

Interview with Mrs. Sally Mitchell  
Final Project Assignment

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HIST 6972: Oral History Methods  
Dr. Krawczynski  
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## **AUM Oral History Initiative**

### **THE LASTING LEGAGCY OF DESEGREGATION IN MONTGOMERY CITY SCHOOLS: ITS TRIUMPHS AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS**

“The Reminiscences of Mrs. Sally Prescott Mitchell”



Interviewed by: Kimberlee K. Fernandez

April 18, 2023

Montgomery, Alabama

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history is a result of a recorded interview with Mrs. Sally Prescott Mitchell, conducted by Kimberlee K. Fernandez, on April 18, 2023. This interview is conducted as a part of the Lasting Legacy of Desegregation in Montgomery City Schools: Its Triumphs and Its Shortcomings under the auspices of the Auburn University at Montgomery's Oral History Initiative.

Readers are asked to keep in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

The following are abbreviated identifying markers for the interviewer and the narrator used in the transcribed text:

Mrs. Sally Prescott Mitchell – SM

Kimberlee K. Fernandez – KF

The interview was conducted using the Tascam DR-40 digital audio recorder, with a 16 GB SanDisk Memory Card by Gigastone, and Comica CVM-V020 Lavalier XLR omnidirectional microphones for both interviewer and narrator.

## **Abstract – Mrs. Sally Prescott Mitchell**

Interviewee: Mrs. Sally Mitchell

Interviewer: Kimberlee K. Fernandez

Interview Date: April 18, 2023

Location: Montgomery, Alabama

Length: 50 minutes, 10 seconds

Mrs. Mitchell was born in 1935 and attended elementary school in Elba, Alabama. Her high school years were spent in Santa Rosa County, Florida (at Jay High School). She graduated high school at sixteen years old, at which time she moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where she was to receive her secondary education. She married Mr. Jerry Mitchell in 1956; they had three daughters (Deborah, Cindy, and Brenda). When their oldest daughter reached school age, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell joined the Alabama Congress of Parents and Teachers Association (PTA). Due to Mrs. Mitchell's faithful volunteer service throughout her daughters' elementary education, Mrs. Mitchell rose in the ranks of the PTA, eventually becoming the Alabama State PTA president from 1979 through 1981. Following her tenure as state PTA president, she became the education liaison for Governor Fob James for two years. She continued attending evening college courses at Huntington College, Troy State in Montgomery and in 1989, Mrs. Mitchell received her teaching certification from Auburn University at Montgomery. She began teaching at Patterson Elementary School, where she taught until retiring from the Montgomery Public School System. Mrs. Mitchell's knowledge of Montgomery's education system is plentiful and vast as she personally witnessed over thirty years of the city's educational successes and failures. The following interview is but a glimpse into Mrs. Mitchell's vast knowledge and experiences.

This interview was conducted as a part of an assignment for the Oral History Methods course (HIST 6972), taught by Dr. Keith Krawczynski, during the Spring 2023 semester.

## Time and Page Indexing Log

Minutes	Page #	Topics presented in order of discussion on recording and transcript.
0:16	5	Identifying information about Mrs. Mitchell's interview.
1:54	5	Date and place of birth.
3:00	5	Description of Mrs. Mitchell's educational background.
5:56	6	Attended Massey Drone Business School.
7:32	6	Became an employee to a Florida congressional representative.
9:18	7	Met and married Mr. Jerry Mitchell.
12:51	7	Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell join the PTA.
14:41	8	Integration of Capital Heights Elementary School.
18:40	8	Mrs. Mitchell watched the "marchers" protesting.
22:35	9	Fanny Mitchell Nelson, Executive Secretary of the Alabama PTA.
24:23	10	Merger of the White and Black PTA organizations.
27:19	10	Mrs. Mitchell's continued service and affiliation with the PTA.
29:58	10	Leaving the public school system for Trinity Presbyterian School.
34:08	11	Mitchell family experience with the first phase of integration.
36:07	12	Mrs. Mitchell begins teaching at Patterson Elementary.
40:13	13	Mrs. Mitchell as Education Liaison to Governor Fob James.
42:27	13	Caretaker for Mr. Mitchell.
46:26	14	Moving toward conclusion of the interview.
47:18	14	Request the Narrator to make any clarifying/final comments.
49:45	15	Conclusion of the interview
<b>[50:10]</b>		

