. This family has no rigidity in adhering to just one school model. The social environment, the family circumstances, and the individual child's needs are continually being evaluated for each generation. And that analysis allows them to see what choice looks best to meet the needs of the student at that time and place.

#### The Son-in-Law

Samuel is married to Stella and they live in Signet with their two children, Emmanuel and Carolina. I met him when I traveled to Signet to interview his family and all of my arrangements for the family's participation in this study had been made with his wife so our interview meeting was the first time we spoke. Samuel has a mild manner and there is warmth in his voice as we sit in his office at the church where he is a half-time pastor. I thanked him for agreeing to be part of the study and for being willing to share his thoughts and ideas about his school experience. He began our interview by telling me about the ethos of his educational experience.

You're welcome for your appreciation of my participation. But in fact I think it's a privilege for me to be able to talk to you about not only the family Stella and I have made, and the family I walked into being Joy's family, but also if we ever get to that, to talk about the family I came from, and the choices that were made by my brothers and sisters and parents as well as myself.

Because I grew up under that segregated pall around everything, easiness was never the equation. It wasn't the easy way, it was the best way. That was always

taught to me. Not to look for expediency, but to look for lasting value. And I grew up with my family, my father and my mother, but also my teachers and my minister. They were also saying, and it makes me laugh at this maxim, that I heard when I was 10 years old, and it has stayed with me these many years. And it is: good, better, best; never let it rest, until the good is better and the better best. So that has always been the refrain. Easy is just not in there. So when I look at where do I want to go, I'm looking at lasting. Where do I want to go that's going to last, and be passed on. So no, it's not easy when you want to take the best road. But the best is where you want to go.

Samuel's introduction encompasses several themes that have surfaced in the interviews of participants who have already been recorded. His ability to refine the plans and experiences into an equation provides a unique overview for the story that follows. It is a summary of sorts for the way that this family has evolved through the generations with respect to the use of educational choice options and in finding the best opportunity for quality education models for each individual. He explained how his father and mother planned to educate him and his siblings all the way through college.

I'm the youngest of seven children. My parents had five stair steps I like to say. The first five I call them, and then my parents waited 14 years to have my sister, and then a year and a half later, had me. So I tease my sister Patricia that she was an accident, but that I was intentional. And my parents made provisions for all of us, and all seven of us went to college.

The way my dad explained it. Each one would help the other. So at one time he had three children in college at Lincoln. The oldest Bob, Maxine, and Vivian. The three older children, they were all in school together. But I was told there were scholarships as well as working. And the money was saved to help the one behind you. And of course Dad was making provisions. My mother did not work outside of the home. So the bottom line for everything was, the expectation was in our family that you would go to college.

There is a very clear picture here of how Samuel's family set a goal for every child to attend college. Then they made financial provisions and used the resources that were available through the community such as scholarships and working, always with the understanding that the older children would help the younger ones who were coming

behind. This was a precisely understood and a precisely executed plan for the education of all of the children in the family, and this plan shows the influence of one generation on the next generation. The plan explains the expectations for following through and it explains the support that was given in order for the plan to go forward for each child.

As the youngest child Samuel was able to take advantage of some additional resources outside of the family. He was able to earn scholarships and he worked to make sure that he could meet the family's goal of going to college just as his brothers and sisters had done before him.

When I came along of course times had changed, and my dad used to say, he was so very proud because, I went all the way through from the first grade all the way through two master's degrees, and my father never had to spend a penny on tuition, nor room and board. I got scholarships or I was working. So I was able to complete that, and then even after receiving two masters' degrees, I went another year in Brussels, Belgium, to learn French to prepare me to teach at a seminary in Kensapo, Zaire. So, as I said, school is so familiar to me, it's a place that when September rolls around I think I'm supposed to be in school. And even now I am an adjunct professor at Northeastern State University in Tallagore. I teach just one course, but I have my hand in the academy.

Samuel is a scholar and education remains an important part of his life even today. His report of his educational journey began at the postgraduate level and he pieced together the steps that he took to reach this point in his life. The economic picture here describes a significant factor that has been enumerated in this study. The availability of money can help a student go on to earn a bachelor's degree, or the lack of money can bar the way to getting that degree. Samuel met the family's expectation of going to college, and he went even further by accessing the financial resources outside of his family's ability to pay for their children's schooling. His proficiency at obtaining scholarships and his skill at working allowed him to continue his educational journey at the master's level, and then to do post graduate work as a missionary in Zaire. He talked

about his family's philosophy of getting an education as a process that leads to continued success and to continued opportunities.

Early on my parents emphasized education, not as a chore, but they emphasized education as a door. That if you're able to learn, and you have a curiosity, you will see that you will meet people who share those same interests; who will introduce you to other people and other opportunities. And it's just a continuing door opening experience. So I was always a curious child, being the youngest. And my parents chose to parent me a little different than they chose to parent the first five. So I was given a lot more latitude and freedom to make my choices early on. And my dad would listen, and my mom would listen. 'Well, that's pretty good, but be wary of these things'. And they would go back to those maxims and those sayings that would keep me rooted. So they would always say that's good, but also keep in mind this. Never telling me not to. But they would say, be on guard.

And I started having children at a later age, so I tend to take the same path that my parents did. Which is to give them latitude and to encourage them to learn, and to encourage them to ask questions. But at the same time to just say, ok, you'll see that there will be these kinds of distractions. Know them before you get there, so that you can anticipate what you're going to do.

Here again is an example of intergenerational influence in setting a goal and in carrying out plans to meet those educational goals. Samuel married into the intergenerational family of this study, and he brought his parents' lessons along with him. He is sharing them and implementing them with his own children. It is an interesting fact that Samuel tells how his parents were older by the time he came along, and that they decided to parent him differently than his older siblings. They listened to him, and allowed him latitude and freedom to make choices early on. Samuel was a participant in the family's planning and decision-making process just as his wife Stella was allowed to do in her family. And now both Samuel and Stella are older parents and they are using some of the same strategies as they raise their own children. And they are allowing them to be participants in decisions and choices that the family makes about school and about education options.

I asked Samuel to share his memories about school, and about the education he received. He began by sharing his educational experience.

First let's talk about the educational experience, and then I'll talk about school. The educational experience was brought to me by my mother, who noticed that I had a curiosity. And so she began to work with me around just rudimentary educational instruction. Showing me letters, teaching me the alphabet, and so by the time I went to the first grade I was reading. So I walked in the door knowing how to read.

As with Rev. Thomas, Samuel remembers the experiences at home as the ones that began the foundation for his education. In this case it was his mother who recognized his curiosity and who responded by taking steps to teach him to read. He attended school in a segregated system in Signet, and his memories of his teachers were like those of Rev. and Mrs. Thomas. And even though the educational system was segregated, the teachers were committed to the education of the students, and they made sure that they got it. Samuel went on to talk about some of his individual teachers and their special commitments.

Mrs. Gray was a wonderful introduction to the institution of education because she loved her students, and her students loved her. And everybody, who ever had Mrs. Gray, was happy with her. Mrs. Gray was of course a disciplinarian because that was the way it was in those days. But she had a smile.

My best friend, to this day, he lives here in Tulsa, we were classmates. My best friend tells a story, and I never knew this, and of course I was just six years old; but he said that during lunch hour, you know he didn't have any food at home that he could go home to eat, and there was no money that he could go to the cafeteria to eat, so he didn't have any food. And Mrs. Gray would bring him food, and he would go in the cloakroom, we had cloakrooms in those days, and she would give him a sandwich with some milk. And he would eat in the cloakroom while we were either in the cafeteria or at home. And he told me that later on in life, that Mrs. Gray did that for him. And she was a very compassionate individual. So my first grade teacher Mrs. Gray, and then of course because I was reading, I was an example. And she used me as an example. And I began to feel that I was special, and that I was different.

Samuel is almost meditative as he recalls the wonderful start he had in his first grade classroom. This public school environment was an exceptional experience because of the quality of his teacher, and even though the school was segregated, he and his friends found compassion, understanding, and support for their academic needs as well as for their physical and emotional needs. The caring teacher is a factor that weaves its way throughout this study. The actions of a caring teacher continue to stand out as being pivotal in ensuring a positive school experience for the student. For Ruth and Stella it was the teacher at the Montessori school, for Mrs. Thomas it was her third grade teacher, for Rev. Thomas it was the collective staff who created a challenging and supportive environment in his elementary school. Samuel continues by describing his other elementary school teachers, and why each of them had a special quality that helped to add another dimension to his character and to his education.

And my second grade teacher, Mrs. Devaroux, was equally compassionate as Mrs. Gray. A little bit more strict, but still interested in the welfare of her students. My third grade teacher Mrs. Chappell, was the most strict teacher in Booker T. Washington. And students didn't like Mrs. Chappell because she would say harsh things and would not smile very often. But once again, because I was a Davis, because I had distinguished myself along the way, I was a special child so she was very gentle with me.

My fourth grade teacher was Mrs. Smith. Once again, a compassionate individual who would ask us on Monday, okay, who all went to church yesterday? And those people who did got gold stars. And she had a little chart over there with gold stars for all the church going kids.

My fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Jackson, Millie Jackson. So fifth grade was Mrs. Jackson. She was the home economics teacher for the high school. So her classroom had stoves and sewing machines, and so we were in the fifth grade class learning things, but part of the class we smelled cookies being baked. So I loved that classroom because it was a really nice little classroom.

So my sixth grade teacher was Mr. Rice. Mr. Rice was a band instructor. I became a musician because my mother said Mr. Rice could play the saxophone, and when he played this song called "My Buddy," and she said it would make her

cry when he played that. So you know, when I heard that I said well I'm going to play like Mr. Rice. I'm going to touch my mother's heart. So I learned how to play the saxophone. I was a little prodigy. I was marching with the big kids at the high school. Okay, that tornado must have come in the sixth grade. No wait a minute, I was in the band in the fifth grade, because I was marching with the high school kids, and I was 10 years old. And there are pictures of me marching with the high school, and I was a little kid playing that saxophone.

There is a great deal of pride in Samuel's words. He emphasized the support he received from his family and the additional support he received from his teachers. It was that support that helped him excel in school, and as he says later, it helped him continue to take advantage of open doors in his later endeavors. Samuel refers here to his family's history in the small town where he grew up. Family legacy is often set by established mores in the community and Samuel's grandfather's work in their hometown set a standard of behavior for his heirs to follow. Samuel is proud of the legacy, and of the notoriety it brought him in school and in the community when he was growing up. He explained a little more about the influence that his grandfather's generation had on him.

My father's father was a minister, a well-known minister who had passed by the time I was born, but his legacy lived on and we were members of the church where he pastored for many years, and the people knew the name Davis in Sapulpa. When you say Davis in Sapulpa people understood, that's a quote unquote a good family. So, that is to say that's how we grew up. The expectation was that you would not be involved in any kind of criminal, disrespectful enterprise. You would be an example of your brothers and sisters and your father and mother.

I wanted to know more about Samuel's view of family legacy and about his understanding of family influence of one generation on the next, so I asked him if he thought the expectations of his grandfather's generation were primarily a function of their being a spiritual, religious family. And I also wanted to know if he thought that a lot of the Black families at that time felt the same way about expectations whether they were in the ministry or not?

You know, that's an interesting question, and thank you for posing it; because it goes to the heart of what I call a myth. And the myth is because the black church has been so evident in our communities; it has had a similar significant impact on the rearing of the families. That's an easily, easily, easily assumed fact. And you say, well yeah, the black church is everywhere and that's why we didn't have so much da, da, da. Just put the two together. But I'm here to tell you that that's not it. I don't believe the church going was a direct impact on how families would rear you up. It was the way families viewed their lives. Now you could make a point, well they viewed their lives as inseparable from the church. They saw themselves as children of God and the minister would speak about the Israelites and the people saw themselves as the oppressed people like the Israelites, because the Israelites were able to use the power of God to find a way out of the wilderness into the Promised Land. That's the way black people were raised. You can make that argument. I have made that argument before from the pulpit, but that's not it. My experience tells me that it comes down to, when people wake up in the morning and they say, what am I going to do. And whether or not there will be distractions by the usual common kinds of things. Someone says come on and play, versus, but I gotta go to work. It comes down to fundamental choices. And I truly believe that the church was just one of the influencing institutions in the life of the black family that made the impact. So consequently I come to this point. There were other families that were, let's say, that were just as straight and focused on the future as my family. That did not have the label of the ministry. But in fact what it was, was that people said for whatever motivation, I want to go somewhere, I want to be like something, I want to whatever it was that was the motivating factor, in other words, they made the choice.

Samuel's response here reiterates information already put forth in this study. He says that everyone makes fundamental choices on a daily basis, and those choices may be influenced by everyday things like the desire to play or the requirement to go to work. But no matter what the distractions may be, it comes down to deciding on a plan to move forward, and then choosing to stick with the plan no matter what. He goes on to say how individuals and families are directed by the people around them as they begin to make their plans, and as they choose which opportunity to take advantage of and which to leave behind them.

Okay, seventh grade, our homeroom teacher was Mrs. Tate. Mrs. Juanita Tate, and Mrs. Tate used to say, brothers and sisters, if I wake you up at one or two o'clock in the morning, I want you to answer this question. You better have this in your heart and on your mind, and if I wake you up and say what is da.....and

you'll answer it; that's the way she used to talk; brothers and sisters. Well, she also used to say. You know you're going to go to school one day with little white kids, and they're very smart. And they study. They're not like you all, you all better study, and they study everyday. And by the time we did go to the high school and we were integrated into the high school, it was funny because we all thought those white kids would be 'A' students all, and we saw their studying and said Mrs. Tate told us a story.

Part of the mystique that came with the separate segregated schools was that children behaved and learned differently in their segregated schools. Samuel's example here is important because it uncloaks one of the myths about students being superior in one place and inferior in another. Mrs. Tate's story set expectations among Samuel's classmates that the White students were superior in their grades, and she also set expectations that the Black students must study to do as well. The integration of the schools showed that there was a range in grades among the White students, too. He talked about the integration of schools in his community.

By the way, when I was going to school, this was a segregated school from first to 12th grade. Booker T. Washington in Sapulpa. And it was first through the 12th until my fifth grade year when we had a tornado that destroyed the school, and the school system rebuilt the school, but only had grades from the first through the ninth. And the [black] high school was integrated into the white high school because of the natural disaster. It was in 1960, and it wasn't a planned integration, but they didn't want to build a brand new school for the coloreds, so that was funny. We integrated because of the tornado.

And then Mrs. Elliott, Lillian Elliott came to our town and her husband was the principal, Luther Elliott, L. W. Elliott, and she was just a wonderful marvelous lady. And the point I want to make here is that Mrs. Elliott took a really strong interest in my studies and so she encouraged me, and when I graduated from high school she sent me clippings going all the way back whenever my name would be in the newspaper, or honor roll. She had kept them for years and years, just every time she saw my name, and just a wonderful, wonderful human being.

The point of all of that is to say that every teacher in every grade encouraged me. In our school we had a trophy case, and I would see pictures of my brothers and sisters when they were kids still in the trophy case for some award. And I would say that's my brother, that's my sister, and I'd see them all the time, and that's the legacy.

So my achievements were encouraged by black teachers. So by the time I got to the high school, I knew who I was. And I knew I was going to be an excellent student, and an outstanding student. And of course I played in the band. I was the only black member of the band all the way through. I was on the student council, I was an officer in our class. I was a charter member of the National Honor Society at our school.

And when I graduated I had scholarships, and one of them was to the University of Tulsa where I went four years. I was a drum major two years. I was in Who's Who, in the Student Association. You know, all of those good things. And graduated with an undergraduate degree in business administration, BA in business administration. And then went on from there to graduate school University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where I received my master's in social work. And Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where I received a masters in Divinity. So I did a joint master's in four years in Pittsburgh. And then went to Brussels to learn French. And then Zaire and taught in seminary.

I was impressed that Samuel spoke with such ease and comfort about his accomplishments. He had a clear and simple way of explaining his plan for succeeding all of the way through school and I exclaimed that it was a marvelous ride that he had throughout the overall process of his education. He gave credit to his parents and grandparents who taught him and influenced him through their plans for his success.

It was a ride, and it still is. But education, this is the focus, and this is why I love it. See those doors opening? Doors were opening all the way through. Because of what foundationally I was taught at an early age. I was talking to some people the other day and they were saying that they grew up poor, and they were on public assistance. And the question was thrown back, I don't know how you all grew up. Well, I didn't say anything. I just was silent. But the way we grew up, as I look back now, well, we didn't have a whole lot. But we had sufficient. Sufficiency so to speak in the sense that all of us went to college. We had encyclopedias and books, and magazines. The conversation was not about people, but it was about ideas. You know as I look at it, it's kind of funny cause I think, were we middle class? Well I don't think we were middle class in a sense of Philadelphia middle class. But we were a proud striving family that did not carouse.

Samuel continued his reflection and extended the idea of getting a solid foundation in education to explain the work that he and his wife are doing with their

children, Emmanuel and Carolina. He said that they looked at the background each of them had growing up and attending their specific schools, and they discussed finding schools that would give the kind of support and encouragement that was necessary for their own students to excel.

