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Nellie Teafor Wood

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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE March 19, 1985

Nellie Seaford Wood
(Signature - Interviewee)

3509 Morgan Avenue
(Address)
Ashland, KY 41101

DATE _____

J. J. [Signature]
(Signature - Witness)

MORROW, NELLIE SEAFORD
3/19/85
KCTC-10a,b

KCTC.10A - TAPE #1
KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Nellie Teaford Wood

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 15, 1985

Jim: This tape is an interview being conducted on March 15th in Ashland, Kentucky with Mrs. Nell or Nellie Wood, is that correct Ms. Wood? (yes) Mrs. Wood was a teacher in Kanawha County, West Virginia during the 1974-75 textbook, Kanawha County Textbook Controversy. And this interview is being conducted for historical research for a thesis on that particular controversy. The interviewer is Jim Deeter, student at Marshall. This tape is for historical research at Marshall University in the history department. That being said, Mrs. Wood, let me begin by ...you've already told me a lot about your background. Just briefly again thumbnail sketch about your background.

Nellie: Alright. I grew up in southern West Virginia in Mullins, in Wyoming County, where I lived from the time I was three until I was about twenty-four. I went to West Virginia schools. My degree being from Concord College, Athens, West Virginia, with some work at West Virginia University the summer I was married. Uh...I was brought up in a Baptist church in a small town environment where the church and the home were the most important elements of our background. We were the Sunday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night kind of attendees at church. And uh, being a Christian, a born-again Christian was as much a part of life as breathing. Every decision in life was made in terms of how it affected our Christian life. Anyone I dated knew that he was going to see me at church or at home, many, many, many times before there was ever a question of a date or that sort of thing. So, I'm explaining this I think, because I want to indicate later on how...important the element of being a Christian came to me in this thing. I uh...became a teacher almost because there was nothing else to be. I was driven to it not because I didn't want to be, but I think because that was all I could be. I think I'm a born teacher. I found it later in those years when I wasn't teaching when I lined up friends and neighbors to teach them something (laughs), I still do. I was going to be a journalist, a librarian, perhaps write the great American novel, as many people do. But my decision to become a teacher was confirmed the year I was a junior when the 7th and 8th grade english teacher was out of school for some particular reason. It was a small school and the principal had me go in and teach those classes for a few days. I was not aware at the time that he had the public address system on listening in to the classroom, and uh, he began to talk with me about the importance of becoming a teacher and the teacher whom I replaced there also did. And at the time I was a senior then, I came to terms with sometimes we are born to do certain things and I realized that the flirting with journalism, with uh, library science even was the kind of fighting of what I could see as almost inevitable. I'd been reared on the tradition of Goodbye Mr. Chips and Good Morning, Ms. Dove (laughs), and even Jesse Stewart's The Thread That Runs So True. And I didn't expect teaching to be a profession that received much money or much praise. I did think that somewhere in my background there might become a time when I was an old lady, when somebody would really appreciate what I'd done. Once again, I recognized that those are going to be words about teaching (mmm-hmm). I was fortunate in going to Concord College, and their teacher training program.

Because we'd had some what I would call hard-nosed, practical teachers who had done their work in the public school system, not these theorists, who had never come into a classroom, but people who were concerned uh, about dealing practically with what went on in a classroom. I was aware of that very much, because at the same time I was going through teacher training at Concord, a sister-in-law was at West Virginia University, where she was oh, uh, having this ivory tower kind of approach to teaching theory, and she afterward taught in Wyoming County as I did and had much trouble. And for years afterward had trouble reconciling practical considerations about teaching with the realities of the classroom. I went back and did my student teaching in my own high school under two of my former teachers. I also went back to the same elementary school that I'd attended and had ...it was a kind of special arrangement that ...because there were people who gave the support that you needed, the praise that we all crave at the same time giving the help and the sensible approach to teaching. I think I was fortunate in that.

Jim: It sounds as though you were.