Kimberlee Fernandez (KF): *This interview is being conducted by the AUM Oral History Initiative sponsored by Auburn University at Montgomery. My name is Kimberlee K. Fernandez. I am conducting an interview with Mrs. Sally Mitchell at her home in Montgomery, Alabama. Today is Tuesday, April 18, 2023, and the time is now 10:35 a.m. Central Standard Time.*

*I would also like you to know that at any time you have the right to refuse to answer a question. If you choose not to answer a specific question, I will not be offended, and we will move on to the next round of questions. Please provide a verbal affirmation that you have heard and understand this statement.*

Sally Mitchell (SM): I have heard, and I do understand and I thank you very much.

KF: *Thank you. And I would also like to let you know that you are more than welcome to ask for clarification on any of the questions that I may ask.*

SM: Good.

KF: *Our first question, if you are prepared and ready, is just for the record. Would you please state your full name, and the name you prefer to be called during this interview?*

SM: My name is Sally Prescott Mitchell. And “Sally” is something I’ve lived with all my life, so I like to go on with that.

KF: *Yes, Ma’am. I’ve been calling you “Mrs. Mitchell,” can I continue to call you “Mrs. Mitchell?”*

SM: You may, you may. Whatever you feel free about doing, Kim.

KF: (Chuckle) *Thank you. Would you please state your date of birth and where you were born?*

SM: My date of birth is July 25, 1935. I was born in Elba, Coffee County, Alabama. My father was John Isaac Richard Prescott, better known as “Button.”

KF: *Button?*

SM: Button.

KF: *And you mentioned that you grew up in Elba – is that where you would call “home”?*

SM: Well, I guess until 1949 when my parents moved us back to Santa Rosa County, Florida; Jay, Florida, to be exact. I went into the 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Christmas time, and graduated in 1952, at age 16.

KF: *Yes, Ma'am. Could you give us a little bit more about your educational background? I know that in our pre-interview, we've discussed this, but if you don't mind, for the record, would you please give us a little bit of information about your educational background?*

SM: But I've enjoyed learning. At the country school I attended in Coffee County, it was Curtis in a rural area of the county. The school was first grade through 9<sup>th</sup> Grade. The principal at Curtis School was E.C. Griffin. A wonderful, wonderful person. The teachers I had there were all so good: Mrs. Grimes in the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Mrs. Hazel Lee in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, Mrs. Pinkerton in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and Mrs. Jean Johnson in the 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I have to tell you, that I didn't understand what salutatorian or valedictorian was, at that time. But I had to give the Valedictorian speech in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade because it was a great ceremony to go from elementary school into junior high school. And Mr. Griffin had a niece, who was a very close friend. Her name was Jean Griffin. Jean and I were always friends. But competitive in our grades, and it seems as though I came out a little bit ahead of her. We went on through the 7<sup>th</sup> grade together, and looking back on it, I think Mr. Griffin wanted to help his niece get out of school quickly. So, he proposed that if Jean and I studied REALLY REALLY HARD, during the summer of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade year we wouldn't have to go to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Well, we did. I studied awfully hard, but you know what? Mr. Griffin didn't ask us to give one answer to any kind of test. He just put us in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade! And that, I think is one reason that I graduated from high school at age 16.

That was my story up until the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade when my parents then moved from Elba back to Santa Rosa County, Florida. We had lived there once before, my dad had. His family wanted him to come back from Elba to do the farming on the farm property. His brothers had vanished to Mobile. It was during the time of World War Two, and they got lucrative jobs working at the ship building places in Mobile. That left Button, my Dad, to come back and do the farming. So anyway, that's my story, and I'm stickin' to it!