Well, my wife and I looked at schools from the standpoint of her experience in going to private schools, and my experience of having caring and compassionate teachers, and we both said that we wanted a school that was going to encourage our children to learn, and that's going to have that focus on reward that comes from education. There's so much good that comes from education, and not this do it because I said so, we've only got 10 minutes, and that sort of thing. So we're looking at that, and also the kind of curriculum they operate on and so forth. So we did some research and we looked around, and we saw the students in Muskogee, and we thought we had a pretty good school.

In Muskogee there was one early childhood education center, and the principal was African American, Debra Horsechief, and her last name was Horsechief. She was African American, and through her ancestors, you'll see that a lot in Oklahoma, Shakota, Horsechief, Winnie, you know those are Indian names with the African American People. Ms. Horsechief was, is, an outstanding, principal, educator. She had those little kids together. And I mean we were just so excited because, yes! This is what we were talking about; and Emmanuel loved the early childhood center, he loved the education. We're teaching at home as well, and we got the computer programs, and flash cards, and we're doing all of this stuff, and we're happy and everything is good.

He leaves the early childhood center and goes to a school that has been recommended, and the teacher is going to be a good teacher. Everything is good, fine, in kindergarten. Kindergarten was wonderful; everything was fine. Then we go to first grade. First grade we get a teacher who is on the way out the door. She is ready to retire. She's about tired of teaching. She'd rather go to the mission field. So she talks about that passionately. She doesn't talk about teaching passionately. And she is harried, because the new rules that say you have to teach so much of the curriculum in so much time. So we have workbooks, workbooks, workbooks. So in first grade, we see suddenly, our bright, wonderfully inquisitive child coming home and crying, cause he's saying all we did was work in the workbooks today. Our child is preconscious, and she calls upon him to read because others cannot read.

These events give a clear picture of the conversations the family had while planning the education for their son, Emmanuel. This is really a "how do you do this"

kind of decision process because it explains how Samuel and Stella identified clear goals for educating their children and then they went forward methodically to achieve that goal by using three basic strategies. The first strategy was to draw on their own educational and school experiences, and those included caring and compassionate teachers that Samuel had growing up as opposed to the teachers in the private schools that Stella had when she was going through school. The second strategy was to identify the kind of school model that essentially encouraged the children to learn and that rewarded the children for participating in the process of education and of learning in and of itself. So they identified that model as the standard they would use when selecting a school. And thirdly, in addition to these philosophical standards, they also wanted a school that offered a quality curriculum, so they conducted active research to find the right school.

The right school remained the right school only as long as each of those criteria was met, and Samuel described the success that the family felt in preschool and in kindergarten. He then went on to describe how the changes in the school's ability to meet the criteria caused him and Stella to reevaluate and take the next steps because their son was not happy and the teacher was not performing the way they wanted her to perform. It is important to note here that Stella and Samuel knew that they had options, and that they felt that they did not have to just accept what they were given. This is a very different perspective than that of many families who attend public school, and feel like they just have to go along with the program, whatever it is. Samuel and Stella had been comfortable using choice options for many years so they began the process again.

So now our educational experience has been tainted. We're dealing with our son crying. He's learning and crying from that load, and that's not the way it's supposed to be. So we said okay, what are we going to do? And Joy is a very, very resourceful young lady. And she got on the Internet, and she started reading,

and she shows me the research. She did the research, and she comes back from the research and she proposes to homeschool. Now I'm from the old school, and I say, where's the curriculum, where's the test score work, and she begins to educate me about home school. So we get the books on homeschooling, then I learned about unschooling because I hadn't heard about unschooling and she said that's what you have to do to prepare the child for homeschool because they have been rigidly subjected to education by rote, memorize, do this, and now you have to allow their curiosity to come forth again. You have to give them freedom. And I said okay, okay, I'm a little hesitant, but cause I didn't know, but she's working with me, and I would complain sometimes, and I'd say Joy it seems like their having more recess than anything else. But then she starts ordering different kinds of math books, and she shows me the curriculum, and I start seeing this, and she satisfies me because I want structure, and she satisfies me to a degree, and then I get over it when I began to see how my son is happy again. And he's learning, and he's interested, and he wants to read the paper that I'm reading, and I'm reading the paper, and he's reading the other side. And I say, you're reading, little boy, and so we're talking about what I'm reading. And he loves Animal Planet. He's watching it, and he comes and says Daddy, let me tell you what I saw, and I'm excited about that. Meanwhile, we have a baby girl that's ready now, and so she goes to early childhood center, because once again it was the greatest experience, and of course she takes her and embraces her, and everything is good once again. But now we're sold on the home school, so now when she finishes her early childhood experience we don't even consider kindergarten. We put her in home school as well, and she is like a sponge. Right away, wow, she's quick, she's in it. So I step back, because I say, okay, they're doing all right.

Samuel's perspective about education is that learning should be fun and that learning should be a reward unto itself. So his response to his son's distress in school was to work with his wife to find a solution. Stella's research gave her information about homeschool, and she considered it as a school choice option for them to consider. She presented it to Samuel and began to educate him about the model itself as a way for them to provide an education for their son. It was a new thought process as well as a new educational design for both of them, and as they went forward to try to implement it in their home. They found that they could tailor it to their needs as they continued to learn more about it. Samuel's hesitation began to subside after he saw the results of the curriculum and the unschooling that Stella implemented because his son was taking an

interest and a joy in learning. And Samuel became excited about the level of achievement that Emmanuel was demonstrating, and about the interest he was taking in sharing his learning with his dad.

At this point, Stella and Samuel have provided Emmanuel with a private preschool, a public kindergarten and first grade, and home school in second through fourth grades because those were the models that worked for him and for his family. The next step for the family was to decide about a school program for Carolina, and the preschool was chosen again because all of the criteria were still being met. But then they chose the home school model for her also because her parents were happy with the results they had achieved with Emmanuel.

Shortly after they put Carolina in home school Samuel received a promotion and the family prepared to move to another city. This meant that they had to decide what to do about school in their new city, and again he and Stella discussed the school options and did research to decide the best outcome for them and for their children.

Now we're at another crisis, not crisis, but another decision. Because now we have moved out of Muskogee, and we're in Signet and we want more choices. And so now we're like okay, do we go with school, if we do, is it public or is it private? If we go with private, which private; if we go with public, which public? Or do we continue with homeschooling? And now the other element to all of this is maturity. Because now see, Brooks is ready for the fifth grade, and fifth grade is at another crossroads because he's getting ready to go into middle school, and you're way above the little first and second grade, and so you're in double digits, but your maturity level may be back here instead of this way. So we're looking at maturity level, is he going to make it over here? Or is he easily influenced. We're looking at that emotional quality. Academically, it's no problem. He's reading on high school level, so that's not the issue. It is maturity. And then with Carolina you know, she's just a social butterfly, you know, and she's going to be all right. But we're making that decision now. I would rather have them both do the same thing. Not one home school and one going to school. I want them both either at home or in school. And if they're in school, I want them both at the same school. So we're at that place. We're making a decision and talking about

it in little bite size chunks. But we're not having to make it all overnight. Uh, so that's where we are.

The move to a new location created the need for the family to look at the wide variety of education models that were available there. They found themselves in a position again to choose and to decide whether they were going to continue with their current plan of home schooling, or whether they would try private school, public school, religious school or some other option that was available in the larger city. Through this process of change the continuity for the family was the fact that they held to their criteria for what they wanted the educational experience to be. To that criteria they added the fact that Emmanuel might be ready to go to middle school, and they considered both his academic preparation and his emotional growth. Their final decision was to continue with the home schooling for now, and then decide year by year which school model might be best for each of their children. They decided that the choices didn't have to be the same for both Emmanuel and Carolina. The children have different personalities and they have responded in their own individual ways to the home school program.

Based on the success the family has had with homeschooling I asked Samuel if he had considered if the children would be prepared to go to college.

Well we talk about it; you know when you go to college da da da. Or when we're driving by TU, Yes! That's where daddy graduated, right there! Can you see yourself doing that? You know. And Stella of course has already decided that our children will attend Talladega because that's the generational school, like Lincoln was for us, and I said, to Stella and I've said to all of our children, you'll go where you're most comfortable. If you go to Talladega, Joy's position is to get your undergrad at Talladega and then do you graduate and post doctoral work. She's built that in, and you'll do that at a school of your choice. But she wants them to have that legacy, generational legacy, at Talladega. So I don't want to stand in the way of that.

The familial legacy that Samuel talked about here is like a vine that has run throughout this study. Each generation has been a branch of that vine and has the foundation and the support of the entire vine to grow from. Each person has the opportunity to make choices from what their parents, and their grandparents have done before. Samuel's family expectations were carried out within the public school system, and the expectations were the same as Stella's family who chose private school education. I asked Samuel to summarize these experiences for other African American families who might be looking for more understanding about educational options for their children.

My dad said, the idea with African Americans is what would be the compelling reason for African Americans to look outside the norm of whether public school, or the expectation of going to college, just look outside the norm, and I was going to say, my dad was a person who would talk about things in a skeptical framework. He would always say, don't be so quick to believe what is popular, popularly assumed. His thing was search, ask the questions, and he would come up with things like, how do you know there was a man sent to the moon? Now Dad, you know...and he would say, how do you know? Get the facts. Read further, research further. So all of that is to say that when you have the idea, that you are going to have to be responsible for finding out a truth, and not just accepting someone's version of a truth, then you begin to approach things a little differently. You hear it and then you say is there another way, automatically you say are there other alternatives. Is there another path to get there? And once again you're not thinking expedient, you're not thinking easy, you're thinking best, so you're looking around not just accepting the first thing. Now, we know what happens then is that people tell you that you're indecisive. Well, no it's not that I'm indecisive, I just want to know, and I want to take the time to know. So you know you just have to weather the storm of what's going to come when people say you're not being popular, you're not being cool; you're not being with it. You just have to understand that it's okay. I can handle that. And every time I say things like that I think of little sayings that dad would say like sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. You know, don't fatten frogs for snakes.

The ethos for Samuel's family was search for the truth, and look for other options to find it without just accepting someone's word that it is so. In living out the strength of

his conviction he continues to say is there another way, and then automatically begins to think of alternatives. This is a simple idea, and it can be almost intuitive for a family if they have been raised with a foundation to approach life with curiosity, and with the belief that they have choices even about whether something is true or not. This is not the common approach to things learned in school, or even to things read in the newspaper because many African American families are commonly taught to believe what they are told. Samuel is saying that they have to be taught to question the validity of what they're told. His family took this unusual position early on and he is passing it on to his children. I asked him how this applies to the African American community in general today as they think about choosing schools for their children.

Well, there are two ways to go with this. You can spend the time researching it and find what's going to be a good fit for you, or you can start it yourself. Ah, I think that we cannot rely on public schools to be the answer for us. Because public schools have now gone into that area that says we are mandated to provide a curriculum, an education, I won't say a good education, but a curriculum that you choose to take or not take, all we're going to do is put it out there. And so therefore you don't have that compassion, you don't have that kind of motivation that says holistically I will approach this person, this little person. They're only saying look, I'm obligated to do this and if you take it fine, if you don't, see ya. You know, I think that cold hard reality of public education is not going to go away. Because we have just so much mandated information that has to be done, and so people approach it differently. I believe that the whole system is going to be a dispassionate institution. Now, what does that say then on our choice? That says that for African Americans who are looking for choice, you have to search.

So here we go, those are going to be the bigger options. If someone wants to tackle the public school morass, then good luck to you, with the understanding that you are going to have to be very, very active in your school. I had a state legislator who talked to me and I told him about our children being homeschooled and he happened to be around the children, and he noticed them, and he said what are you doing differently? You know, and he said to me as we parted and said good-bye, this is an elected state official, you keep your kids at home. Keep them out of the public schools. He says you all are doing a great job, and the public schools are just gone, and he's up there mandating, you know, getting the money to fund schools, right now.

So the same thing starts at an early age. Getting children excited about sharing who they are, writing stories, yes, all of that is part of reading. So all of that is to say that the African American parent, just like any other parent, has got to be very involved in their child's education, and you chose the right school for your child, the niche. Or you choose a private school for your niche. Or you do the homeschooling, but that's what's going to be the answer. The choices are there. And if they're not there then you start your own.

Referring back to Samuel's family ethos gives each family choices about what they decide to do each day and that includes what they want to do about school. He believes that African American families can either continue to trust public schools to provide quality education for their students and accept whatever curriculum requirements are handed out and whatever environment is created there, or they can do a little planning and research to find school models that meet their needs and provide a better fit for their children. The responsibility and choice to do either one is given to each individual family, and the outcomes are the results of each family's choice.

## The Youngest Grandson

Emmanuel is 10 years old and the youngest grandson in the family. He has an energetic, outgoing manner, and he was very confident as we sat down at the kitchen table to begin our interview. I asked him to tell me what he thought it meant to attend home school.

Well, I guess it means that you are at home and your mother or father, either, is teaching you, but still they're schooling you. Well, I haven't really caught on, on what homeschooling really is. I've just thought of it as home. Home and your parents are teaching you. That's what I thought homeschooling is.

His answer matches the definition of home school that his parents explained, and he added that for him it meant being at home. For him being at home is important and it is a comfortable place to be because it was a better environment for him than the public school classroom he attended for first grade. I wanted him to say more about the differences he noticed in what he learned at home from his parents than from what he learned at school from his teachers.

Well, lots. Lots more than they do in school. Because they [school] don't teach you, they have you learn everything from a textbook, or stuff like that, and the textbooks aren't always right. Like on African American history and stuff like that. Not a lot of African American history. Homeschooling, you get to learn everything about the world and its causes, its weaknesses, its strengths, poverty, war. And it's just better than being in school.

See I went to school from preschool to first grade, and I started homeschooling at second grade. We were living in Muskogee when I was going to school, and the school that I was going to, it just wasn't what I wanted. I had a hard time learning there, and besides, I'm easily influenced, and I just got distracted, and so we started homeschooling, and so we've done that for about let's see four years. This is our fourth year. It's Carolina's third year. And homeschooling is better. Like I said, it's better.

Emmanuel's thoughts about his school environment are an expression of his individual likes and of his individual needs. His first thought is about learning primarily

from textbooks. He points out that the subjects that are covered are not always thorough in terms of cause and effect, strengths and weaknesses. His concerns are examples of ideas and of concepts, which are a step beyond the factual information that is presented in many textbooks. From my work in education I know that the concepts and ideas part of textbooks are often in the enrichment section of the chapters, and that section is not always used in classrooms because there may not be enough time to involve students at that level of information and of analytical thought because the factual information has to be covered thoroughly first. Emmanuel's second thought is about his learning style. He recognized that he was easily influenced and that he got distracted easily. This identification of the kind of student he is falls into the same vein as each of the earlier participants who discussed their strengths and their weaknesses as students. Their ability to analyze their learning styles helped them determine what they needed from their school and from their teachers in order to have the greatest success. Emmanuel's grandfather knew that he loved to learn for learning's sake just as his father did, and Emmanuel knows that he wants to learn everything about a subject without the distractions of a school classroom. I asked him to tell me more about the teachers and about the classroom.

The teachers. They were mainly focused on behavioral issues with the kids. Because, I had a class of over 23 kids including me. The teacher, our teacher she just yelled at every single person. It seemed like she didn't care if the person she was yelling at a person that wasn't even acting up or was just studying. Because mostly every single person in the class was just acting up. Only two people who were never in trouble in class were me and another girl named Caitlin. And the teacher just wasn't right. And recess time, it was like five minutes unless the teachers had a meeting then it was extended to only like 10 or 15 minutes. So you're just sitting there seven hours a day. It just wasn't working out for me. I needed to move. I'm really athletic, and I need to move. I can't sit for seven hours a day staring at a book.

Emmanuel's observation of his first grade class show that sometimes very young students are aware of their learning environments at a deeper level of understanding. In this case he was negatively affected by the rigidity of the schedule, and by the disciplinary style of the teacher. By his understanding, he was not adjusting well in that particular classroom environment and I asked him to tell me what happened at home to make things better. I also wanted to know how his parents made the decision to change schools.

Oh, that's a hard question to answer. They saw me, they saw that something was troubling me, cause at the time my father was losing his sight, and I got in trouble a few times but not bad enough to be reported. I just, they could tell that something was troubling me, and soon they found out and they just, we all decided that it would be better for me to home school. And about my father losing his sight. I gradually accepted that over time. It took me about three months to accept that.

Emmanuel identified two strategies that have been used by other generations of this family when decisions had to be made about educational programs. The first was that his parents were actively involved in monitoring his success in school. Both his grandfather and his mother had parents who were aware of school conditions and also were aware of how their children were doing in school. Secondly, his parents involved him in determining what the problem was at school and then they included him as they looked for alternative solutions to his academic concerns and to his behavior concerns. He told me how he got along with his friends and his classmates in school.