Nellie: And uh, then I went back to teach in the same county. I did in that first year, I graduated in January because I'd gone to school the summer my husband and I were married. And I started in January teaching, replacing a teacher who had been run out of the classroom by impossible behavior problems in the classes she taught. My first inkling of that came the first day I approached the classroom when somebody said, "you're certainly gonna look different at the end of the day". And by the third time I heard that, the third classroom, I said, "if anybody's gonna look different at the end of the day, it is NOT going to be me". And I did discover that the teacher who had left because she was ill was ill because the classes had driven her to that. And so I had some very uh, interesting problems when I began. Never though, did I have the kind of problems that ran me out of teaching. I could...you know, kids who were interested in having their way, I had some remedial classes that first year, so I taught for three years at Pineville High School in Mullins, and then my husband took another job and we moved to Raleigh County, and I taught down the gulf there at East Gulf, Stocco High School. I approached that high school when there was that great exodus out of the mining area to Dayton, Cleveland, when the mines were mechanized. And 3/4 of the people we had in that school were in some way or other supported by (dog barking in room), public money. It was a defeated group of people, people didn't want to learn. I one year had all the sophomore's in school and I had a great many who could not read. I fought the county system to get reading materials on all levels. I conducted classes according to an elementary system with two or three groups going on at once, with little or no help from the county office. I...I should have mentioned that I have a public school certificate which involves training in elementary schools, too. I don't think it's any longer granted. (mmm-hmm) But also, that's a practical education, which a lot of high school english teachers don't get. So anyway, I used that elementary training to organize remedial reading classes, 2 or 3 different

groups on 2 or 3 different levels. And that was an innovative approach for Raleigh County. Then I, at the same time I was building up, I was teaching there, I was building up my spanish teaching degree by night classes, and Saturday classes, and I left Stocco High School when my husband and I adopted three children. Once again, I believe in doing things the hard way. (laughs) They were seven, and six and three when they came to us. And uh, kids who had been pretty badly scarred by their experiences. They had been a year and a half in the care of an agency. I mentioned this because I think this is important in the way I teach, the way I feel about teaching (mmm-hmm), things happened to my children in school. They were already what you might call culturally deprived children. I read the three bears, the three pigs to them for the first time. And so I know what happens to children who have slow starts, I know how much they need superior teaching, how much they need material that they can understand. My oldest son was always out of his depth because he had never had the background material of what he was supposed to have at any particular time. And I think some of this even came out in the textbook selection process as we were trying to see that there were materials for every level of student. So that there was something for everybody to read. (mmm-hmm) Now, Alex was a failure at six years old, at seven years old, and too many kids go all the way through school, always being failures, never having material that they can cope with, never having people meet them and teach right where they are and try to bring them on up. And he had too many of those experiences. Anyway, I never particularly thought I'd go back to teaching until after the children were grown. But uh, after one year at home, of course, Mark, the two older boys were in school, and I had just one at home, and all through the summer they kept calling me to teach spanish because they had no spanish teacher for Stocco High School or for Woodrow Wilson High School in Beckley, not for Stocco, for Shady Springs. And I wouldn't agree to go back until I think I finally agreed the week before school started, but I wouldn't sign a contract. I taught a whole year without a contract because I was placing my boys best interests, since they did have problems before, the teaching, and each time I would fight, they would bring me a check and say you must sign the contract before you receive the next check, and I would say to my principal, if I must sign a contract, then consider this my resignation, because I cannot be sure (mmm-hmm). It sounds stupid I know, but ...and that was the year I wasn't teaching english, because I taught spanish at Woodrow Wilson in the morning and at Shady Springs in the afternoon. But it seemed to work, and the adoption agency didn't feel that it interfered with the boys behavior. In fact, they thought the boys might be better off, you know, so that I wouldn't be the overprotective, clinging kind of parent. So I went back to teaching and taught then at Shady Springs, managed to teach there both spanish and english for three years, until we moved again. And then we...we moved to Rupert, Rainelle area. I didn't teach for that, we were there for that one year, and then we moved to Oak Hill. I didn't teach for another year, and finally was talked into going back once again because of the spanish/english kind of thing. And uh, I taught both classes. Then my husband was transferred again, and we went

to Montgomery and uh, we were there two years and I did teach both of those years. And then we moved to Charleston, I taught nine years at George Washington, and my husband was transferred, promoted again, (mmm-hmm), and we moved to Canton, so I taught three years in Canton. And basically that's, that's the educational background, the teaching background, the travel pattern. I taught in nine different high schools.

Jim: You taught nine years at G.W.?

Nellie: Nine years at G.W.

Jim: And that, that period...where did the 1974-75 textbook controversy fall in that period, beginning or the end or middle or...?

Nellie: Near the end of let's see... '74, '75, '75, '76 I was there one more year. I left in the summer of '76.