KF: *So, after high school you attended....?*

SM: Massey Draughon Business School because the head of Massey Draughon promised my parents that he would see that I got proper employment after I graduated. So, at age

16, my parents let me get on the Greyhound Bus and travel to the big city of Montgomery. Now, I had been there once before with my Dad when Jim Folsom was elected governor. My Dad used to fox hunt with Big Jim, so my Dad wanted very much to come for that inauguration. [1947] I got to come along too. I can remember running down the hills at the capitol building on the green grass. It sloped and everything like that. And I can recall those days, and it was really, really fun.

KF: *That's wonderful! What an experience. You also attended Massey Drone, and from Massey Drone you began work? Or....?*

SM: Well actually, my basketball coach in high school, and also one of my teachers in high school, her name was Minnie Pittman, she and her husband, John, did not have any children – and I did not know this until YEARS and YEARS later – but my mother, in reminiscing said they wanted to adopt me.

I was almost through with Massey Draughon when Mr. Pittman was elected to the Florida legislature as a representative from that area [Santa Rosa County, as a Democrat, in 1953]. They wanted me to go to Tallahassee with them, so I did. Mom and Daddy said it was fine. They trusted the Pittman's, because they looked after me in my basketball playin' days at Jay High School, and they felt comfortable with them. So off to Tallahassee I went. There, Mr. Pittman secured a job for me, as secretary to Mr. Joe Fine, who was a representative from Volusia County, Florida.

I did that for two months, and then because I had not received a diploma, if you will, from Massey Draughon, I came back to finish all the tests that I needed to take so that I could get that big diploma that said, "Congratulations, you have finished." And true to his word, I got a job at South Central Bell in their office manager's section, where I worked for the next three years.

One of the things in all this junk I have (papers rustling), is a picture of Mr. Hinds, who was the District 4 manager for the phone company at that time. They got in new directories at that time, and they took a picture of me handing out the new telephone directories. My mom kept it for me all these years.

Anyway, that was fun. I worked there for three years, before I met this cute, cute, cute, cute, CUTE fella that had just (gentle laughing) come back from being in the National Guard and his service in Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. He graduated from high school in



1954 and went off to Birmingham Southern College. But in the middle of the year, [he got] appendicitis. He goes back to school and ruptures that incision, then he has to come home. Then he can't go back to school because they are taking mid-term exams and he hasn't prepared for them. But anyway, Jerry Mitchell and I were married, later on, and we had three daughters, Deborah, Cindy and Brenda. Then and now the love of my life.

KF: *And you married Mr. Jerry Mitchell in...*

SM: 1956.

KF: 1956

SM: Mmhum

KF: *So, since we are mentioning 1956, we're going to transition over into the main topic of what we wanted to get to, and that is the school system during the 1950s to the 1970s. I just want to get a little bit of your reflection of that, if you don't mind.*

SM: Well, at that time, I had gone to work at a law firm, Hill, Hill, Carter, Frank, Cole and Black. I first worked for two attorneys in the litigation section, Bill Oldacre and Bobby Buck. Following the death of one of the main attorneys that I worked for. His name was William A. Oldacre and he lived in Prattville. He had married Sue Escriidge. His mother-in-law and father-in-law were well known in the Prattville community. They even named a street after him, called Oldacre Lane or something like that. It's just off the interstate that goes through Prattville. And funny, as a youngster I guess, after he passed away, I could still see his house from the interstate. It was good for Jerry and I to have made friends with that family. One of the neat things about this, Kim, was he had a beach house at Graydon Beach in Florida. He would come in with keys dangling in his hand and drop them on my desk and say, "Your girls need to go to the beach, so why don't you take off?" And that was fun. In the Spring and in the Fall, we took off to go to Graydon Beach in Walton County, which was a lot of fun. Two of my girls LOVED the sand and the ocean. The third one, she didn't like anything about it! (Laughter).