Friends, I would just call them acquaintances. I was a really smart student, and I got student of the month a number of times, and I guess they were jealous. They did make me feel uncomfortable, and I handled it for a while, and then it kind of wore off. And then it just started back up again. And one time they influenced me and I got into a fight. Not like a fistfight, no punches and stuff. We ganged up on this kid, and she sent me to the principal's office, and at that particular day, I was student of the month, or student of the week, and it just; that's one of the

reasons that I just really wanted to home school. And I was cranky; whenever I got home I was really mad. Well in school I didn't throw fits and stuff; at home, that was where it just burst. Staying home and go to school; being with your parents. You're used to your home environment and it's easier to concentrate and learn. Not like when you're in school and everybody is trying to distract you. It's fun.

Emmanuel seemed to be very aware of his feelings, and of what was distressing him. His family took his frustration into account when they looked at the home school model. As parents they were looking to find an environment that would allow Emmanuel to be actively involved in learning, that would support his advanced academic skills, and that would have less behavioral distractions. The home school model provided an opportunity for them to work more closely with him at an emotional level as well as at an academic level. His daycare center had been located in a private home, and the home school model was similar to that environment, so I asked him to tell me about a typical day in home school. He talked about the schedule during the day, and explained how his mother chose his home school curriculum.

My alarm clock, I usually set it for 6:50, sometimes 7:30, but usually I wake up on my own, which is usually at 10:00. And get up, have some breakfast, and start home schooling. And by home schooling we mean math, reading and music.

Every little bit of the day is part of home schooling. Like when we count, when the cash register, when we're at a cash register, I look at the numbers on there and kind of multiply and divide.

Mostly we find out what the schools are teaching, and sometimes my mom chooses a curriculum and says that I need to study this to keep up with the grade level. I read every night. I go to bed, and if I had enough time I would read 'til the end of time. I swear I would read 'til the end of time. Like a few weeks ago she asked to have me do the states at one point, and I would write down the states, all 50 states, it doesn't matter if they were in alphabetical order. I would write down the states and their capitals.

The schedule for the school day varies, and that flexibility is one of the advantages of having school activities that can work around the family's needs. The

curriculum is a combination of their individual interests and of subjects that are being taught in school. Emmanuel's example about doing division and multiplication at the cash register in the store is an example of his being involved in a teachable moment. When students have the opportunity to apply a skill through practical activities they benefit from one of the most effective teaching strategies that any teacher can use. I asked Emmanuel about enrichment activities as part of the home school curriculum. He gave examples of what the family does based on their interests, and he explained how his mother was able to find the resources for some of those extra curricular activities.

I am a musician. We are a musical family. My dad played the sax, and was a drum major in his college years, and my mom is taking violin lessons with me. My sister was taking violin lessons, but started piano. And I also play the electric guitar and the acoustic guitar, along with the violin. Carolina also plays the electric guitar.

Music is part of their daily curriculum and they practice morning noon or night depending on what other activities they have had during the day. I asked him if he had given any concerts either with the violin or the guitar and he said that he had in his campfire group. Then he gave me a little more about the campfire activities.

Well, the Campfire group consists of 30 kids or more and there are different groups based on ages. Like I graduated from Discovery to Fire Makers, and before that I was a Wood Gatherer, and before that I was a Trail Seeker. I started at Trail Seeker. At first I looked at Star Flight it was made up of a bunch of babies that were three years younger than me, and I was not happy there. I was not happy. So my mom suggested that I look at Trail Seekers, and it was a group of just all girls, and I didn't mind that and I liked it. It was fun and besides I was with kids my own age. I don't know how it got started but I do know that I think my mom was searching the web or something, and somehow she found the group, and we went to look at it and we liked it and we joined.

Emmanuel's mother already mentioned the family connection with the campfire group through Emmanuel's grandmother. This is a unique intergenerational influence within the home school system because the Signet Campfire organization is benefiting

family members two generations after its establishment. This example adds to the theme of connectional family that is such an integral part of this study.

At this point I asked Emmanuel to think about how home school had worked for him and for his parents. I also asked him to tell me what he says to other kids who are curious about his home school. In his answer he told me what advice he would give to parents who are thinking about doing home school with their children.

Usually a lot of kids ask me, do you like home schooling, is it better than being in school? And I would always say yes. And if you [parents] want to home school, my advice, if you want to home school is start at your child's grade level, and if you find that he is above or she is above their grade level, then get a higher curriculum, or a more advanced curriculum. If your child starts to get lonely, enroll them in a campfire group. See if he or she likes it, and if they don't you could continue home schooling, or just go to another campfire group, or another home schooling group.

I concluded by asking him what he thought about his parents being his teachers. And I wanted to know if he thought that his parents were enjoying teaching him and his sister, or if he thought that they were benefiting from the home school arrangement. I wondered if he thought that his parents are missing out on anything by being home schooling teachers, especially his mom.

No, though she is thinking about getting back into the workforce, maybe like at night, a night job because she has to take my father to work, and she knows that I don't want to go to school, but she also knows that Carolina wants to and does not want to go to school. But her wanting to go to school is stronger than her not wanting to go to school.

Well the reason why I do not want to go to school is because I don't want to face what I faced back in first grade. It's a torture chamber. That's what I would tell my mom. I do not want to be tortured again. I'm not sitting seven hours a day seven days a week, or five days a week.

Emmanuel has expressed very strong feelings about what he wants and needs as a student. His ability to analyze his feelings, and to make a distinction between his first

grade year and what he has had in home school over the past three years shows that he is quite mature in his thinking. It also shows that he has benefited from being in the environment that his parents created for him at home. This would seem to indicate that he is comfortable with the opportunities that have evolved for him through his family's participation in school choice options. And he is aware that there might be changes in his education if his mother decides to go back to work or if they decide that Carolina will go to public school. Choice is still a big part of the family's method of determining the best education for themselves and for their children.

For this study, Emmanuel's answers would also seem to indicate that children in other families might benefit from being involved in decisions with their parents regarding the type of school they go to. And as a side benefit parents may have more opportunity to influence their children's academic and social and emotional success during the educational process.

#### The Youngest Granddaughter

Carolina is the seven-year-old daughter of Samuel and Stella and she is the youngest member of this intergenerational family. She had a quiet smile as we sat down at the kitchen table to begin the interview and I asked her to tell me about the preschool she went to before she started going to home school. She said she liked it and that there were four or five children in her class.

Well, I remember that we had paper clips, and that we had these little signs with little smiley faces on it and so you could put your paper clip on the little smiley faces and that's the corner where you could play. We count the numbers and our ABCs.

From her answer I know that she was in a small class, and her example with the paper clips and smiley faces shows that there was structure for the activities the children

did. Carolina was four years old and attended that school for one year before she started home school with her brother. I asked her to tell me how she decided to go to home school instead of going to the public school for kindergarten.

Well, all the other kids started to leave preschool because they were getting older. And so they had to leave. So we had our graduation in Muskogee, and we had cake and ice cream and punch. And other kids came in the same classroom that we were in, but I wasn't there because then I started home school. And my mother wanted me to go to home school because she didn't want me to go to Creek Elementary. My brother told me that the teacher yelled at him. And his music teacher yelled at Emmanuel, and so I didn't want to go there because it seemed like a bad school.

And I like home schooling, and I like subtraction and adding and math and reading, and music. And those are my four things that I like. We have a lot of recess, and we get to go to the store a lot. And it's really fun in home schooling because it's easier and more relaxing, and it's lots better than school. I didn't want to stay inside because I was hot, and I had the sprinkler under the trampoline, and I turned the water on, and it was really cold, and it felt good. Probably I'm going to be a gymnast because I took gymnastics in Muskogee and then I had to quit because I moved. Then, one of my mom's friends told her that there is boys and girls gymnastics, but I don't know the name of it.

Carolina listed several reasons for why she liked attending home school. Some of them focused on the environment that she wanted to be in such as having a classroom teacher who did not yell. And some of them focused on the structure of the day such as having a lot of recess time and being able to go to the store a lot. One example of recess that I observed a few days earlier was when she was able to play on the trampoline that had been set up in the backyard. And while I was interviewing her mother, Carolina changed into her swimsuit and played in the water. She was delighted at being able to choose two very different activities, and I saw a genuine integration of physical education skills through her recess time. She would not have had this experience in a regular

school, but would have had to follow the schedule like all of the other students. I asked if she thought she would miss this extra playtime by going to public school.

I didn't really like school. But I liked preschool. But I didn't want to go to a public school like Creek Elementary. My brother told me that the teacher yelled at him. And his music teacher yelled at Brooks, and so I didn't want to go there because it seemed like a bad school.

We talked earlier in the study about how family members could influence one another. In Carolina's case her parents were directing her and her brother was influencing her. This pattern of being directed by parents and being influenced by siblings was seen with the two daughters, Ruth and Stella in the second generation, and is continuing now with Carolina and Emmanuel in the third generation.

I asked Carolina to give me more examples of the subjects she studied with her mom and her dad while she was at school at home.

I like to cook breakfast with my mom; and dinner cause when I cook it with my mom, it smells good. Cause she buys the stuff that I like, and stuff that my brother likes, and it's fun when we run errands with my mom.

We do our chores, and like we make up our bed, or wash the dishes or vacuum the den. And dust the furniture like the banister on the stairs, and then we do our math, and then practice our music, then we read and we either watch TV or play on the computer. Cause we do our math first and then we do electric stuff. We work in books, and well I don't really use a text book cause I don't really know what's in a text book, because I don't like to use a text book. I just like to use stuff in my head when I'm using my math book. And either my mom gets the wrong book or she gets the right book.

But my dad doesn't really teach. Because my mom always teaches us because she's the only one around, but when my dad's home he usually teaches my brother or me, and my mom either teaches my brother or me. He [my dad] pretty much knows everything in Brooks' book, but mine like is too easy for my dad so he teaches me more than my book

Carolina's description of what she did during a homeschool day went from cooking breakfast and dinner to straightening her room and running the vacuum to doing

math and electric stuff on the computer. And it is not the uniqueness of these activities that makes the home environment so important in the school day. Rather, it is the way they are integrated and emphasized as part of the educational program that makes the home school model so effective for this family. Carolina's mother told me that a large part of the curriculum she designed for the children at this level is about life-skill training. She is giving them an understanding about how all of these chores and studies fit together during the day. And she is showing them the connections between each category of their day so that they can understand the goal of having a balance between paper and pencil activities, computer time, and taking care of their house hold chores. The life skill approach is not emphasized in other parts of this study, and it is an important perspective for parents and students to consider when making an overall educational plan that includes the home school model.

As we continued talking I asked Carolina to tell me about her experience with the Campfire group and she gave me some specific examples of her activities and told why she liked going to the classes.

Well, we do arts and crafts, and we learn, what the sky is. And one of the things is its rain with air floating around it. And we made a rainbow out of a CD. Like with a flashlight. We turned out the lights, and put a CD near the flashlight and then we made a rainbow on the wall. And I have two CDs stuck together with glue, the CDs that we never use, and we put paper on it, and then we made the sun.

This description is important because it contains a lot of information about this area of the curriculum in the Campfire program. The unit described here involves the solar system and meteorology from a scientific and an artistic approach. An equally important factor in the campfire program is that students work together, and they have the

opportunity to share ideas and to learn from one another. I asked Carolina if she missed the students on the days that they did not go to Campfire programs.

Well, it kind of feels lonely when nobody's there except your teacher and when I go to church, I was the only child there, and we did noisy money. So we have the bowl, and people drop money in the bowl, and then we take it and we put it on the secretary's desk. And then we light the chalice and I was the only one there so I had to light it.

When children interact with their classmates they have a chance to share life experiences with them. This method of socialization is one of the foremost reasons to have children attend schools and the lack of this contact and interaction is one of the leading concerns for opponents of home schooling. However, supporters of home school models point out that home school students are exposed to a wide range of activities with people of all ages and parents feel that this benefits them because it exposes them to things beyond their peer-group point of view. Carolina's description gives a child's perspective about loneliness and perhaps that is why her mother describes her as a very social person, and perhaps that is why Carolina has told her parents that she would like to go to school in the fall. Again there are options that can be addressed as the needs of the children change or as the needs of the parents change. As a child her parents have guided Carolina's choices and opportunities. All of the students in this study have had the same parental leadership involvement in their school programs. Carolina's parents know her needs and her learning style very well, and they allow her to participate in discussions and decisions about school. Her mother told me that during the spring months, the family would begin to make plans for the next school year. That is when they will decide whether Carolina remains in home school, or whether she goes to school outside of her home.

This is the only family in the study who chose to home school, and they have weathered the questions and criticism from friends, colleagues and other family members because they decided that it was the best model for their children at this time in their lives. Stella's parent's told her to give home school a try and see how it turned out. That support provided encouragement for them to select this home school education model, which falls outside of the public school arena, and they have been pleased with the results.

## CHAPTER FIVE – OBSERVATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The goal of this narrative was to hear the experiences of one intergenerational African American family's experiences with school choice options. The participants shared their educational experiences over time and from this information a new knowledge has been created about the collective choices they made regarding school choice. There were several areas that differed in the choice process. The stories were collected through face-to-face interviews with each participant, and all of the interviews took place in the participant's homes.

The study looked at the three generations of the family, which consisted of nine members including the Patriarch and Matriarch, their two daughters, their four grandchildren, and one son in law. At the time of the study the oldest member was eighty years old and the youngest member was seven years old. The participants discussed their school stories over a period of time beginning in the early 1930s and continued through 2006. During that time the families lived in the southern United States, on the East Coast and in the Midwest United States.

I did not attach expectations and outcomes to this study because my goal was to listen to the adults and to the children so that I could learn about their experiences and then share them with the community. My interest in this particular format came out of my own background as an educator and from my interactions inside of and outside of the public school arena.

As discussed in chapter three, the shared theme of K-12 education became a common focus for the participants in each generation. Dialoguing around that theme created some common meaning between the participants in each of the three generations,

and the knowledge that was created about the choices made for educational models has given the participants a new perspective about their family's goals and processes. That knowledge has been organized into four core themes.

The presentation of my analysis is through the identification of four core intergenerational themes that were present in each participant's interview. The core themes that I am presenting sometimes overlap, and they may connect to other themes that are not prioritized here - such as the influence of neighborhood schools, similarities and differences in school systems in the south and on the east coast, and political dynamics spanning three generations. However, the four themes I have identified are the foundation of the data recorded and I have presented each theme in a narrative, which includes the corresponding quotes from each of the participants. The first core intergenerational theme is *Family Expectations and Support for Academic Success*. The second core intergenerational theme is *Family Experiences with Segregation and Racism*. The third core intergenerational theme is the *Participant's Identification of His or Her Own Learning Styles*. The fourth core intergenerational theme is *Each Person's Participation in School Choice Options*.

The first intergenerational theme focuses on the importance and the value of education. This theme was critical to the family because it showed growth and how they added meaning to themselves and to the world around them. Because of slavery and segregation, education is a priority valuable to this African American family because it has not always been available to them in the United States. This family's reference to slavery was first referred to by the Patriarch who stated that his great grandmother had been a slave in the 1800s. Slaves were not allowed to go to school or to obtain an

education in any other way. Thus education was very important to the whole family. The examples given by the participants indicated they recognized the importance of education. They knew that it was the process of imparting knowledge and wisdom; that it was the process of teaching culture from one generation to the next; and that it was the process of helping each of them realize their self-potential, their skills and their talents. Education was viewed as an asset that gives added value to each person's life experiences.

The second intergenerational theme identifies the various forms of segregation and racism the participants encountered as part of their school experiences. The experiences that were shared occurred in schools, in their neighborhoods, and in their communities. In many cases this family's decisions about participating in school choice were stimulated and influenced by these racial experiences.

The third intergenerational theme reiterates that each family member understood their unique learning style and the support they needed to perform well in school. The children and their parents chose specific schools at various times during their educational journeys. Some of the schools were chosen because of laws of segregation. Some of the school programs were chosen to provide protection from violence. Some were chosen to provide a high quality curriculum. And some schools were chosen to meet specific learning styles and to accommodate specific family needs.

The fourth intergenerational theme explains how the parents and the children participated in the school choice process. An integral part of this process was that after a decision was made, the parents continued to evaluate the choices in order to see if they

were producing the expected educational successes that they wanted for their children. And if the expectations were not being met, the family decided to make other choices.

As discussed in chapter three, the narrative who chose non-traditional schools rather than traditional public education. One research goal is to understand how and why they made their choices. A second goal is to document the voices of the adults and of the children as they describe their experiences in the nontraditional settings they chose, or in the case of the children, those settings that were chosen for them.

First Intergenerational Core Theme:  
Family Expectations and Support for Educational Success

Education was set at premium value for this intergeneration family. They passed down the directive from slave grandmothers and slave grandfathers that the necessity of going to school and being academically successful was most important for all of their descendants. The family's goal was to participate in school in a way that would allow each person to graduate from high school and go on to college, and education became the cultural capital that was used to move the family into desirable and productive positions in society. For purposes of this study cultural capital is defined as the knowledge gained through life experiences and through personal relationships that allows the participants to experience success in society. The list below gives each person's understanding of this goal.