Jim: And you haven't taught since then?

Nellie: Yes, I taught the well, actually two and a half years [at Canton At Hoover High School in North Canton, Ohio. Then my husband was transferred again and I moved here and didn't teach anymore.

Jim: You were a teacher at George Washington High School, in Charleston. You were an english teacher.

Nellie: I started out teaching in both english and spanish, but that was departmental work and team teaching and it was difficult to work in two different departments. And so I switched into english completely. I had been english department chairman, uh, was english department chairman at the time we began the textbook study. I think it's interesting how I got involved in this. It's ironic

Jim: Let me clarify this for the tape. You are talking about the process of selecting the textbooks prior to them being presented to the school board. (yes) And you were involved in that directly. (yes) Selection of language/arts textbooks for...the whole county? (the whole county) Okay, tell us a little bit about that.

Nellie: That uh...we uh...select textbooks every five years, West Virginia in Kanawha County, and a member of the George Washington faculty, whom I admired very much, Sally Codie, had served on the previous textbook selection committee. And she told me it was important that people who were dedicated teachers, who were conscientious, hard workers, it was important that kind of person volunteered for serving on the committee. And she recommended that I do it. And since I admired her, I did. I almost, the same kind of you might say puritan ethics that got me into it, or the Christian service kind of thing, and it was a long, hard year. We worked a year on the study of the books. Now, I think there were

ten days that we met, ten full days, but each time the textbook committee met, we had spent hours in preparation and study on our own time before we went to that meeting. That day in the office, among the members of the committee, was to discuss the study and the work that we had done outside that committee meeting. And so when somebody totals up the number of hours involved in the textbook selection, they're not figuring the hours, because we actually studied those books.

Jim: You actually...that's an interesting question, 'cause I was told by someone else, I don't know who it was now, that textbook selection was kind of a I'll use his word, a joke...

Nellie: That's absurd! And that shows the person's ignorance of the process. Now, uh, we met and each textbook company presented an overview of his books and that kind of thing. Then we were organized into committees. Now, there were five people on the actual textbook committee. Two of us were senior high school students, two were junior high school students, teachers, two were junior high school teachers, one was an elementary teacher. Now, that was the official textbook committee. There were however, two sub-committees, made up of elementary teachers and secondary teachers. There were six elementary teachers and they would pick some from grades one through three, three of them that balanced, three from one I mean, from four through six. On the 12-member sub-committee for secondary, six of them were junior high school teachers. Six of them were high school teachers. Now, I can't say that the sub-committees were as careful about study as the five member textbook committee, because I didn't sit in on their meetings, although we met in the same office area about the same time. But I know that my five member committee did, because we came to the meetings with our notes that we had made on the series. We, we worked long and hard...in fact, at that time I quit singing in my church choir, because I did not have time. I was spending so much time working, studying on the textbooks. I just got back into church choirs a year and a half ago, too. That...uh. (oh, excuse me....)

Jim: I was gonna ask you one thing about this textbook and this question might come up, I'll interrupt you (sure), but I need to do this while this comes in my mind. You were working on this for a year, this textbook committee works for a year. Now, is that from spring of '73 to spring of '74, would that, is that a fair, chronological base there? Because my understanding is it was in the spring of '74 that the controversy, led by Alice Moore, kind of really got started. And it was after the textbooks were presented by your committee.

Nellie: I think it was the course of the year. I..now this sounds absurd to say, I think it was, I think we started in September, we volunteered back in the spring and that's when Sally Codie, my friend had suggested I volunteer. It began, I'm not sure whether it began in August with _____ or in September. As I tell you, I have forgotten much because I tried to forget. (I'm just trying to get a chronological....) (It was in the fall of '73

and the Spring of '74. (okay) Now, I do have some notes on that, somewhere. I tried to organize this so I could tell what I had. We did uh, it's a long sheet.

Jim: Well, while you're looking for that, let me uh, ...(okay, go ahead with your question)...I'm trying to move us into now, the first rumblings of the controversy, when did you first become aware, now, let's ...is this a safe assumption now, by the spring of '74 you had your committee?

Nellie: Let me tell you how the study happened (okay). We got together in February of '74 and prepared our submission to the board members because the submission went to the board member ah! here it is, and here is something you may want a copy. That is an early copy, by the way. But I will let you xerox and return (okay, yes, that would be nice to have). That was prepared, and I can (pause), alright, it does say, we did fill out and file forms on every group, every textbook that we studied. And we, we completed our work on February 28th, that's what I wanted to get here.