KF: *I believe children are that way, some are particular when it comes to the beach. In reference to the schools, I believe that during one of our previous meetings you mentioned you joined the PTA, and your husband joined the PTA because your mother-in-law was president of a local PTA in Montgomery?*

SM: Jerry's mother was Vera Reeves Mitchell. While they were in school at Cottage Hill Elementary School in Montgomery, she was president of that PTA. When our children, Deborah, started school at Capital Heights Elementary School in Montgomery, since then, that school has burned, I'm sorry to say, I guess he said, "We've got to join the PTA because my mother was president of the PTA when I was in Cottage Hill."

And I said, "Sure, Honey. Let's do it." Never realizing that PTA would mean so much to me in the rest of my life. It has been a wonderful, great experience, I've had along the way; great people that I have had the privilege of working with, and I don't know whether any of them know what a blessing they have been to me. I would like, if anybody is still around (laughter), they will know that I do so much appreciate those times with them.

KF: *Thank you, so much, for sharing that with me. One of the things that I actually wanted to check on was the school systems, at that time, were segregated in the State of Alabama. Even though Brown vs Board of Education comes out, you're a member of the PTA during these moments in time, would you like to describe anything that you personally witnessed as far as the segregated schools' aspect and how you felt about that during that time?*

SM: I don't know exactly how to answer that question. My recollection is that when my girls were in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, integration became, I guess, at that time, all the schools across Alabama, they were being integrated, but the faculty we had at Capital Heights was good. The integration went real smooth there. I don't recall any adversities, or anything like that.

KF: *Any positives?*

SM: The positives?

KF: *I mean, just any part of your memory that you may remember about just that process in general, positive, negative or indifferent.*

SM: Indifferent, I would guess would be the thing. We were told in meetings with the principal at that time, James A. Wall, was the principal at Capital Heights Elementary School. He was really, really a fun fella to be around. He was welcoming to the parents. I think that is the thing I have always been thankful for – that openness, and that the administration in all the schools where my children went were acceptable, and everything

like that. They treated us parents as equals, if you will, but didn't look down on us, at all. And you know, maybe I was not a college graduate, but it wasn't because I didn't want to be. Jerry had gone back to school, graduated from Huntington College, after working at Chemstrand Corporation in Pensacola, Florida, while our children were being born. In moving back from Florida to Montgomery, his work started in the mortgage loan business. He was with a realty company first and from there he went into the vice presidency in a company that was in Stockton, Baldwin County, Alabama. That was the time that my Dad suffered death in an automobile accident. We couldn't go to Florida, Jerry came back to Montgomery, one of his former coworkers at Arnov Realty, by the name of Sam Blitz, knew that First Federal Savings and Loan Association was going into the home loan business. He recommended Jerry to the president of First Federal. And he came back as vice president, for First Federal Savings and Loan, where he worked until that business moved to Birmingham. He did not want to go to Birmingham. So he went, then, back to work for the VA in Montgomery. That's where he retired from the VA.

*KF: When he went to work for the VA, do you remember, roughly what year that might have been?*

SM: I don't recall that, but I know one of the things that I remember vividly at Hill, Hill, Carter, I remember being in our break room and looking out the window of the third floor of the Hill Building. I could see the marchers going up and down Dexter Avenue, on the South Perry Street intersection of Dexter Avenue and I felt uncomfortable, because I didn't think that was the right thing to do. I don't believe in marches and show of force like that. I think that's one of the things that still bothers me. One of the things I've tried to do, in all my endeavors in the community, working with different groups and everything, was to be quiet about it. To do what I could do, but to be quiet about it, don't get out and raise voices, don't shout, and wave placards, or anything like that. I think that was one of the things when the Colored Congress and the Alabama Congress, the White Congress, started to merge in 1979, I'm sorry, I'll have to check on my dates. My friend, Mary Edith Jones of Montgomery, was president of the Alabama PTA at that time. The person who was the president of the Colored Congress had wanted, in one of the things that came back to me through conversation, is that she wanted to alternate the terms of office – black/white, black/white, black/white, but that was not anything in the