*Rev. Thomas*

For my family it was important for us to be learning. There were three of us and we had to be doing our homework. And we lived in a shotgun house, with a light bulb in the center, and we had to do our homework at night. Well, I got A's &

B's and it was important that you got A's and B's because you had to take that home.

*Mrs. Esther Thomas*

...and I don't know whether learning was emphasized or not. It seemed like I never knew why I was in school.

*Ruth*

That was like a mantra when we were there, and that's where I turned it around, and said you know I'm going to excel, and I did start excelling in my classes, and enjoying it. So I graduated at the top of my class. Talladega I have to credit with that.

*Rachel*

But I remember my grandma teaching us more and keeping us in practice after school or during the weekends or something. I think she brought workbooks, and yeah, just used her knowledge and write our ABCs on paper and copy it.

*Wilbert*

My mom, 'cause she has been to two colleges. She's been to the one in Tennessee, Penn State or whatever that was. And she's been to Tuskegee, the one in Alabama. And she got a PhD, and I think she went to college four years however long it takes to get a PhD, and I think she went to graduate school. 'Cause not a lot of people could say their mom's a PhD.

*Stella*

Well, education has always been an important part of our family's background several generations back. Therefore, as a result both my parents are college educated. My father has a master's degree, or M.Div. And he chose the administrative route in the religious world. So he was more of a bureaucrat within the denomination and an administrator of programs that helped people. And so as a result of their education luck and of being I the right place at the right time, and of making use of opportunities that came their way, I think they became knowledgeable about information, about certain schools. You know, so its having access to, having privileges, or access to, maybe not privileges, but having access to information, and then using that information for their kids to another opportunity that they may not have had.

*Samuel*

The way my dad explained it, each one would help the other. So at one time he had three children in college at Lincoln. The oldest were Bob, Maxine, and Vivian. The three older children they were all in school together. But I was told there were scholarships as well as working. And the money was saved to help the one behind you. And of course dad was making provisions. My mother did not work outside of the home. So the bottom line for everything was, the expectation was in our family that you would go to college.

*Emmanuel*

Well, I haven't really caught on, on what home schooling really is. I've just thought of it as home. Home and your parents are teaching you.

*Carolina*

But my dad doesn't really teach. Because my mom always teaches us because she's the only one around, but when my dad's home he usually teaches my brother or me, and my mom either teaches my brother or me.

These quotes summarize how each person built cultural capital because of their family's expectations and their family's support for going to school. The messages were expressed across the generations. Each participant held formal education as a priority and each in their own way acknowledged their parent's and their ancestor's influence in their beliefs that getting a formal education was a gift as well as a personal responsibility.

Second Intergenerational Core Theme:  
Participants' Experiences with Segregation and Racism

During the 70 years of educational experiences spanned in this study, the racial political climate in the United States went through periods of upheaval and violence. As told by the men, women, and children in this study, their level of involvement in this critical time of turmoil was at times voluntary as with Rev. Thomas in Boston, and sometimes situational as with Mrs. Thomas and Samuel growing up in segregated towns. No matter the reason, the involvement was always pervasive in its impact as shared by

Ruth, Stella and the children. The following quotes are incidents that are connected through the generations.

*Rev. Thomas*

One of the highlights of my life was that I was able to be a delegate in 1944 or 43 to the national convention of the NAACP in Chicago. It was the first time I had ever been above the "Cotton Curtain" to go to Chicago. We went to Chicago and Mrs. Carr, and who was the other person somebody else and I was 16. Boy!! That was the biggest thrill.

*Esther Thomas*

And by me being the color that I am, which was considered 'high yellow', I wasn't really accepted by everybody. But the orphan kids, they never questioned that. They always, we were always good friends. I just was always close to the kids who came from this orphan home, the Niles Orphan Home. It was right across the street and those were always my friends.

But Kansas City was getting closer into the segregation. Our downtown was segregated, and we stood at the counter to eat. You didn't go to theaters.

*Ruth*

It was a reaction to being treated as an outsider by some White students. And out of that reaction comes, oh I'm not one of you, and I'll never be one of you, so I'm going to be with my own. And all of that is within the social context of what was going on. And so Black people had, we had our own culture. And it wasn't mixing with the White culture. So it was a bigger difference back then. You're talking '72, '73. So, Civil Rights, Martin Luther King who had just been assassinated just a few years before that. And the whole Black consciousness was just coming up in the 70s in that period 'cause I started wearing an Afro.

*Rachel*

It was like a lot of hearing impaired kids at Carson, and like maybe a quarter Mexican, and Hispanic, and not very many African Americans, 'cause there were a lot of white kids.

*Wilbert*

In my class it was pretty much full of white kids, except me and this other kid, and these two other girls. And I was mainly the one that got in trouble in that class 'cause I thought my teacher was racist. And I still think she is.

*Stella*

Also when we moved to Boston, Boston public schools were in the middle of transitioning to what they called, forced desegregation. And that's a very Caucasian term for desegregation. And buses were being stoned and things. And it was really, really tumultuous and of course my parents didn't want us to be part of that. Even though dad was on the front line protesting for desegregating the schools, and we received quite a bit of hate mail at the house because he was the executive director of the Missionary Society, but also active in political groups that wanted Boston schools, that wanted all children to have access to school. But they didn't want their children part of that, and I can't blame them. If they could afford it and not have to have their children in all that, you know, I would have made the same choice.

*Samuel*

Because I grew up under that segregated pall around everything, easiness was never the equation. It wasn't the easy way it was the best way. That was always taught to me. Not to look for expediency, but to look for lasting value. And I grew up with my family, my father and my mother, but also my teachers and my minister.

The point of all of that is to say that every teacher in every grade encouraged me. In our school we had a trophy case, and I would see pictures of my brothers and sisters when they were kids still in the trophy case for some award. And I would say that's my brother, that's my sister, and I'd see them all the time, and that's the legacy.

*Emmanuel*

Lots more than they do in school. Because they don't teach you, they have you learn everything from a textbook, or stuff like that, and the textbooks aren't always right. Like on African American history and stuff like that. Not a lot of African American history. Homeschooling you get to learn everything about the world and its causes, its weaknesses, its strengths, poverty, war. And it's just better than being in school.

*Carolina*

At age seven Carolina didn't share any experiences of a racial or segregated nature with me.

Their statements show that neither the type of school nor the geographic location in the United States seemed to diminish exposure to segregation and racism for this family. Each generation was directly affected in their abilities to live in certain neighborhoods and to participate in certain activities. The family reacted and was influenced by the impact of the laws and practices in the way they were able to choose schools for their children. Rev. Thomas' vision allowed him to move his family through the turmoil. His foresight allowed him to create positive outcomes for himself, his children and his grandchildren.

#### Third Intergenerational Core Theme Participants Identify Their Own Style of Student Learning

Each participant learned about their academic strengths and weaknesses as they progressed through school. During that process they identified their own learning styles and they identified the support they needed for the greatest academic success. They benefited from this knowledge because it allowed them to be active participants with their parents when decisions were being made about choosing their schools. Some of the participants were very clear about their own educational beliefs and motivations. Others were less sure of their roles in making connections and in creating successes, but all of them had a sense of what worked for them, and how to find resources and support.

#### *Rev. Thomas*

And one of the ways that we learned, and it's coming back to me now, we learned we used to have spelling bees. And it was a whole, it was a district wide, all of the Black schools in that part of Kentucky had a spelling bee every year and you had a ,your own you had an elimination process, I remember this one time what word did I miss, I missed inconvenient, I was 5 or 6, and I missed that word. Cruel, crushing!! that I missed that word!! Yes, because I could spell. Spelling was

important and we had these lists. All A's and you've seen them. And you start in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade and you did that every year.

*Esther Thomas*

In my heart, I really wanted to be a good student, and I liked to read, but it looked like when I'd get to school, my brain would shut down and something, I don't know what it was, I just could not motivate myself, and of course I didn't have the thing going for me at home either, so these were not the best years for my life at all, and how I ever thought I was to go off to college, cause I went off to college and didn't do well at all, so got kicked out there. I got sent to two colleges, because they [my family] wanted to impress the people. Your child must not be at home, they must go off to college, and I had no idea. I should have been home going to a junior college, until I could get myself straight, but I didn't so I finally, they finally, the other relatives, finally got me to Chicago. And I went to college there, and finally got through college. I majored in physical education.

*Ruth*

Just kind of lack-a-dazical. So I went to college and I still didn't have that drive, and then I finally went to Talladega where I was with people who kept saying excellence, you can do it, hard work, study hard, that kept going over. That was like a mantra when we were there, and that's where I turned it around, and said you know I'm going to excel, and I did start excelling in my classes, and enjoying it. So I graduated at the top of my class. Talladega I have to credit with that.

*Rachel*

I think kids should be like able to wear whatever they want because I don't know, I think you should be able to express yourself by the way you dress. Not by, because some people think uniforms are ugly and stuff. I just think you should be able to wear whatever you want even though like some kids might get made fun of by what they wear. But it's something you have to learn from.

*Wilbert*

And then when I went to fifth grade there was a lot of work. And then I remember progress reports. Cause like, cause I was used to being at Carson, so I was used to not doing a lot of work, so I started out like getting D's and all that stuff. Then I brought it up to C's and B's and A's.

Because my friend Alula was playing a prank on Kinser but she stole her bus pass right. And so we had a substitute teacher and so he couldn't find any proof that Alula took it, but he finally came in and gave her the bus pass so we had a court up in the classroom. The teacher was the judge, I was Alula's lawyer and DeAndre was Kinser's lawyer.

And I was the best lawyer, cause if he was innocent I would have won the case, but he was guilty so. And I liked that. It was pretty cool.

We took him and put him into the charter school Highline, and that was really wasn't a good choice. I think he's smart. But I think he's a child that if he's not kept real busy, things get out of hand for him. But he's beginning to come into an understanding of what he ought to be, and what he ought to do. I see him developing now. I kind of think he fought growing up for awhile. I think he really did. I just think that he has refused to try to get some real feeling for education or for controlling himself and things like that. I think he wanted to stay the little mischievous child and I told him, you're getting older, and you're not looking cute at school. You've got to straighten it out. Nobody admires these little silly things you do, but I think that he's deciding now that he wants to grow up.

*Stella*

A lot of changes, and as a result I could sail through. Because I had been, I had a really good education. Windsor was very advanced, Bremmer was somewhat advanced, and Manual was just a public school, and was not that advanced, but what I studied in my senior year I had studied in my sophomore year and my junior year, so for three years I studied the same thing. By my senior year I was just sailing through. I was not studying, and nobody knew it. But that became a detriment for me. When I got to college I had to relearn how to study, you know. So yeah, but it was a good, in terms of the social stuff it, I realized then I'm a very adaptable person. I had a good personality, I could make good friends, and that was important to me so I did that, and I did that well. I made sure I did that well, and I adjusted.

*Samuel*

...because early on my parents emphasized education, not as a chore, but they emphasized education as a door. That if you're able to learn, and you have a curiosity, you will see that you will meet people who share those same interests who will introduce you to other people and other opportunities. And it's just a continuing door opening experience. So I was always a curious child, being the youngest. And my parents chose to parent me a little different than they chose to parent the first five. So I was given a lot more latitude and freedom to make my choices early on. And my dad would listen, and my mom would listen, to comment and then me. Well, that's pretty good. But be wary of these things. And they would go back to those maxims and those sayings that would keep me rooted. So they would always say that's good, but, also keep in mind this. Never telling me not to. But they would say be on guard.

*Emmanuel*

See I went to school from preschool to first grade, and I started homeschooling at second grade. We were living in Muskogee when I was going to school, and the school that I was going to, it just wasn't what I wanted. I had a hard time learning there, and besides, I'm easily influenced, and I just got distracted, and so we started homeschooling,

*Carolina*

Yeah, we work in books, and well I don't really use a text book 'cause I don't really know what's in a text book, because I don't like to use a text book. I just like to use stuff in my head when I'm using my math book.

Each person realized in their reflections was there was a connection between the expectation of achieving success and the process of navigating through the family situations, the school environment and the community conditions in order to reach those successes. The observations show the journeys were as varied the family members who made them. Their individual cultural capital gains were related to their recognizing what they wanted and what they needed, and to how they were helped by people that they knew.

Fourth Intergenerational Core Theme:  
Each Person's Participation in School Choice Options

This family's awareness of their right to choose the school they wanted to attend seemed greater than the average family's awareness. Their interactions with informed people gave them access to information they used to make informed decisions. They discovered how to attend schools that were not in their neighborhoods. They made very specific financial plans so that money was available for school tuition. They moved into neighborhoods that provided a safe environment for their children and they continually measured their decisions by the ultimate standard, which was to have the children get the best education possible. The decisions Rev. and Mrs. Thomas made about where to send

their daughters to school was based on their own personal school experiences, as well as on the racial climates in the Midwest and on the East Coast. They taught their daughters to think independently when they were deciding what they wanted from their schools. They helped them learn how to gather information about the schools that were available and then, after the decision was made, they taught them to pursue their goals with all of the deliberateness and all of the tenacity they had.

Rev. Thomas

Well I would say that in the school that I referred to in the earlier commentary, the school was not kindergarten, but first grade thorough twelve, in one building because all the Black folks went to that school.

So I got out of the Army, and went home in August, and school was starting the first of September, and I shared with the family that I was going to Alabama to go to school. And my mother said why don't you go to Berea? Berea had opened up for black folks then. Berea opened up in '49 or '50 after they'd closed in the early 1900's. And I said no. I didn't want to go to a White school. (OH) And ah, my other family from Carolina, they said why don't you go to Johnson C Smith? No. I don't want to do that. I'm going to Talladega. Oh, Tuskegee. No. Not Tuskegee, Talladega.

*Esther Thomas*

But everybody was at their wit's end as to what to do with me. And finally my cousin, George Williams College, which was a YMCA college, and a physical education college in Chicago, and they decided, maybe if she goes there, it would be OK. I think finally I began to be OK, but I was making some mistakes there too, but they weren't as traumatic, and finally I finished there.

*Ruth*

About her own participation in school choice Ruth says, "they said that I had to go to a black college. That was that. I had no choice."

About her involvement with her children's schools Ruth says, "Well, it's playing out now because they [son and daughter] don't have the choice. 'Cause I have to send them to public school because I can't afford private school.

*Rachel*

I think, let's see, public, I think that public school is the best school to choose from. Cause kids can interact more, cause I think like private schools are too restricted and have too many rules, private schools have too many rules. And charter schools, I don't know about, I actually think charter schools are really good more than public schools. 'Cause you actually learn more, you learn a lot from charter schools. I learned a lot.

*Wilbert*

Charter schools are maybe a little bit more strict. Carson wasn't that strict, 'cause they didn't suspend a lot of kids. But now in middle school, in public school, teachers just suspend kids for no reason. Like they can suspend you for accidentally cussing.

*Stella*

Public school was never an option. I graduated from the Advent School, and then I attended Windsor School which is an all girl's college prep school in Brookline, Massachusetts. Very Blue Blood, very Brahmin, Boston Brahmin, that's a term that you would use. I think I chose the school because it had structure. It has a little bit more structure than what I had at Advent. Advent there was a lot of freedom, and I think I wanted a little bit more structure, and still was looking for the close-knitness, closeness that Advent afforded me, but I knew that I wasn't going to be able to get any more. We only had eleven students in my class at Advent, and then we went to 45 girls, but it was all girls. And that was my choice. My sister chose another school. She chose a co-ed school. So we could choose our own school.

*Samuel*

No, the University of Tulsa is private. And the University of Pittsburgh at the time was private. It's now public. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is public. But first through twelfth was public. It was because I had an opportunity to go there. TU wanted me to go to law school. They were recruiting me to go to law school. I wanted to leave town. I wanted to go, and I had a call from God, to minister.

*Emmanuel*

They saw [my parents] that something was troubling me, cause at the time my father was losing his sight, and I got in trouble a few times but not bad enough to be reported. I just, they could tell that something was troubling me, and soon they found out and they just, we all decided that it would be better for me to home school.

## *Carolina*

I'm happier with home schooling because it's better than a public school or a private school, because I don't really like public schools anymore. Because I wanted to go to school and then my mom said can't because you'll either sit there two hours or seven hours, or three hours, or four hours, and so I said no, I'm not going to school, and then I wanted to home school.

Each generation of the family received cultural capital from their ancestors in the form of expectations and goals for going to school and for being successful. Each generation used the cultural capital they received to take hold of their environments and to shape them for their own use by taking risks to do something different, to do something better, to always do something to try to get what they needed from their schools even when their families questioned their decisions and even when the cultural customs did not encourage it.

### Opportunities for Other Families

One of the procedures I discussed in chapter three was the narrative inquiry method. I chose the narrative inquiry model because it allowed the individuals to express their perspectives about their educational life experiences. Those educational life experiences were organized into generational core values to show where there were similarities that connected the three generations such as the value of education, and the belief in individual responsibility in choosing a school model to obtain a quality education and also the individual responsibility to include the family in the decisions when those school models were chosen.