Jim: Okay, on February 28th of '74 your work was completed on the textbook committee.

Nellie: Yes. Now, we, we prepared at that time, you have no idea of reams of material that we prepared on those books. I even had some of it ...I have a rough draft. This is a rationale for the teaching of the books.

Jim: This thing states why you're choosing the books?

Nellie: Why we chose the books. Here is a final copy of materials that were filed with the board. This particular document is on the basic text, this is on the supplementary text. Then, we file with it a statement of philosophy for teaching and we uh, filed all of that at the board meeting on March 7th. Now, this is a board memo from March 7th, 1974. This was when the books were presented to the board members. Now, the board members had from March until the April board meeting to examine the books, the rationale. At the same time, we presented this to the board members, all the books were set aside in a room at the board office, 300 Elizabeth Street there, in that complex (yes) for board members to come at their convenience and examine them. At the same time, those books were placed in the library in (public library?) public library, the downtown public library, and St. Albans public library. It was interesting that not one board member went to examine the books, nor did more than a handful of people examine them in the public libraries. Now, later on there was the suggestion given that there was some kind of secret sort of thing going on. But that's absurd. Now, (pause), April 15th was the state uh, adopted deadline for the county to notify the state superintendent.

Jim: May I interrupt you one more time? Had any textbooks been purchased by this time? By April 15th....

Nellie: Heavens, no.

Jim: No textbooks were purchased. (no) Okay.

Nellie: We just had samples, copies. And so the ...the board of education had to adopt books on April 11th. All the board members knew this. This was state law. Now they did vote to adopt the books. And it was done on recommendation of Mrs. Moore, saying at the time, we'll adopt the books, we can get rid of the ones we don't want later.

Jim: Now, you're saying that on the meeting of April 11th, 1974, that the committee voted to adopt the books

Nellie: No, not the committee (oh), the board of education. The committee votes had been back in February.

Jim: Sorry, I meant school board of education, voted, the school board, voted to accept the books and that language/arts series, of which there were 318 I think, different volumes, if my memory's correct, and Mrs. Moore voted, she moved to adopt the books (yes), and voted to accept them and made a statement that later they would get rid of the ones they didn't want. (yes) Now, were you aware at that point in time of a controversy or was there a question with any of the books, by that time? By the April meeting?

Nellie: (laughs) I was a totally unsophisticated kind of person. I believed that all I had to do was to be a good teacher, a hard worker, and that that was my job. Few people understand the complexity of the school system. Teachers are nothing in the concept of a school system. Teachers have no power, they have no authority, they have no position. Teachers have a position openly in the their classrooms. And I was classroom teacher with uh, no pretensions, no ambitions for being anything else. Now, I think that's important. I did not want to climb anywhere in the school system. I wanted no position of power or authority. Because I believe in the 'Peter Principle', and I knew where I belonged. Now, there, Mrs. Conley was the english supervisor, relatively small fish in the pond. There was the whole hierarchy of that division, her supervisor's directly were Mrs., I forgotten her name (I can't recall either). Going through Mrs. Bird, I've forgotten the level (yes, I met Mrs. Bird). A dark haired woman, she had worked at George Washington in the IDEA office, and I cannot remember her name, then Roger Warner, who was assistant superintendent, and all of these people spoke, I had never been to a board meeting.

Jim: You went to this April 11th meeting?

Nellie: I went to that meeting for the 1st time. Because I was told to be there, in other words, dabbling in board meetings and board politics, even teacher politics, had never been my line. That's unfortunate for Kanawha County. (mmm-hmm) Because had I been more sophisticated, things might have been different all

along. And when a question was directed, even in subsequent meetings, about books, they went through channels, the general speaks to the colonel who speaks to the major and frankly, I was the private. For the longest time. And there were very few questions actually.

Jim: Now, at the April 11th meeting, were there questions about the textbooks at the time?

Nellie: (rustling paper) I have it (oh, good) Uh, a statement
END OF SIDE 1

Nellie: ...previous times I have this statement by Mrs. Moore on April 11th, she said she hadn't had time to examine the books, but she said something to the effect that if they followed the ideas of the National Council of Teachers of English, she knew she would be against the books. Because she had never agreed with anything they had said. And she said we can adopt the books later and remove what we don't like. Or words to that affect. And her husband who was in the back of the room, said at the time, go get 'em girl, go get 'em!