bylaws or that the executive secretary of the Alabama PTA could accept. The executive secretary had worked for many, many years in her capacity, and we had many PTA members who were colored. You know, I hate to say “colored,” because what do you do, what do you do? You know, I’ve got freckles, so I could be (laughter) I could be half colored. But anyway, I’m not. I appreciate the fact that I am who I am.

KF: *You have worked very closely in the school system, since you joined the PTA.*

SM: Absolutely.

KF: *Would you say that you dedicated a lot of time each year since your eldest daughter was in school, and about how much time would you say you gave to the PTA during this time?*

SM: Oh my goodness! Does that include baking cookies? (Laughter)

KF: *Well, you could include baking cookies!*

SM: I believe one of the best memories that I have is that of baking cookies. I know that I had little cookie cutters that gave you the shape you wanted – if you wanted a turkey, you got a turkey; if you wanted Santa Claus, you got Santa Claus. At Christmas time, especially, we went into cookie makin’ mode where I would bake the cookies. Then Mr. Mitchell, with his (laughter) with his artistic ambitions, would take the girls and go to the table and take their paint brushes and watercolors and paint the images – like the turkeys came out with detailed feathers all different colors (laughing). So anyways...

KF: *I’m sure those are wonderful, and very treasured memories.*

SM: They are. They are.

KF: *You had mentioned the executive secretary of the Alabama PTA, do you remember what her name was? You didn’t mention her name.*

SM: Her name was Fanny Mitchell Nelson. She had one son, Walter, who went into education, and I’m sure it’s because of his mother’s influence. When her husband was a member of the ... He was a state trooper, Mr. Nelson was. Unfortunately, he passed away many years before I became involved in the PTA. But Mrs. Nelson was very good. She started working for the PTA when the PTA and AEA, Alabama Education Association, had offices in the State Department of Education, and they were there as supporters of education. And I don’t know what happened, but anyway, they had to leave

the State Department Building, and the Alabama PTA began to rent spaces for their offices in the City of Montgomery.

KF: *Do you remember about what year this was?*

SM: Well, I think it would be 1965. It was after integration, and everything like that.

KF: *I'm just trying to make sure we establish a timeline, of chronological events, so if you could mention some dates when you are talking about these events and things, that would be very beneficial so we could create a timeline for you as well.*

SM: The merger of the Colored Congress and the existing Alabama PTA, the White Congress, occurred in 1969-70. The Alabama PTA convention was held in Mobile that particular year. A friend of mine, Mrs. Mary Edith Jones of Montgomery, was Alabama PTA president. It was her responsibility to meet with the president of the Colored Congress, a lady by the name of Mrs. Lonie Gill. And Mrs. Gill, in 1968-70, proposed a rotation of administrations for the presidency of the surviving congress. Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Nelson could not go along with that. But, in the ensuing years of the PTA we've had one lady, and I have to say, Mrs. Arthur Mae Norris, who was president of the Colored Congress, at one time of her life, and was also elected president of the Alabama PTA after that merger. My term of service in the Alabama PTA was 1979-1981 and Mrs. Norris was elected four terms, two years after that. We had several, several people that have transitioned into that. One of my really good friends, was a young man by the name of Larry Hooks from Macon County, who was elected president of PTA twice. I was asked by his wife, Dr. Janice Hooks, if I would speak at his funeral. And I did. One of the things I was able to say was that whenever membership lagged in the PTA, Larry was the one who stepped up and served a second term as president. I believe he was the first person who repeated as president of the PTA.

Since that time, we have had a couple of people who have served twice in that capacity.