The review of these core values may provide opportunities for other families who are looking for strategies to use as they consider participating in school choice options.

One strategy used by this family was their continual evaluation of the schools where the children were enrolled. In this evaluation, the parents looked for the competence and for the experience of the teachers. They looked at the quality and the content of the curriculum. They looked at the safety of the school building and of the neighborhood environment. For example the Thomas' decided the schools in Boston were not safe because of the violence associated with desegregation activities, and they chose to put Ruth and Stella in private schools that were located in neighborhoods that were not experiencing high levels of violence. As mentioned in chapter three there were some unexpected outcomes. The selection of public schools for the first and third generations was unexpected data, and the inclusion of public schools was a result of environmental issues, social issues that influenced the experience, and cultural traditions that were infused throughout the experiences of the first and third generations.

A second strategy the family used was to develop and nurture a mindset that allowed them to acknowledge their right to seek alternatives in educational programs when they found deficiencies in teacher performance, curriculum standards, or safe school environments. They learned that they did not have to just accept the traditional school attendance assignments, and they put themselves into more active roles as parent educators. The family had to assume responsibility for helping to determine what was best for their children's learning. They learned to look beyond large school district education plans and take advantage of alternative school models.

The process of thinking outside of the traditional education box is a matter of practice, and it takes time to feel comfortable and competent with deciding for oneself instead of waiting to be told what to do. Many families in the African American culture

have trusted the school system to take care of their students and to make the best decisions for them. This long-held practice of accepting what the school says and not questioning school administration and teachers has not been the most positive or the most productive over time, and the intergenerational family in this study decided early on to take advantage of alternative opportunities.

The third strategy was the family's purposeful planning to involve the whole family in finding the schools that were most suitable for education. The parameters for those decisions were created by the individual needs of each student. Both the parents and the children looked at the type of school model that delivered the teaching styles needed. The information about school models was found through visiting schools, through studying the philosophy and the practices of the schools, and through letting the students try them out.

The fourth strategy was the family's intentional plan to train the children to have an active part in deciding what support they needed in order to get a good education and so that they can personally feel okay with school. Rev. Thomas had good support at home, and he was part of a segregated school system that had caring teachers who made sure that he learned and that he was successful. He used that support to become an independent thinker and as his daughters got older he included them in the decisions that he and his wife were considering. Mrs. Thomas generally did not have the support she needed at home or at school, and she decided that her children and her grandchildren would not have that same deficit so she included them in the discussions when decisions were being made about schools they would attend. Rachel and Stella were raised to be

independent thinkers, and they have passed that on to their own children, and they have allowed them to have active roles as the decisions about school are being made.

The intergenerational core themes and the strategies discussed in this chapter are the summation of the values of cultural capital refined from an intergenerational African American family. This intergenerational family has shown that it is very possible for families to be a part of the school choice system. They included public schools in their choice options because some public schools fit the criteria for the good quality educational programs they were seeking. When the public schools fell short, they chose private schools, religious schools, charter schools and home schools to provide the best educational programs. They were clear about what they wanted for their children's education. They were diligent when they researched the options that were available. They were committed to providing the support that their children needed while they were in school. And they evaluated the success of the educational programs they chose keeping in mind that they might need to change programs again if the school was not working to their satisfaction.

This study has shown that families can have access to school choice options in public schools, private schools, religious schools, charter schools and home schools. Families have to decide what they want, they have to find resources to help them, and then they have to be diligent about going after the school program that they want.

## APPENDIX A: CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

I want to better understand school choice decisions made by an intergenerational African American family who chose non-traditional schools rather than traditional public education in various areas of the United States from 1935 through 2007. This ethnographical study of one intergenerational African American family will focus on both students and parents who have chosen alternative educational programs. The first generation parents of this family searched for schools they felt were designed to create successful academic and educational experiences for their children. In turn the children selected school choice opportunities for their own children who make up the third generation.

I explore why this family chose non-traditional school models rather than the neighborhood public schools that were provided tuition free and were in close proximity to their homes. I wanted to increase understanding of how school choice decisions were made when the patriarch and matriarch of this intergenerational family were choosing educational resources for their children and how those decisions affected their children's educational achievement and subsequently how their children then made educational choices for their own children. This extended family's schools of choice included religious schools, charter schools, private schools and home schools. This ethnography is designed to look at educational experiences from these three sequential generations' perspectives.

### Historical Background

The issue of equitable education for all students continues to influence the social policy and the educational finance policy agenda across the United States. School district administrators, policy makers in state legislative branches, students, parents, and classroom educators continue to search for ways of establishing and implementing educational models and programs that promote academic achievement and success for all students. In January 2002, President George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Initiative into law. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings (2005) commented in her address on the fourth anniversary of the law, "Four years ago our nation said it would no longer accept a public school system that educated only a portion of its children. Americans said schools should be held accountable for results and students should learn through proven methods" (p. 202). The acknowledgement made by the Secretary of Education is key to this study because it points to the disparity of public education for some groups of students. Even with efforts at multiple levels of the educational and legislative systems, a wide discrepancy still exists in the access to quality educational resources, and in the academic achievement scores between racial ethnic students, particularly African American and white students.

Disparate educational achievement between African American students and white students has been explored from numerous perspectives. Considerations of socio-economic status, urban geographic location, and family educational achievement history all have been examined to determine possible impacts on the continuing gap in academic achievement. The latest Nation's Report Card, released today, shows steady growth and gains by America's schoolchildren, particularly in the early grades and between African

American and other minority students. The results, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2005-benchmark exam of fourth- and eighth-graders, confirm that real progress is being made in helping to ensure that the promise of the (NCLB) Act is realized for millions of young Americans from every background.

At the national level studies and reports have been published concerning the plight of African Americans in the public K-12 education system. In their book, *The Politics of School Choice*, social scientists, Morken and Formicola (1999) contend that being black transcends partisan politics and business as usual. The special nature of the economic, social and educational needs of African Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups challenges all those in public office to think again about what makes a school public, and what makes an educational opportunity equal”(p.199). The National Center on Education Statistics study of 1999 indicates wide disparity in American public schools.

The findings of this study imply that, over the past two decades, Black-White differences in educational achievement have been strongly associated with low socio-economic levels. Achievement differences do not necessarily cause gaps in educational attainment, employment, or earnings, but they reflect a set of circumstances responsible for Black-White disparities in both the academy and the economy. Addressing the contributing causes of Black-White achievement differences will be important in efforts to narrow Black-White gaps in educational performance, and perhaps also in subsequent labor market outcomes (NCES 1997b).

These data are important to this study because they discuss academic achievement and the effect that it has on the placement of African Americans and Whites in the economic society over time. The U.S. Department of Education’s Condition of Education Report for 2004 provides data that confirm that black and Hispanic students are more likely to be from low-income families. Additionally black and Hispanic students are more likely to be concentrated in high-poverty schools located in central cities, urban fringe, and rural areas. These conditions contribute to students being ill prepared to get a good foundation for learning that is essential for students to do well in school. The report also states that these schools are located in urban and or rural

locations. Hill, Guinn, and Celio (2003) discuss three critical facts that keep schools located in central cities contained in cycles of systemic failure. The first consideration is that local school boards are political bodies who deal with educational effectiveness without feeling the pressure of increased performance that local schools face. Secondly, school districts allow money and other resources to follow political influence, so that poor students end up receiving the least and the worst of available resources. Thirdly, teachers with greater experience and preparation can avoid working with the most disadvantaged students and often choose the nicer schools in the district (p. 129).

Collectively these factors sustain the cycle of poor students, who are poorly prepared, and who receive inadequate resources as well as insufficient instructional support. A change is needed in the methods used to allocate resources to make them more equitable for students who need them most. This would be a step toward leveling the playing field for the students who come to school without basic learning readiness skills. Placement of high quality experienced teachers and adequate materials would support student advancement and make improved achievement a consistent reality. Then the achievement gap could be decreased over time. This intergenerational family's awareness of the diverse abilities and experiences of teachers motivated them to seek schools that employed highly trained, highly motivated educators.

The historical aspect of school choice is another factor in this study. The last five decades have brought vast changes for black parents in the number of options for educating their children in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court was a catalyst for black parents to make decisions about sending their children to segregated or integrated schools. Now, 50 years

later, parents have a renewed interest in accessing school choice options. While federal and state laws require that all students between the ages of 6 and 16 be educated, the settings for that education and the contents of that education curriculum are now more varied than those offered in public schools throughout the last 50 years. Options available now include public charter schools, home schools, religious schools, and private schools.

The school choice movement began to gain momentum in the United States in the early 1980s and continues to grow as parents look for ways to meet their students' educational needs (National Center For Educational Statistics, 1997). In considering reports such as the one from the NCEC parents have begun to look for methods that would support their students' academic success. Racial ethnic minority students, especially African American students, score lower than their White counterparts who take the same academic standardized tests. These comparative test scores, viewed by teachers, parents, and educational analysts alike, seem to indicate that the students in racial, ethnic minority groups have not learned academic curricula at a level sufficient for them to pass or to be successful.

More specifically, the interest of this study is how this African American family made choices about school models and how those choices affected their education. One look at the statistics provides some insight. African American students continue to lag significantly behind their White counterparts on all standard measures of achievement. (Bray 1987). The research indicates that strides have been made, but they are insufficient to bring the African American population in line with the success of their White counterparts National Center on Education Statistics (1999) The NCEC study (1999) also

indicates that wide disparity still exists in the academic achievement between these two cultural groups. Helping parents access the information contained in this NCES report can be a first step in raising awareness of a systemic problem that cycles through generations of African American families. Additionally, outcomes such as these motivated the intergenerational family in this study to look for alternatives outside of the status quo of public school education.

In my professional experience I have given information to and received information from parent teacher organizations, professional teaching organizations, and community involvement groups. Some of their common goals include providing a means for equal access to academic opportunities for all students, and providing a means for equitable distribution of financial resources and human resources to all students. During my work in public education I also observed that African American parents are generally not well represented in the PTO and similar organizations. They often do not have a means to air their concerns about allocation of human resources and financial resources in schools. This study may serve to give voice to their concerns for equitable access and resources to a broad menu of educational opportunities.

African American parents are searching for answers outside of the status quo. They are looking for school models that will give them more direct involvement in their students' education. They are looking for ways to support the successful academic experience of their students in school choice classrooms. The Brown Reference Group (2004) gives a broad perspective for obtaining successful achievement,

Education is a topic that encourages passionate debate. Most people agree that education is a vital process for children and teenagers, but there are many issues about education on which people have opposing viewpoints. These include

teaching methods, the subjects taught in schools, whether schools should be private or public and types of education (p.4).

This controversy has special meaning to African Americans who continue to seek equality and success in America's educational programs. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) gives a historical perspective about the position of African Americans in education. "Perceived as the most direct avenue to the realization of the dream, education and access to schooling have been cherished privileges among African American, Slaves were not allowed to learn to read or be educated, and this has underscored the possibility and power of education for liberation" (1994, p. ix). She further states, "Quality education remains an elusive dream for most African American children. Historically they have been denied schooling, subject to separate and unequal education, and forced into unsafe, unhealthy, substandard schools" (p. ix, 1994). The intergenerational family in this study experienced the fallout from this systemic system of denial, and began to look for alternatives.

Gaining access to quality education programs has been a challenge because it was not the norm for African American families in the United States. Recent controversy at the national level has prompted remarks from the White House. "President Bush acknowledged persistent racism in America and lamented the Republican Party's bumpy relations with black voters as he addressed the NAACP's annual convention Thursday for the first time in his presidency" (Deb Riechmann, July 20, 2006). "I understand that racism still lingers in America," Bush told the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "It's a lot easier to change a law than to change a human heart" (Deb Riechmann, July 20, 2006). These statements are significant to all African Americans and specifically to the study of this intergenerational family because racism in American

has been a substantial barrier to gaining access to equal education opportunities throughout the United States.

Some African Americans such as the intergenerational family in this study were able to navigate around the boundaries of racism to obtain quality educational programs. Fortunately, the last decade has revealed organizations that will help in this process so access to equal education is no longer an individual struggle. One organization, the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), has taken steps to help give a public and political voice to African American parents. The organizers reflected a heightened national concern among African Americans regarding quality educational school models. BAEO has chapters in about 20 cities. Its members advocate a broad range of expanded educational options, especially for low-income families. (Friedman Foundation 2006). The work of organizations such as BAEO is significant to this study because it is the first of its kind in the United States to focus on school choice options for African American students. During the 2006 third annual symposium for BAEO I listened to parents testimonies about the assistance they received from this student centered organization. They received information about school choice models, they were given insights into how to communicate effectively within the school system they attended, and they were provided with opportunities to meet other parents who had a vision for better educational activities for their children. Additionally, BAEO has a legislative arm that helps to support the passage of school reforms bills and that provide financial options for low-income students and families who have traditionally been underrepresented and underserved in the school choice arena.

Review of literature suggests a growing interest in the school choice movement across the United States. The school choice movement began to evolve around the time the publication *A Nation At Risk* was released. This 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education outlined many of the problems in American schools, including the gap in academic achievement for African American students. The Condition of Education (2005), reports that school choice provides more options for parents and students of all socio-economic groups. Choice models allow parents and students to select programs in public charter schools, private schools, and home schools. The structure of traditional public school education allows public schools to remain open whether the academic achievement of students improves or not. The choice model is based on a premise of competition for student enrollment and the funding that is attached to student numbers. Choice schools compete for student enrollment with innovative curriculum programs, smaller class sizes, and community partnerships.

The prevailing programs of choice are found in non-public schools, and though more available now than they were even 10 years ago, they are still out of reach for many families because private schools and religious schools do not receive state funds and usually charge tuition. Additionally, as parents delineate reasons for seeking programs in non-public schools, several criteria emerge. Smaller class sizes generally mean more attention is provided for individual student's needs. More individualized academic programs support greater academic success. Discipline and safety are more easily managed in smaller schools. Parents who chose the schools their children attended were more satisfied with the schools than were other parents. In both 1993 and 1999, higher percentages of parents of students in grades 3 to 12 who attended private school (both

church-related and not church-related) were very satisfied with their children's schools, teachers, academic standards, and order and discipline than parents whose children attended public school both assigned and chosen. (National Center For Education Statistics, 2003). The NCES also reported that, not only did students in private schools have the most satisfied parents, they were also more likely than other students to have parents who were involved with their schools.

Growing numbers of African American parents are taking the initiative themselves to work outside of the traditional public school system to find solutions for improving academic success of their students. Parents have a broad spectrum of goals and they make decisions for their children's education to avoid some restrictions imposed by local governments. They make alterations in the standard education delivery systems because they want a better fit for their child's learning style. They change the method and timing of academic evaluations, and they decide what assessments are authentic for what is taught and learned (Callihan, 2000; Field, 1998). Marion Wright Edelman (1992) is not a researcher, but as a dedicated parent and founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, she speaks to the welfare and rights of children. She confirms her belief learned from mentors that education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it (1992 p 9). The intergenerational family in this study built on this premise by participating in school choice options.

Choice educational settings this intergenerational family selected include charter schools, private schools, religious schools and home schools. Charter schools are public schools of choice that are allowed some exemptions from local and state regulations in

order to provide more flexibility in operation and curriculum delivery than regular public schools.

A second choice is the private or religious school. Private schools and religious schools are broadly defined as “non-public” schools. They include parochial and independent schools that provide education to students of compulsory school age. These schools do not operate under the jurisdiction of a state or local board of education, are required to provide a basic academic education that includes communication skills in reading, speaking, mathematics, history, civics, literature and science.

A third type of choice school for this study is the home school. In 1994 it was estimated that between 750,000 and 1.2 million children were educated in homes in the United States (Field, 1998). Parents are given the option of providing an education for their children without the governance of an outside agency such as a school board. They apply for home school status through the local school district, and meet the minimum curricular content set by the state.

Data from the National Center for Home Education in 1994 indicate that home schooled students score higher than public school students in language arts and math. The attendance requirement and methodology are at the discretion of the family. The U. S. Supreme Court has not ruled explicitly on home schooling but has generally upheld parents’ rights to direct their children’s education. Home school programs bring a unique set of financial obligations to families and traditionally poor families struggle with this option. The home school movement in the United States has evolved from an underground activity in the 1970s to widespread public phenomena by the late 1990s. The Metropolitan Organization of People (MOP) has worked in communities around the

country to support parental participation in the education of their children, “In thriving school systems parents and families have real choices from a variety of unique schools” (MOP 2004). The parents and students in this intergenerational study have participated in each of the choice schools described above. Their choices were specific and deliberate, and each generation had a goal of providing the best possible educational experience for themselves and for their children.

In literature published by the Center for Educational Reform (CER) questions and criticisms are researched and answered.

When *Nine Lies* first joined the debate 13 years ago, barely any research covered school choice, despite communities in Maine and Vermont already providing it for more than one hundred years with great results. Today, however, with scholarship or voucher programs in 11 states, more than 75 privately funded programs covering 39 states, and nearly 3,400 charter schools operating in 40 states, many researchers have begun to examine the effects of choice. Now critics of school choice are not only being answered, but proven wrong. With every new program and rigorous piece of research, public support for school choice grows stronger (CER p.1).

This study goes on to recount research conducted in other states involved in school choice:

A study conducted by researchers from the University of Wisconsin, Georgetown, and Harvard found that black students participating in privately funded voucher programs in Dayton, Ohio, New York City, and Washington, DC performed significantly better on tests after two years in private school than did the students who remained in public school. In addition, the participating students narrowed the gap between their scores and those of white students by one-third. (CER 2005 p. 10).

The information in *Nine Lies* is pertinent to this study because it compares the perceptions of school choice, to the actual availability of school choice for all families, especially African American families. The intergenerational family in this study exercised its options in school choice programs when they became available beginning in

the 1950s. The conditions in the social/racial, and economic environments have changed over the past 50 years and have allowed access to school venues once closed to them because they were African American. Segregation in hometowns, cities, and states dictated what schools were open to them. Socio-economic status measured their access to schools outside of the public school realm. Their awareness of the differences in the conditions they were experiencing compared to conditions experienced by students attending other schools in their hometowns led them to search for other venues, greater opportunities, and more success.

This study begins by looking at the school experiences of the family patriarch. The schools he attended for K-12 education were segregated public schools in Kentucky. Segregation and socio-racial conditions led him to attend Historically Black institutions for part of his post-secondary studies. During his university tenure he began to have a broader perspective about the limitations and inequities African Americans experienced in America. He encountered more restrictions as he traveled in the Army. He began to consider the restricted access afforded to him because of his race. He became more aware of the restricted access to schools, employment, to economic opportunities, and privileges of citizenship. After his 1952 discharge from serving in a segregated African American Army unit, he made newly informed choices about colleges and universities.

New choices were available to him as the social/racial climate in the United States began to respond to the civil rights movement in the late 1950s. The study progresses with the family matriarch, the children, and grandchildren. Their participation in charter schools, religious private schools and home schools spanned five decades and ranged from the Southern hills of Kentucky, to Boston, Chicago, and finally Colorado, and

Oklahoma. All produced rich, experiences that were often positive and rewarding, and also painful and bleak.

#### Purpose of the study

The intent of this inquiry is to understand how members from one intergenerational African American family made school choice options for K-12 education. I will use the following questions to guide my inquiry.

#### Research Questions:

1. How do the members of one intergenerational African American family view their academic and environmental experiences at non-traditional K-12 schools?
2. What goals and expectations does one intergenerational African American family use when making decisions about selecting schools?
3. What are the daily experience of the students in one intergenerational African American family who attend non-traditional schools such as private schools, home schools, and charter schools?

#### Significance of the Study

Although recent studies have examined non-traditional school models, (CER 2005, BAE0 2000, Hadderman & Smith 2000, NCES 2003, Heritage Foundation, 2003) few studies have focused on the choices made by African American families who leave traditional public schools (Anderson 2003, Fuller 2000, Collins 2003). The data from this research will add to the field of study by providing insight into some of the specialized needs of one African American family that are not being met by the traditional public school system. It will highlight background preparation of individual participants. It will investigate the process of establishing individual and family educational goals. It will

provide information on how educational choice decisions have been made by this family over the past five decades. And it will bring to light the experiences, both positive and negative that resulted from those decisions.

The data will provide significant knowledge about parents' and students' efforts to participate in school choice. The personal perspectives from the three generations of this family will give insight into the steps they took to utilize educational choice options that have evolved over the past three decades.

Sharing the family's efforts to meet their educational needs will bring a specialized focus to the current trends of education reform efforts, and of educational choice efforts in the United States over five decades. The data will provide unique guidelines that can be used as methods for how families can access available choice options, or how they might create new options for their personal educational needs and goals.

## APPENDIX B: CHAPTER TWO—LITERATURE REVIEW

### One Intergenerational African American Family's Participation In K-12 School Choice Options

The review of literature in this chapter is focused on a brief description of the evolution of school choice options that developed out of the traditional public school system in America; specifically, it focuses on charter schools, private schools, religious schools, and home schools.

This study will look at how one intergenerational African American family made decisions to access school choice options and their subsequent experience at four different types of non-traditional schools. Those schools are charter schools, private schools, religious schools, and home schools.

The public education system in the United States has been described as, "America's noble experiment-universal education for all citizens." (PBS, 2001, p.1) The Center For Public Education (CPE 2006) has also described it as a tuition-free education for all students that promises equal educational opportunities no matter race, religion or ability of students, and has a commitment to high standards and high expectations for all students within a system of governance that ensures public accountability providing benefit to society by teaching democratic principles and common values.

If indeed we consider the premise that the U.S. public education system is an experiment, questions are raised as to how this educational system is defined, who actually receives it, and the purpose of the education provided (PBS 2001, CPE 2006)?

These questions are central to this study because they bring to focus how this intergenerational African

American family accessed the U.S. public school system, and how they were able to participate in the reform measures of that school system and the developments over time that have led to K-12 school choice options.

By definition, public education is K-12 education that is mandated for children of the general public by the government, and is paid for by taxes. School models usually involve compulsory attendance, certification for teachers, and testing and standards provided by governments. According to the National Center for Statistics (NCS), in the fall of 2002 one in every four people in the United States – a quarter of the 288 million populations – were participating in formal education (Brown Group p. 8).

The American public school system began in the town of Dedham, Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1643. This was nearly 150 years before the establishment of the United States. It took over 100 years to pass the land ordinance of 1785, which established a way to fund public education in the United States though most schools were privately owned and operated until the 1840s. Separate Roman Catholic and Jewish schools were established in the mid-19th century, and became the early religious schools in the school choice movement. This historical timeline shows the fragmented development of what we currently know as the American public school system administered and funded in all 50 states.

A problem that has risen with the American system of public education is that not all students have equal access to education, and some who have access do not have equal access as exemplified by the U. S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of*

Education. Some areas of the United States practiced separate educational practices for various groups of students. *Brown v. Board of Education* was a landmark ruling in educational law because it overturned the 1896 *Plessey v. Ferguson* “separate but equal” doctrine, which allowed public schools to separate races as long as the instruction in both systems was equal.

This controversy in the delivery and access of public education has special meaning to African Americans who continue to try to find equality and success in America’s educational programs. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) gives a historical perspective about the position of African Americans in education. “Perceived as the most direct avenue to the realization of the dream, education and access to schooling have been cherished privileges among African Americans. Slaves were not allowed to learn to read or be educated, and this has underscored the possibility and power of education for liberation” (1994, p. ix). She further states, “Quality education remains an elusive dream for most African American children. Historically they have been denied schooling, subject to separate and unequal education, and forced into unsafe, unhealthy, substandard schools”. (1994).

Researchers focusing on the historical struggle of African America families for choices in quality education (Anderson 2003, Fuller 2003, Ladson-Billings 1994) note that this has been a daunting challenge and that the burden of historically being denied equal access quality instructional programs has made the realization of this goal a difficult one.

“ No challenge has been more daunting than that of improving the academic achievement of African American students. Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and relegated to unsafe,

substandard inner-city schools, the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community, However, it does remain a dream- perhaps the most powerful for the people of African descent in this nation.” (Ladson-Billings, 1994p.ix)

Peter Ascoli (2006) writes of Julius Rosenwald, a businessman and philanthropist in the early 1900s who had a particular interest in supporting African Americans. It was an interest shared by other philanthropists such as John D. Rockefeller Jr., George Peabody, Paul Sachs, and Andrew Carnegie. These men worked, at times, to promote minority programs when it was not popular to do so. Ascoli (2006) quotes a letter Rosenfeld wrote to the YMCA of Chicago:

I have been considering for some time the question of the best method on assisting the colored people, particularly in large cities on securing such facilities for education and recreation as are afforded to others through your organization in Chicago and similar organization in other cities. It has seemed to me that both in the interest of the colored race and in the interest of the country it is essential that there should be in every community in which there are large numbers of colored people, a building, primarily for men and boys devoted to such purposes for their use. They have not as yet, in their own ranks, a sufficient number of people whose means would enable them to establish and adequately equip such institutions, and it is therefore, in my judgment the duty of the white people of this country, irrespective of their religious beliefs, to evidence their interest in these, their neighbor, by assisting to supply this need (p.81).

This endeavor to correct and support the discrepancies between ethnic races in social accommodation and in educational arenas further delineates the systemic barriers that African American people in general, and this intergenerational family in particular have faced in the American public school system. Marian Wright Edelman (1992) writes about the economic, social, cultural, and educational climate African Americans face in United States, “It is utterly exhausting being black in America - physically, mentally, and emotionally. While many minority groups and women feel similar stress, there is no

respite or escape from your badge of color” (p.23). This visual burden separates and divides African Americans from opportunities that Anglos generally receive unconditionally. The reviews in this study have shown that there is no greater remedy for this racial burden, than the release of the rigid systemic and attitudinal boundaries that have been imposed by educational, governmental, religious, and economic institutions.

At the national level studies are being done and reports have been published about trends regarding the plight of African Americans in the public education system. The PBS Nation’s Report Card (1999) indicated that the strides that have been made are insufficient to bring this population in line with the success of their Anglo counterparts. The National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) study of 1999 indicates that wide disparity still exists.

The findings of this study imply that, over the past two decades, black-white differences in educational achievement have been strongly associated with black-white disparities in a variety of educational and economic outcomes. Achievement differences do not necessarily cause gaps in educational attainment, employment, or earnings, but they reflect a set of circumstances responsible for black-white disparities in both the academy and the economy. Addressing the contributing causes of black-white achievement differences will be important in efforts to narrow black-white gaps in educational performance.. (NCES 1997).

The data in this report is pertinent to the study because it delineates a pattern of systemic barriers that contributed to the limited access to equal quality education for African Americans in general, and inclusive to the intergenerational family participants in this study.

Ladson-Billings (1994) summarizes these historical facts and turns the researchers eye to the cultural inner vision quest. “These poor economic and social conditions have

traditionally prompted African Americans to look to education, in the form of the integrated public school as the most likely escape route to the American dream” (p. 2).

In 1935 W.E. B. Du Bois posed the question, “Does the Negro need separate schools?” And today some parents, educators, and researchers are asking similar questions (BAEO 2002, Kozol 2005). Since public schools are not providing the support for academic success equitably to all student populations, answers are being sought outside of the traditional school district classrooms.

Some of the special elements that the parents in this study are seeking include a solid curriculum that challenges and engages students in a program that contributes to the child’s overall socialization, enrichment programs; a safe nurturing environment, an appropriate curriculum, and opportunities to explore and grow to the fullest potential.

Marian Wright Edelman (1992) is a dedicated parent and founder and president of the National Children’s Defense Fund, who speaks about the welfare and rights of children. Her belief is that education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it. As a private civil rights lawyer she found her efforts produced only limited success because there was no coherent national policy to complement the local empowerment programs for illiterate children and families (p. 11)

Research by Anderson (2003) produced data about parental choice programs in one integrated magnet school district. He describes the reasons that parents in that district participated in school choice in four categories as presented by Levine (1999)

Education-driven choice is grounded in perceived differences in learning styles of children and in the amount of structure they need as well as opportunities for parental choice in accordance with family values and orientation; Economics-driven choice reflects the view that the problems of public school are due to ‘their

noncompetitive, monopolistic, and no-incentives status' and that the market approach, by requiring public schools to compete with private schools, will reform public education and force bad school out of business; Policy-driven choice is directed toward equity-based initiatives. These can include vouchers based on a family's income and willingness to invest in education, or what are characterized as ways of equalizing opportunities for families to find a good school or to enable their children to escape a bad one; and governance driven choice is characterized as the 'desire to remove education from the arena of collective decision and return its control to individuals' or the 'libertarian case for choice (p.269).

As the call for parental options increases, researchers (Anderson 2003, McDonald 1999) agree that the model parents choose does not diminish the validity of choice.

Regardless of the type of educational option, school choice affords parents the opportunity to choose a school that is the right fit for their youngster, along a varied spectrum of political, social and educational reasons.

The establishment of school choice programs, and their availability to the historically underserved African American population, are milestones in the movement for equal access to quality education for their students. School choice has allowed parents such as the African American family in this study to become more involved and active in school selection for their students. It has also given them an opportunity to examine information about educational, and economic issues that affect key policies.

"Far too many African American children have their dreams of success and their self-image stolen from them by the harsh realities of poverty and racism. Sadly, this is reinforced by schools that place children into a punishing and culturally insensitive environment that does not validate their strengths as African Americans or as children."

Henry Levin (2001).

National education reform programs include the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. NCLB was signed into law January 8, 2002. It is the latest revision of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and is regarded as the most significant federal education policy initiative in a generation. The overall purpose of the law is to ensure that each child in America is able to meet the high learning standards of the state where he or she lives.

“No Child Left Behind aims to make schools more accountable for student performance and to underpin a continued improvement in literacy and teacher quality” (Brown Group p.9).

### School Choice

School choice is not new to American education. Many Catholic families abandoned secular schools long ago. Wealthy parents have sent their students to private prep schools as part of the cultural tradition. Elmore and Fuller (1996) contend that school choices in education are influenced by wealth, ethnicity, and social status of parents. School choice describes programs that allow students to attend schools in a variety of models ranging from private schools to public schools.

For purposes of this study of one African American intergenerational family, this researchers considers a concept of positionality. This term is taken from feminist philosophy and refers to how one is socially located, (or positioned) in relation to others given background factors such as race, class and gender (Maher & Tetreault, 1993; Martin & VanGunten, 2002, Cooper , 2005).

The choice program is intended to give parents more input into which primary and secondary schools their children attend. School choice sometimes refers to the social movement instrumental in promoting programs that create competition between schools for education dollars which may give public schools an incentive to perform better than they would without competition.

The U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Statistics (NCES) School Universe Survey (2004) says of non-public education in the United States, "The non-public community in the United States provides parents with important options for the education of their children. At the elementary and secondary levels, faith-based and nonsectarian private schools, along with a growing number of children who are home schooled, account for approximately 12 percent of the school-age population" (p.1).

The NCES study 1.1 Million Home Schooled Students in the United States in 2003, (2004) reports that 24 percent of U. S. elementary and secondary schools are private schools, and that about 1.1 million students were home schooled in the U. S. in the spring of 2003 (p.1). The modern school choice movement began in 1955 when Nobel Laureate Dr. Milton Friedman proposed that tax dollars should follow the student and that parents should be allowed to choose the school that best fits their child's unique needs (Enlow 2006). This proposal came to be known as school vouchers, and the premise was that choice in schools would create an effective competition and improve performance in education so that students, parents, taxpayers and the society at large would benefit (p. 6).

The Concept of Market Based School Choice supports the idea of using vouchers for private school tuition and the creation of public charter schools ( Fuller 1996). Literature shows that advocates for these reform efforts claim that the nature of market based school choice reforms will make choice schools more accountable to the public,

and thereby better for parents because it will empower them to exercise choice and allow them to move from failing, urban public schools (Manno Finn, Bierlein , & Vanourek, 1998; Nathan, 1996; Peterson, 1999).

The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) found that students from affluent families are more likely to attend a chosen school than students from poor families, however, Black students were more likely than white students to attend a school selected by their parents. Considering this group of students, black students were more likely to attend a public school than white students; parents whose children were attending chosen private or public schools were generally more satisfied than parents whose children were attending assigned public schools.

An important way that parents are involved in their student's education is through the schools they choose. Many public schools across the United States went through an era of bussing for school integration in the 1970s and 1980s. During that time attendance schools were set by school districts boundaries, and after busing ended in most states during the 1990s, the selected schools were often close to where families lived. Through those decades some parents made selections based on their preferences for academic programs, specialized curriculum, and family value preferences. Those parents were participating in school choice.

The literature indicates that parents choose private schools for their academic and curricula focuses, for implementation of discipline, and for overall safety (Bauch, 1988, Erickson, 1986, Greeley, McCready & McCourt, 1976). The grandparents of the

intergenerational family in this study attended colleges and universities and received full four-year degrees. They wanted, at the very least, for their children to have the same level of training and education as they had achieved. Literature also indicates that parental education, family income, and the race of the student are important factors in determining whether families choose private schools. Parents who have higher degrees tend to place a higher value on educational goals, and their interest in education is reflected in their attitudes and actions around schools for their children (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Even with positive and assertive attitudes, some African American families such as the one in this study cannot access private education because of the economic barriers, racial barriers, transportation, and other access barriers. Schneider et al. (1996) conclude that families with more resources tend to send their students to private schools more often than parents who fall in lower income brackets and are unable to afford the school tuition. Literature also indicates that race is an indicator in whether students attend public schools. One study by Cooper (2005) reflects the position of African American mothers' involvement in school choice, and this position can apply to this African American family as well.

African American mothers' views, experiences and choices reveal that race, class, and gender factors are critical to their school decision-making, in which the mothers perceive traditional public schools as sites of sociopolitical and cultural resistance. Moreover, the salience of mothers' positionality reinforces their tendency to make positioned choices, rather than rational ones. (p. 3).