KF: *I was just getting ready to ask you were you still active and holding a current role in the PTA?*

SM: Well, one of the good things about PTA is that they believed in experience counts. They have something called the "Past Presidents' Club," so that once you have gained this knowledge of being a leader, you are still valued. One of the things they asked me to do was to edit the Alabama Parent-Teacher Bulletin, which I did for several, several years

until, unfortunately, our finances could not support the printing and distribution of that magazine. But it served as a great, great purpose during the heyday years, I guess, of PTA. And our membership, at the time that I became president was, I think, 240,000-something members. I don't really remember the exact number right now. But in our last membership report we had, oh, I guess, 78,000 members. We have just fallen off. I think a lot of it is the school systems – they want to keep their money, they don't want you to be trying to do, and everything like that. It's almost like a time when the doors are being closed to parents, and I feel that. I have to say that at the time that I served as president, in 1979, 1981, that it was welcoming. [Cell phone chimes in the background.] Parents were welcomed and we were partners. The parents and the teachers were partners in raising children, and that's what you have to have, you can't have an "us" and a "them."

*KF: And because you say, "us" and "them," and we are talking about the integration of the schools, the "us" and "them," do you kind of feel like that went seamlessly for you and your family during the integration processes throughout the schools, wherever your daughters went to school. Did they, you know, experience positives, negatives or...?*

*SM: Well, one of the bad things, I think, was, a friend of my children, whenever she left Capital Heights Junior High School, and went into Lee High School, a bad thing happened to her. I don't want to talk about that, but it was said to me, "You don't want that. You don't want that." Trinity Presbyterian School had just established a higher grade level than what had been going on there, and because I was gone a lot from home and everything, with my volunteer work, if you will, I did not want to worry about my children. Jerry and I made the decision that we would enroll them in Trinity. And we did. Our oldest daughter, Debora, was in the second graduating class from Trinity, and then of course the other children followed in ensuing years. Debora went on to Huntingdon College because that was her Daddy's school (laughter). Cindy chose to go to Alabama. Brenda, the youngest daughter, chose to go to AUM, where she stayed for about seven years (laughter).*

*KF: I've been there for about five, so, I can understand the love of AUM, it is a lovely place (laughter).*

SM: Brenda was our youngest daughter. She was a cheerleader at Capital Heights Junior High School. She was a cheerleader at Trinity, and she was a cheerleader at AUM. She loved that cheerleading bit. Larry Chapman, the basketball coach at AUM, way back then, she enjoyed that relationship and everything. And he petted them, I think. They say that the coaches hated all the cheerleaders because of the noise they made. But we did enjoy her being at AUM. And yes, I did receive my teaching certificate from AUM, and what year it was, was 1989, '90, is the year I started working for the Montgomery Public School System at Patterson Elementary School.

KF: *I bet it changed quite a bit from when your daughters started school, and you said your oldest daughter started school in... what year?*

SM: I'll, I'll have to do the mental calculations, probably '80, '81. Yea.

KF: *So, your oldest daughter started school in....*

SM: No. That's when she graduated, when she started at Huntingdon.

KF: *OK. No, I was talking about elementary school.*

SM: Elementary school ... lets go back to the very beginning! (Laughter)

KF: *Yes, let's go back, for just a moment, if you don't mind. When did she start school? Do you remember what year?*

SM: I'm going to have to do some mental calculations, here.

KF: *Yes, Ma'am.*

SM: So, if she was born in 1956, her birthday is in December, she would have to have been in 1961, 1962.

KF: *So, there were a lot of events going on during that timeframe.*

SM: Absolutely. She was in the fourth grade at Capital Heights Elementary School when the first integration of the public schools began.

KF: *Do you remember if any students came to her elementary school, any black students, came to her elementary school during that time?*

SM: Yes. Yes, there were not many at that time. I don't know why, maybe because of the zoning regulations and everything. The neighborhood schools were truly neighborhood schools, and there were very few of the, I don't know how to refer to them, the African American students, who were in the zone to go to Capital Heights Elementary School. There was a community off of the old Wetumpka Road that was zoned into

Capital Heights Elementary School and from there, we got in the school system at Capital Heights. We got maybe two dozen blacks, and the neighborhood they came from was called "King's Hill." They were good kids. We didn't have any problems.