The African American intergenerational family in this study is subject to all of the conditions mentioned by virtue of their race and culture.

## Charter Schools

A charter school is a public school operated by a group of parents, teachers, and /or community members as a semi-autonomous school of choice authorized by a school district (Colorado Department of Education, 2006).

The Charter School Program in the United States was authorized in 1994 under the Title X, Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The program is intended to enhance parent and student choices among public schools and give more students the opportunity to learn more challenging standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). More broadly described, the U. S. Department of Education (2001) states that charter schools hold the possibility of reform and innovation for public school education, and provides a unique model for “freedom and accountability”(p. 5).

Charter schools are underwritten with public funds but run independently, charter schools are free from a range of state laws and district policies stipulating what and how they teach, where they can spend their money, and who they can hire and fire. In return, they are held strictly accountable for their academic and financial performance (p. 5)

This report further finds that charter schools are generally developed as the result of someone’s vision for a special school. These schools begin with a mission that fills a particular need, or interest of an individual, a group such as the Kipp Foundation, or a company such as Edison: Everyone associated with the school knows what it stands for and believes in its vision. Each school engages parents as real, not nominal, partners. Each school fosters a culture that is highly collegial and focused on continuous

improvement. And each effective charter school has a strong accountability system, not just to please its authorizers but also its "clients," the parents. The African American family in this study chose charter school programs that fit the needs of their individual students both programmatically and academically.

### Private Schools

A private school is one that is not supported primarily by public funds. The NCES (2006) Private School Universe Survey (p. A-4) states that private schools are an option for parents who want to assure their child a better education. They are often very expensive. While the state governments regulate them and insist that they meet certain educational standards, states do not provide financial aid. Private schools can be day schools or boarding schools, where students live on campus away from their parents. Private military academies, known for enforcing strict discipline, exist all over the country.

Private schools have advantages from the outset that many public schools cannot match, stemming from the choice by students and their families to participate in private education.

There are differences in the racial and ethnic diversity in public and private schools. Public and private schools differ in racial and ethnic diversity. In 1999–2000, 77 percent of all private school students were white, compared with 63 percent of all public school students (figure 3). The private school sector as a whole had lower proportions of Black and Hispanic students than the public school sector as a whole. Some earlier research (Greene 2001) found that individual private school students were more likely

than those in public schools to be in racially mixed classrooms. Enrollment patterns in public schools more closely replicated neighborhood segregation in housing.

Public schools were more likely than private schools to have any minority students in 1999–2000, and to have high concentrations of minority students (more than 30 percent). Although many private schools had a racially diverse student body, about 14 percent had no minority students, compared with only 4 percent of public schools. Catholic and nonsectarian schools were about as likely as public schools to have some minority students (95–96 percent of each group did), contrasted with 76 percent of other religious schools. Relatively few other religious schools had 51 percent or more minority students (15 percent), compared with Catholic (21 percent), nonsectarian (23 percent), and public schools (27 percent). Private schools are less likely than public schools to enroll LEP students or students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program. The NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS:1999–2000) found p.1)

Private schools overall have fewer students than public schools, and minorities are a lower percentage of the student population. Catholic schools tend to be larger with greater diversity in enrollment than other types of private schools.

Students who had attended private school in 8th grade were twice as likely as those who had attended public school to have completed a bachelor's or higher degree by their mid-20s, and far less likely to have had no postsecondary education. Private school students generally perform higher than their public school counterparts on standardized achievement tests.

Private schools are owned and governed by entities that are independent of any government—typically, religious bodies or independent boards of trustees. Private schools also receive funding primarily from nonpublic sources: tuition payments and often other private sources, such as foundations, religious bodies, alumni, or other private donors. In contrast, state and local education agencies (districts) and publicly elected or appointed school boards govern public schools. At some schools, parent/teacher organizations or similar groups also play a role. The data presented are from the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS:1999–2000), the National Assessment of Educational Progress High School Transcript Study of 1998 (NAEP:1998), the NAEP:2000 student achievement tests, and the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, "Fourth Follow-up" (NELS:1988/2000). Further information on these surveys can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/>

### Religious Schools

One school model selected by this intergenerational family was a religious school model. The literature covers the development of religious schools in the United States historically as well as through present day implementation. Religious schools or faith-based schools have existed in America since the 1600s. There were many factors that led to faith-based schools losing out to government-run schools including cultural, political and financial issues (Rockne 1981, Tyack 1974, Cremin 1988, Glenn 1987). According to Steven C. Vryhof (2005), "Eighteenth-century enlightenment thinking, nineteenth-century social conditions, and twentieth-century court decisions have resulted in the concentration of enormous financial, legal, and cultural power in government-run schools. Of prominence and importance, Vryhof (2005) contends is that faith-based

schools have, as part of their vision and curriculum, the 'norms and network' needed to achieve functional community (communities of meaning) that allow information to be passed on to the young who then use those meanings to help replicate society in the future. This African American family utilized the religious school system to help their children formulate and continue the personal goals for achievement and success.

The Catholic parochial school system developed in the 19th century in response to what was then seen as Protestant domination of the public school system in the United States. A group of American bishops met in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) to plan for the establishment of a comprehensive parochial school system. Local churches were directed to establish elementary schools for the education of the parish children. In time a number of secondary, or high, schools, supported by a diocese and encompassing a number of parish schools, were also established. Both the elementary and secondary schools developed a religious curriculum emphasizing Catholic doctrine along with a secular curriculum very similar to that of the public schools (encyclopedia, Yahoo education online).

Parochial and religious schools have their own school systems throughout the United States. The Catholic school system is by far the largest. Religious schools usually cost less than secular private schools. Children at religious schools receive religious instruction in addition to the academic subjects required by the state laws.

### Home Schools

Home schooling can be defined by using two examples. The broad definition applies to anyone who teaches children from home and uses a variety of materials and

locations to do so. A more narrow and specific definition is parents who teach their own children in their own home using a systematic curriculum (Gold and Zelinski, 2002). Both definitions are used interchangeably in the literature and are included in this review. Along with definitions, the literature emphasizes reasons why parents choose to home school their children. (Allee and Morgan, 1999; Field, 1998; Callihan, 2000) share some recurring themes regarding necessity and motivation for adopting home school programs. Parents want to define, the quality of education their children receive based on their own beliefs and experiences. They want to determine the best method to deliver instruction for their individual children, and to individualize it by spending appropriate time needed by each child. Children and parents often form and maintain a tighter family bond by working and learning together.

The home school movement in the United States has evolved from an underground activity in the 1970s to widespread public phenomena by the late 1990s. In 1994, between 750,000 and 1.2 million children were educated in homes in the United States (Field, 1998).

The numerous reasons that parents cite in deciding to remove children from the public education arena are as varied as individual family belief systems. Parents have a broad spectrum of goals and make decisions for their children's education to avoid some restrictions imposed by local governments such as the specific curriculum that is taught, and the curriculum that is excluded. Parents make alterations in the standard education delivery systems because they want a better fit for their child's learning style. They change the method and timing of academic evaluations, and decide what assessments are authentic for what is taught and learned (Callihan, 2000; Field, 1998). Both mothers and

fathers also may feel that knowing their own children intimately gives them the advantage in delivering the individual instruction in an appropriate manner and in providing the adequate time needed for learning.

The philosophy of unschooling is a term that refers to child directed learning. Children are allowed to decide what they want to learn, when they learn and how they learn. Their entire day and whole environment is learning, and it is a philosophy of opportunity and interest that is facilitated, guided and supported by adults. (Amy Bell 1998) Natural Learning Page <http://home.rmci.net/abell/page6.htm>).

The various home school models allow fathers to be more involved in the education of children than they are in traditional public school settings. Flexible time schedules and experiential teaching strategies encourage dads to share their own experiences with their families. Fathers can assume responsibility for math, science or art. They can incorporate learning in daily tasks and projects like repairing plumbing and painting. Career awareness can be taught through mentorship programs where sons and daughters go to work with dads (Allee & Morgan, 1999; Field, 1998; Cohen, 2000). Additionally one of the newest phenomenons is the trend in community colleges and other institutions of higher education to identify and reach out to students coming from home-school environments. (Allee & Morgan, 1999; Field, 1998; Callahan, 2000; Cohen, 2000).

Essentially, home schooling is free just as public school education is free. The costs vary depending on the model chosen and can be minimal or very high depending on what parents choose to spend on curriculum materials, special lessons and supplements to what is found in the home. The expenditures can be tailored to each family's life style, priorities, and budgets (Allee & Morgan 1999; Gold and Zielinski, 2002)

Data from the National Center for Home Education in 1994 indicates that home schooled student's score higher than public school students in language arts and in math.

The home-schooling process requires that parents evaluate themselves to see if they have the determination and stamina to make the program successful. The reasons to establish a model outside of the mainstream system must be compelling enough to make parents decide to change to their life style. The accountability to family and community often requires justification from unexpected parties. Parents have found that they must sometimes answer questions from friends, relatives and their own children about exiting from the mainstream. One key answer to these questions that surfaces in the literature is that parents desire to have more influence on learning their children's individual learning styles and preferences (Allee & Morgan, 1999; Field, 1998; Dennis, 2000; Cohen, 2000; Callihan, David and Laurie; Gold & Zielinski, 2002).

Behavior and discipline can be more closely directed in a home environment. Special needs interests in gifted education and special education learning disorders are easier to define and manage for many home-schooled children.

Parents have a deep need to make a difference in the process and the outcome of the educational instruction so their child's growth, academic achievement and overall development are individualized and tailored to the best match for both parent and child. They want more freedom to direct their children's learning. They can select subjects to emphasize and teach through their view of the world and philosophy including and excluding whatever they want. Many adults find that they are dissatisfied with the growing trend in public education to standardize the curriculum, homogenize instructional delivery, and impose discipline with little consideration to individual

character. There is also a concern with the accuracy of evaluating achievement and awarding marks of accomplishment based on standardized assessments. (Allee & Morgan, 1999; Dennis, 2000; Field, 1998). Juhasz (2004).

Today, African Americans are more visible in education, business, and professional arenas; it is our responsibility to make the dream of education come true. The African American family in this study has put this vision into practice.

## APPENDIX C: CHAPTER THREE—METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

### Introduction

I wanted to better understand school choice decisions made by one intergenerational African American family who chose non-traditional schools rather than traditional public education. One research goal was to understand how and why they made their choices. A second goal was to document the voices of the adults and of the children as they describe their experiences in the nontraditional settings they chose, or in the case of the children, those settings that were chosen for them. And a third goal was to provide the broader educational community with perspectives and stories from grandparents, parents, and students who attended these schools.

This chapter connected the research goals and questions outlined in Chapter One with the methods and procedures used to address them. The sections contained here are (1) the design of the study, (2) the ethnographic approach, (3) the participants (4) the data collection procedures, (5) the data analysis procedures, and (6) trustworthiness.

### Significance of the Study

I chose a qualitative research model for this study. During my course work I found this format to be closely linked to my personal style and preference in interacting with people and the data they produce. I wanted to hear about the way that the participants made sense of their decision to choose alternatives to public schools. This perspective assumed that the participants are constructing a self and an identity from their experiences. I retold their stories for the benefit of the broader community.

I used qualitative methods based on a constructivist model where the meanings of an individual's experiences created knowledge for that person. In this case the participants shared their educational experiences over time and created new knowledge as a result of reflecting on the experiences and in conjunction with meanings that other family members have gained from their experiences. According to Creswell (2003) and Clandin and Connley (2000) the construction of knowledge results in the development of a theory or a pattern that can be political, issue-oriented, or change oriented. In this study the issue is the non-public school experience it is both political and issue-oriented because of traditional practices in the implementation of educational programs, and because of financial parameters necessary to support mandatory education of all students between ages of 6 and 16.

*Ethnography* - This investigation was an ethnographic study where I spent significant time conducting interviews with children and adults and also observing the family in their settings at home. Karen O'Riley (2005, p.2) defines ethnography as a small-scale study that is carried out in everyday settings; that uses several methods; that evolves in design throughout the study; and that focuses on the meaning of individual actions and explanations.

A critically minimum definition of ethnography includes iterative-inductive research where I engaged in the process of interviewing each participant. I did two interviews with the grandparents and oldest grandson, and I did one interview with the others. This was primarily due to the amount of time that was available for the interviews, and in the case of the children it was due to the amount of life experience they

had to share. The interviews were conducted with the families between February and May.

This ethnography produced a written account of the data, which I reflected in the transcriptions of the interviews, and in the data analysis. I honored the concept of the irreducibility of human experience as I retold the stories the participants lived through. And I have shared my own role and experiences as a researcher.

Ethnography shares boundaries with other methods of qualitative study and develops when the researcher explores a program in depth; delving into the most intricate facets of the phenomenon (Creswell 2003). The framework of culture is one of the distinguishing features of ethnography. I inquired about the “lived experiences” of family members regarding public schooling and about non-public schooling. I studied the educational lives of the family spanning three generations. The study was bounded by the educational activities and experiences of the participants over the time of their kindergarten through twelfth grade school attendance throughout the last twelve decades.

*Narrative Inquiry.* I used narrative inquiry as a means of building a relationship with the participants in order to hear their story experiences. I chose the narrative inquiry model because it allowed the individuals to express their perspectives about their educational life experiences.

The process of creating knowledge from personal interpretations is a collaborative process between the researcher and the individual. I took the participant’s perspective and attempted to understand the knowledge they created from their understanding of their experiences. The shared theme of K-12 education became a common focus for both the

participants and me. Dialoguing around that theme allowed us to create some common meanings and we established a relationship that encouraged sharing and subsequently collaboration of knowledge about school choice options.

Narrative inquiry was especially appropriate to this study because it was a personal and individualistic way to conduct research. Narrative is structured so that participants can share their special and particular views and understandings about the events in their lives, and how those events may have influenced other parts of their lives.

### *My Role as a Researcher*

“Qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell 2003, p. 184). Considering this quote, I enjoyed a fairly intense experience with the participants because of my very deep interest in the phenomenon of school choice that is moving across the United States. The intergenerational family in this study shared how the choices they made affected their school experiences. They shared the experiences of a daily, weekly, and yearly routine.

My personal K-12 school experience was in public schools from kindergarten through high school graduation. That system served me well, and I found success in most of my classes, especially those in science and literature. During my junior high school and high school years, most of the students in my classes divided themselves into levels of excelling, passing, and failing based on their academic abilities and even more so based on their ability to mold themselves to fit the system of the classes they were

attending. Students were tracked into programs and remained in those tracks throughout the school tenure.

The class system was intricate and included attendance, homework, class participation, class behavior, and mastering the academic material. Perfect attendance was expected, and conduct grades were tied to the number of days students were in school. Homework was assigned, and papers were collected and graded as part of the overall achievement score. Students were expected to respond to teacher questions and participate in peer group activities. Disruptive behavior was not tolerated, and students who would not or could not behave were sent out of the class. Subject lessons were given primarily through lectures and students generally responded by reflecting what the teacher taught, and repeating what was written in the textbooks. Little emphasis was given to creative thinking, alternative imputations of subject matters, or to thinking out of the box. The students who could not mold themselves to this system generally did not succeed very well in public schools because few adjustments were made for varied student learning styles or to make the learning relevant to the experiences and the backgrounds of the diverse student body. My experience left me with a need and a responsibility to seek educational models that filled the gap for students who did not have alternatives to identify their strengths and to have their academic instruction needs met through different teaching and learning styles. Therefore, a perspective of this study will be an inside look at choice school models that may or may not show similar structures, and that may or may not meet the needs of students who do not succeed in traditional settings.

### *The School Choice Movement*

The school choice movement began to evolve around the time the publication *A Nation At Risk* was released. This 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education outlined many of the problems in American schools, and concerned responses came from national leaders, school officials, educators, parents and students.

I was a science teacher at that time and my response to the report was to ponder how I could contribute to the increased success of the students in my classroom. The wide disparity in student skills has always been a challenge. The required curriculum with accompanying timeline emphasized delivery of the material to students separated by grade level rather than by achievement level. Numerous changes were made in math programs, literature models, and science and math instruction, to meet the need for improved student achievement. The results now being published in such documents as *School Choice Basics* (Cascade Policy Institute, 2004), and *No Child Left Behind*, (NCLB, 2002), report that the academic achievement gap still exists, and that steps must be taken to close it. "On the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment-a national tests that gauges states academic progress, 40 percent of white fourth graders scored at or above proficient, compared to only 12 percent of their African American peers. In math, African American achievement also lagged;-35 percent of white fourth graders scored at or above proficient and just 5 percent of African Americans scored as high achievers. The racial achievement gap is real, and it is not shrinking" (NCLB, 2004). I am concerned that these statistics persist.

President George Bush and the U.S. Congress have committed \$8.6 billion in FY 2002. They have provided a 35 percent increase to state programs for teacher quality programs, and for reading programs. They have provided support for 1,800 new and existing charter schools, and they have increased special education funding by \$1.3 billion (NCLB, 2002). As an elementary school principal I found that the increased funding did not translate in more resources at the school building or classroom level. Rather they became additional programs that made the direct delivery of services more complicated and less effective at the teacher student level.

My concern about the direct delivery of services between the teacher and the student has fueled my search for a better, simpler, more effective way to support student achievement. Traditional public schools have not shown effective achievement strategies for African American students in general as summarized in 1983 report, *The Nation At Risk*. I tend to support systems outside of the public schools for students who are underachieving. Those schools would be non-public schools which are currently modeled as charter schools, religious schools, private schools, and home schools.

The family of participants in this study experienced each of these school settings. They span three generations and have lived primarily in the mid-west and southeast states of America. I met them as part of a church community several years ago. Glesne and Peshkin, (1992) have described the research project that involves studying the researcher's own organization, or friends, or immediate work setting, as "Backyard" research. I was especially attentive to the difficulties that could arise in terms of disclosing information and reporting the data so that it is not biased, incomplete or

compromised. I used strategies to create reader confidence in the accuracy of the findings.

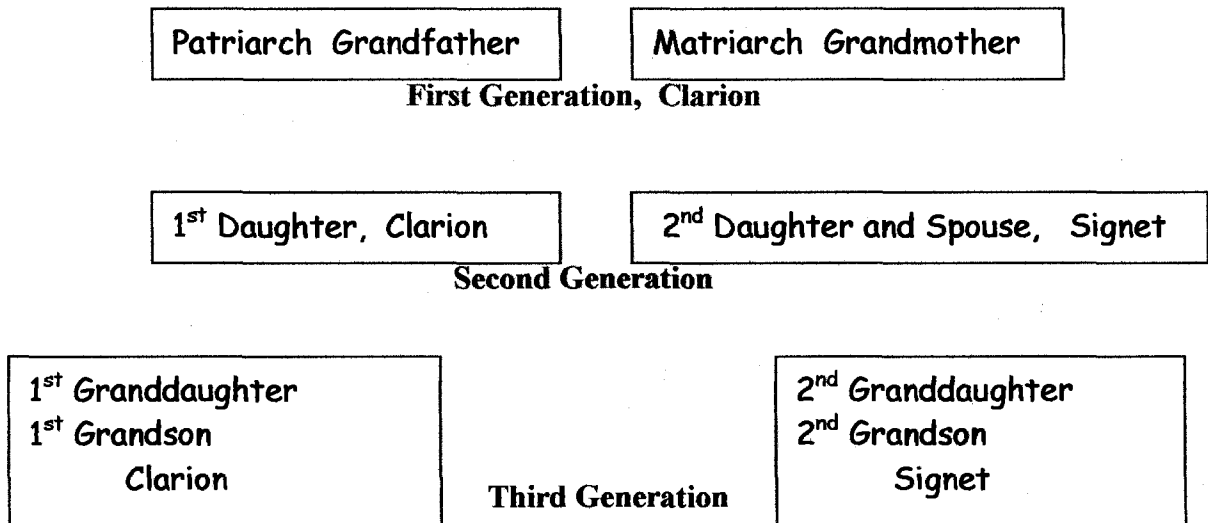
One of those strategies was to clarify the bias that I brought to the study based on my experience as a parent, public school teacher and administrator for over 30 years, and as a researcher seeking to understand a growing phenomenon. Secondly I used accurate language, rich and cultural to convey my findings. Additionally I used peers to help me debrief the data, and I used an external auditor to review my entire project. I also provided drafts of the interviews to the family members so that they can check for accuracy and for any information that they want to clarify, enhance, or exclude.

I realized that this study was very personal one for the participants, and I used all levels of confidentiality for the family. I asked them to share only what they were comfortable with, and they reviewed the transcripts so that they could remove or clarify anything they wished. The reporting of their experiences is being done with all ethical and professional deliberateness, and respect.

#### *Participants in the community of Clarion*

This study investigated the educational experiences of an intergenerational African American family who had chosen school options outside of the public school system for their children's education. Table 1 outlines the three generations of the participants who live in Clarion and Signet.

**Table 1.**



Three generations of the family participated in the study and the participants included grandparents, children, and grandchildren. The first family group lives in an urban setting called Clarion for purposes of this study. The grandparents, one child and two grandchildren, a boy and a girl, now, reside in the same home. The patriarch is a stalwart member of the community, being involved in various community organizations, participating in artistic productions, and heading his family with a firm yet open vision for their progress and success. He is retired and remains involved with the spiritual community he served. The grandmother stays at home and helps with the grandchildren's schooling and extracurricular activities. As matriarch she manages and supports the family on a daily basis. One daughter is single and she is a teacher in the public school system, and in the community college system. One granddaughter is in eighth grade and one grandson is in sixth grade. There has been a blending of cultures

and socioeconomic levels in the family as well as a commitment to community service and to social justice action through the generations. Clarion has a population just over 500,000, and is experiencing rapid growth. The median income in Clarion is around \$39,000. There is one unified public school district with just under 73,000 students. The area has growing numbers of private schools and charter schools.

### *Participants in the Community of Signet*

The other family group lives in a community called Signet. This daughter is the second child who lives with her husband and two children in Signet. It is an urban community several hundred miles away from Clarion. The population is just under 400,000, and the public school system serves around 41,000 students. The average personal income in Signet was around \$26,500 in 2004, and the unemployment rate was 5% in 2005. In this two-parent family the mother works outside of the home in the medical field and the father is retired from his first career in the military and now stays at home. The children, a boy and girl, are elementary school age. The daughter attends public school and the son is being home schooled. The family is close knit and has diverse careers and interests. A common goal has been quality education, and personalized education for each member. Signet has a support network for non public schools such as home schools and religious or private schools that is noted on the state board of education web site, <http://www.sde.state.ok.us/home/defaultie.html>.

### *Data Collection*

My description for this study is an intergenerational ethnography. I wanted to hear this family's stories about their school experiences and share it with the broader community. I conducted either one or two in-depth interviews with each participant depending on their age the time available. Each interview was done face-to-face and we did clarifications via the Internet. We did not have to use the telephone as a backup. The settings for the interviews were in the families homes. I traveled to Signet for interviews and conducted the interviews within a span of four months.

Karen O'Riley (2005) describes ethnographic research as a process that begins with a design model and leaves room for fluidity and flexibility p. 27. I wanted to identify themes that develop as part of the interviews, and allowed space, time and method within my model to accommodate the unexpected data, such as environmental issues that contribute to the experience, social issues that influence the experience, and cultural traditions that are infused throughout the experience.

The interview questions were open ended, broad based. I used a recorder to capture accurate and complete narration. Yow (1994) recommends telling the participants that their taped memoirs are historical documents that others may listen to and benefit from hearing their stories (p. 59).

### *Analyzing The Data*

Miles and Huberman (1994) view data analysis through three strands of data reduction, data, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (p. 10). The structure outlined here will guide my continuous evaluation of the field notes, transcriptions and

reflective observations. The analysis of qualitative data is a process of sorting and exploring the material that has been collected and written down to see how they relate to one another. This analysis takes place continually throughout the study. (O'Riley, 2005) refers to the iterative-inductive approach, which is a process that had data collection analysis and writing inextricably linked. This method uses a model that looks like a spiral, or helix, that demonstrates how analyses and writing up can lead back to more data collection and writing down (p. 177). As more questions are asked, more is learned, and as more is learned, the researcher can be led in more directions than indicated in the initial research question. There is a need to balance the information that is gathered and the new information that comes from additional learning and asking. The balance can be achieved by going back and connecting the new data to the initial question.

Unlike quantitative survey research where the data is written up by telling how many respondents did certain things or made certain expressions, ethnographic research data looks at summaries of the points used to tell a story and then proceeds to make sense of how the events, expressions, and phenomena go together. The analysis can "emerge from an interrelationship between you, your data, and your research participants" (O'Riley 2005, p.181). Allowing the participants to read and comment on the field notes is a form of analysis that the researcher can use to clarify and authenticate the data. The field notes and the transcriptions will be available for each participant to review during the study.

I sorted the data thematically. I reviewed my field notes, I listened to audiotapes, and I reread the transcriptions. I was able to simultaneously be conscience of what I wanted to find and what I did find. The personal accounts added so much depth to what

the literature presented. Their individual excitement about school, and their individual struggles about school created a whole continuum of challenges and success. Rev. Thomas' whole life experience was changed because of the schools he chose. Stella's whole cultural experience was broadened and she felt validated because of the school she chose.

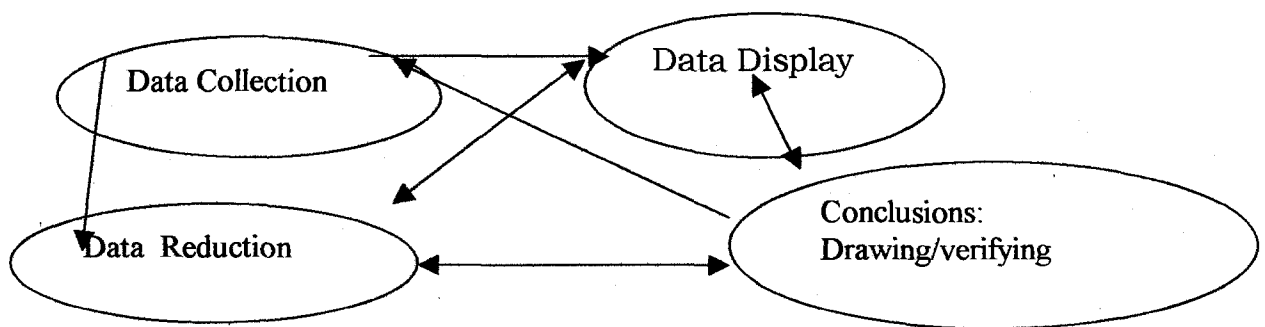
Harry Wolcott (2001) believes that writing up the data is an integral part of thinking about the data, which is an integral part of analyzing the data. "The conventional wisdom is that writing reflects thinking. I am drawn to a stronger position; writing is thinking. Stated more cautiously, writing is one form that writing can take" (p22). One strategy of analyzing my data will be to write about it throughout the collection process.

Harry Wolcott (2001) emphasizes authorial voice as the opportunity/challenge of treating the participants as humans, and the researcher conducting the research will participate among the participants rather than on them while conducting qualitative research (p.20). This perspective allows the researcher to present in the first person rather than third person. His position is that the third person is very impersonal, and does not necessarily present a more objective truth about the data, and is thus arguably, not the most compelling method of writing up qualitative data.

As I recorded the data, I created a database to help me store, review, and sort the information. I looked for themes that were placed in more than one category. Miles and Hubner (1994) caution that "the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their confirmability -that is their validity" (p. 11). I plan to listen to the tapes multiple times to capture things that I might miss in one session.

Hand writing notes while playing the tape is technique that helps me better hear and understand what I am listening to. Table 2 demonstrates an interactive model of data analysis as presented by Miles and Huberman (1994, p12).

**Table 2**



### *Trustworthiness*

I asked the participants to check the interview transcripts to enhance the accuracy of the accounts. The participants received a copy of the transcription and the recorded tape. Secondly, I requested that my peers review my narrative inquiry process and the data collected.

This chapter contains a review of the methods chosen for this study and the appropriate fit with the nature of a qualitative study and with the researcher's personal style and preference. This chapter has also shown connections between the research goals and questions outlined in Chapter One along with the methods and procedures used to address them. The sections contained herein are (a) the qualitative design of the study with ethnographic and narrative dimensions, (b) the researcher's personal experiences and

biases going into the study (c) the selection of the participants ( d) the method and the procedure of data collection, (e) the methods of collecting and of analyzing the data, and (f) the methods used to establish and to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Hearing the experience of the participants has enriched me and I feel that this study will help other families as they learn how these parents and children accessed school choice options.

## APPENDIX D—BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allee, J.W. and Morgan, M.L.(1997). *Home Schooling On A Shoestring*. Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw Publishers.
- Ascoli, P.M, “ Julius Rosenwald”, Bloomington and Ind.: Indianapolis University Press.
- Anderson, A.S. (2003), *A Descriptive Study of the Criteria Used for School Choice Selection and Preference Among African American Parents/Caregivers in an Integrated Magnet School District of Choice*. South Orange, N.J.: Seaton Hall University.
- Bray, R. “The Miseducation of Our Children.” *Essence*, Sept. 1987, pp. 79-80, 153-156. In Ladson-Billings, G., *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brown Reference Group (2004). *Pro/Con Education*. Danbury, CT: Grolier
- Callihan, D. and L. (2000). *The Guidance Manual For The Christian Home School: A Parent’s Guide for Preparing Home School Students for College or Career*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: The Career Press.
- Center For Public Education. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjJXJ5MPIwE/b.1427855/k.BEB0/Home.htm>
- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cohen, C. (2000). *And What About College? How Home Schooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities*. Ann Arbor, MI: McNaughton & Gunn, Ltd.
- Colorado Department of Education, Research Department. Retrieved from [http://www.cde.state.co.us/index\\_assess.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_assess.htm)
- Colorado Department of Education, Research Department (2001). *Closing The Achievement Gap Coalition*.
- Cooper, C.W. (2005). *School Choice From The Standpoint of Mothers: Considering The Power of Positionality*. *Journal of Negro Education*. [JMW1]
- Dennis, J.G. (2000). *Home Schooling High School: Planning Ahead for College Admission*. Lynnwood, WA: Emerald Books.

- Downy, M. (2003). Black Schools White Schools. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.
- Du Bois, W. E. B., Journal of Negro Education, 1035, 4 328-335. In Ladson-Billings, G. *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Yahoo Education. Parochial school definition. Retrieved at [http://education.yahoo.com/reference/encyclopedia/entry/parochia;\\_ylt=AioXXbx F6g1.kdIGkK4nPrBTt8wF](http://education.yahoo.com/reference/encyclopedia/entry/parochia;_ylt=AioXXbx F6g1.kdIGkK4nPrBTt8wF)
- Enhow, R.C.( 2006). A Short History of Education in America. The Milton and Rose Friedman Foundation, Educational Choice. Indianapolis, IN.
- Field, C.M. (1998). *A Field Guide To Home Schooling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revelle, Baker Book House Company.
- Fuller, H. (2003). The Continuing Struggle of African Americans for the Power To Make Real Educational Choices. Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.
- Gold, L. and Zielinski, J.M. (2002). *Home Schooling Step-By-Step: 100 Simple Solutions to Homeschooling's Toughest Problems*. Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing, Random House.
- Harlan, S. (June 5, 1985). "Compared To White Children, Black Children are..." USA Today, p. 9A. In Ladson-Billings, G. *The Dream Keepers Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hawkins, D. (Feb. 12, 1996, 58). "Home School Battles," U.S. News and World Report.
- Juhasz, A. (January 2004). The Future of Family Involvement in Schools In African American Communities, 2004. Negro Educational Review, Vol. 55, No 1.
- Klicka, J.D., Christopher, J. (1999). *Home Schooling in the United States: A Legal Analysis*. Home School Legal Defense Association, Purcellville, VA.
- Kozol, J. (Sept. 2005). Still Separate, Still Unequal: America's Educational Apartheid. *Harper's Magazine* v.311,n. 1864.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Levin, H. (2001). David Jacks Professor Of Higher Education, Stanford University. Retrieved from [http://www.pbs.org/kcet/publicschool/roots\\_in\\_history/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/kcet/publicschool/roots_in_history/index.html).

- Manno, B. V., Finn, C. E., Jr., Bierlein, L. A., and Vanourek, G. (1998). Charter School: Accomplishments and Dilemmas. *Teachers College Record*, 99,537-558.
- Maher, F. A., and Tetreault, M. K. (1993). Frames of positionality; Constructing meaningful dialogues about gender and race. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 66, 118-126.
- Martin, F. J., and VanGuten, D. M. (2002). Reflected identities: Applying positionality and multicultural social reconstruction in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53, 44-54.
- Nathan, J. (1996). Charter Schools: Creating hope and opportunity for American education. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Peterson, P. (1999, October 4). A liberal case for vouchers. *New Republic*, p. 29.
- Phi Delta Kappan (Feb.2002) Vol. 83 Issue 6, p463, 6p
- Wright Edelman, M. (1992). *The Measure of Our Success*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Race Ethnicity Comparisons. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/download/pdf/2001PM/Race-EthnicityComparisons1981-1991-2001.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Ed Science, U.S. Department of Education, [map](#)) Washington, DC.
- Sternberg, J. R. (1998). Principles of teaching for successful intelligence. *Educational Psychologist*, 33 (2/3), 65-72.
- U.S. Department of Education, NCES (1999-2000). Schools and Staffing Survey, "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys."
- U. S. Department of Education, NCES (2004). Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results from the 2001-2002 Private School Universe Survey. Washington, DC: NCES.
- Successful Charter Schools. U. S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/report.pdf>
- U. S. Department of Education, NCES, (2004). 1.1 Million Homeschooled Students in the United States in 2003. Washington, DC. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_education)