KF: *So, from the time that, you said 1961, 1962, until you received your teaching certificate, and you began teaching at Perry Hill School*

SM: Not Perry Hill. Patterson Elementary.

KF: *Patterson, I'm sorry. Patterson Elementary, when you started teaching at Patterson Elementary, in 1989...?*

SM: 1990.

KF: *1990. I'll bet there was a big transition between the student population?*

SM: There was, there was indeed. At Patterson we had 100% colored, or African American students.

KF: *You said, in one of our pre-interview conversations, that you were hired by a particular person at Patterson Elementary. Could you please tell me a little bit more about who hired you?*

SM: Well, I don't want to talk about the lady who hired me because of problems within the school system at that time. But the next principal I had at Patterson was named Dr. Mary Lowe. She was a wonderful principal! She had, after retiring, opened up a day care. She still has that day care in East Montgomery. She had two sons, and both of them went into education following their mother's footsteps. Mrs. Lowe went on and got her doctorate, so she is now Dr. Mary Lowe. We had a young lady from Auburn, Dr. Lynn Patrick, who became our principal at Patterson. She convinced the school system to let her try new things, like when we went to school for six weeks and then took a month's break. We didn't do the traditional nine months of school. We did a six-week tour and then took off for a month, and that was year round school. We did that for four years. Then superintendency changed within the school system and the superintendent that was in office at that time did not want all year school system, including the different times and all that. So, we went back to the nine-month thing. That's when Mr. Mitchell became ill, and I had to stay home and be his caretaker!

KF: *I'm very glad that you were able to do that, to be a caretaker for Mr. Mitchell. I really wanted to find out a little more about your experience, as a parent, when your*



*daughter... I find this fascinating, you know, within that timeframe that 20 year, 25, 30 year gap, you go from segregated schools to fully integrated. That is just a fascinating thing for me to wonder what you've seen and experienced in those moments. And then you go and become a teacher, in that very same school system. I do want to find out, very briefly, how long were you a teacher in the school system?*

SM: Eighteen years, I believe.

KF: *So, if you began in 1990...*

SM: 2008 would've been...

KF: *That is a very long time. Did you notice again, we're talking about a very big stretch of time, was there a difference between 1990 and 2008?*

SM: Well (chuckles), I tell you what – I had so much fun! I can't because of the places that I have been. I was welcomed in the government ... you know. I worked for Fob James for two years following my presidency in PTA. I worked for him as his Education Liaison from 1981 to 1983. Bob Larger, I succeeded him. Bob Larger was the first Education Liaison that had ever been in state government. I was happy to come in and do what I could for Governor James, and he spoke at several of our events in PTA. I guess that we kind of bonded there. He thought I might be of help. I hope that I was in that role.

KF: *You had mentioned earlier that you were uncomfortable with marches or the yelling and shouting. Do you feel that that was a way for you to promote change? To get within the system?*

SM: Absolutely. Quietly. Quietly.

KF: *Thank you so much for answering those questions, but I do want to just briefly ask, when you started working in the school system, did you find it difficult to, adjust, or was there any, in 1990, when you began working, did you find it difficult to adjust to the expectations that were laid on you, you know, by the school system. For instance, we are only giving you this amount of resources, and you are only allowed for this particular amount, and you would have to dig into your own pocket, or was there anything else?*

SM: You know, I didn't experience that. I guess I had been within the system enough to know that we didn't have all the finances that we needed. We had to be careful of our

budget. The budget that we set, we had to adhere to within the school, and each school had a certain amount of money. That's all I know about that.

KF: *Because you had been in the school systems for such a long time, was there any one school system that had a lesser budget than another school, city school?*

SM: Some. The answer to that question is, "yes." Some of the larger metropolitan areas, they taxed themselves so that the monies could go into the school system. Some of the county schools, the rural areas, just didn't have the tax base that the metropolitan areas had. For instance, Birmingham, Huntsville, those were the systems that really valued education and they put their money, you know, where their mouth is, I guess.

KF: *And you don't know if any one Montgomery city school received more funding than other?*

SM: No.

KF: *The only reason that I am asking this is because there has been a difference in the schools throughout Montgomery, the different high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. So, I was just wondering, it is just a curiosity question, if that might be the reason that there is such a big difference?*

SM: I don't know the answer to that. I really don't. Since I left the school system, my focus has been different. I had to take care of Mr. Mitchell. He was an invalid for a little over three years, before he passed away. This has been the eleventh year of his going home to be with the Good Lord. As one of my friends says, he and James Harold are having a ball!

KF: *Well, I'm glad you look at him as having a ball and waiting on you to get there. That is a very pleasant memory for you to have. I'm very glad that you were able to care for him during that time.*

*I'm going to track back to something you said at the very beginning of the interview, and that is, that Mr. Mitchell was also a member of the PTA?*

SM: Absolutely.

KF: *Other than decorating cookies with his artistic flair, was there anything specific that he had a knack for? Because you just have a great knack at mingling and getting to know people – not to say that you didn't work hard (Mrs. Mitchell chuckles), you worked very hard, I imagine. But is there any particular flair, or trait, that he brought to the PTA?*

SM: I guess, just his, he didn't mind attending functions with me. He was happy to be there. That was one of the things that, in looking at, I guess, the administrations that followed, where are the fellas? You know? "You're president, but I don't see your spouse with you." And Jerry Mitchell was always there with me. He enjoyed those times, and if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be a momma (Chuckles)!

KF: *That is true, that is very true. I'm going to end our interview here in a few minutes, but I would just like to ask, is there anything that you feel that you might want to clarify? Is there anything you might want to add to our interview before I end our interview?*

SM: The only thing I know is that part of what you want, Kim, is what happened at the integration level, and I don't know anything other than what I've said. And it's just repeating something that was told to me.

KF: *Well, if you don't mind, if you want it for the record, you can repeat it again, and I can actually include that into the record, what you had mentioned.*

SM: The only discourse that I'm thinking about would be the kind of demand that the administration swapped every other year, and you can't, in my mind. You have to have continuity. And to me, that did not look like continuity. If we look at the by-laws of the PTA, it sets up a continuity. If you will, for instance, retaining past presidents in a Past Presidents' Club that sits on the Board, and who are part of the Board, so that their knowledge that they have gained is available to somebody coming up. I'm going to brag a little bit now. The current president of PTA just sent me a email a little while ago, thanking me for being there for these past two years. So, you know, that means a lot to me, to know that I have been a help to someone else.

KF: *You have a wealth of knowledge, as you have shown in this interview. From you going to Jay, Florida, and then graduating from Jay, Florida, then you've been all over the Southeast, working in so many capacities. You've seen so much change throughout your life. I believe I would send you an email as well, if you were helping me for two years. I would probably become president, too, if you were helping me. At this point, your knowledge, and just personal witness to the things you've seen in your life is just amazing! Thank you for sharing just a few tidbits of that with me. I do know that there is a lot more that you could share with us, and I would love for this to be, you know, a five/six-hour long conversation if need be, but unfortunately we have to limit our interview*

*time. I'm going to conclude our interview. I have to make a specific statement, if you don't mind?*

SM: I don't mind at all.

KF: *This concludes the interview with Mrs. Sally Mitchell. The interviewer was Kimberlee K. Fernandez. I would like to thank Mrs. Mitchell for sharing her time, knowledge, and for her assistance in helping the AUM Oral History Initiative with this important topic: Desegregation and integration of Montgomery City Schools. Thank you very much, Mrs. Mitchell. I am going to press "End."*