Jim: He said that openly?

Nellie: Openly, in the meeting. Now, if I had any idea your question a minute ago, I don't know how you said it....

Jim: Well, I asked you if you had any inclination of any rumblings or beginnings of controversy prior to the April 11th meeting. Your answer was no, because you were not involved in the process.

Nellie: And the answer was no, but if I ...I may be unsophisticated, but I am far from stupid. And that meeting told me more than I wanted to know about where the problems lay.

Jim: So Mr. Moore, Alice's husband, from the back of the room in that meeting said go get 'em girl, and you're implying then that there was, they had already determined that they were gonna get involved in getting the textbooks out of whatever. She made a statement that they would get them out later. (yes) Okay....

Nellie: Now the one question I can remember having been asked at that meeting was, was there anything said about dialects. And yes there was something said about dialects, because if we're gonna teach an understanding of language, we must teach something about how dialects operate, because there are many dialects, which each one of us use. I would use one dialect in speaking with you here in my own home, and another if I were making this as a formal presentation from a lectern, as you would use one dialect in speaking to me as a researcher and perhaps another from your pulpit.

Jim: Mmm-hmm, okay, I understand your point. Uh...

Nellie: Although a lot of people would not call those dialects, still they are. And that question about were there dialects used in the books, came up in the April 11th meeting.

Jim: So on the April 11th, the April 11th meeting, the motion was made to adopt the textbooks and Mrs. Moore said that later they would get rid of the ones they didn't want. (yes) Okay, what then was the, let's move along in the chronology. What then was the next contact you had about the books and uh, your first introduction to a?

Nellie: Well, all along we made up, you mentioned that there were 318 books. I had no idea how many books. You..I doubt that few people understand other than the people who worked with the schools themselves, the complexity of a large system. And that's another thing that made me say something about outsiders. Kentuckians are used to small systems. A city system and then perhaps several within the county, as we have here. In Ohio there was that sort of thing. West Virginians are used to a county system, and are not frightened by it. Now within that county, we have, I don't know how many, were there eight or eleven or twelve high schools? The number has escaped, (I think there's 12), alright, 12 high schools then something like 22 junior highs, now they are as varied and different as the people involved in them, and Kanawha County was a complex county. We had high schools that were operating on a very traditional system, and high schools that had gone into many courses uh, six week courses, semester courses, and a very complex system. Those I think were Herbert Hoover and there was another of that type.

Jim: The urban, the urban-type school?

Nellie: No, they were not the urban. The urban were almost using a more traditional plan, George Washington offered senior english on several levels, but it was, we did not offer the complex mini-courses kind of thing. Herbert Hoover was one that was one of these, offering 40 perhaps 9 weeks or semester courses from which a student picked with certain backups. Anyway, we needed, we needed all of these books in order to meet a basic plan as well as the kind of complex system that we had. Also, in Kanawha County there was a plan instituted by Dr. Underwood to map out the skills needed in a particular class on a particular level from grades one through twelve and we set up techniques for teaching those skills so that we could move students through learning all the skills, at whatever level they were. In other words, if somebody needed to go back and pick up a skill on division of words into syllables, we could go to a packet of material, pull out lessons on that, and work with one student who had that problem on that level. (mmm-hmm) We were in the process of writing all this curriculum. Now, a lot of people were fighting Dr. Underwood over it. It's an extremely complex idea. And yet an extremely practical idea. In other words, it would work for the benefit of students, we would test, find out where there were weaknesses, where there were strengths, we'd go back and work on

the strengths. I'm doing this too, because I decided if...(pause)...

Jim: Might as well, might as well take advantage of this time of recollection and record it for yourself, of course, I would have been very happy to make copies.

Nellie: I haven't touched this material for seven years, and uh, I spent two days with it, by the way (oh), a half hour after you called the other night I realized the ten years had just melted away, and I was back in this. And that's where I've been for two days, although I tried not to get there. The best information about all this has been the information that I've given you in the last two days that you haven't been able to get. (laughter)

Jim: There's something still in my mind, I'm sorry I'm not up with you, but you said something to Alice Moore, it just popped in my mind, that that school board meeting on April 11th, she said she hadn't had a chance to read the textbooks yet, and then she said she voted to adopt them and then her husband said, she made a statement....

Nellie: Well, I don't know when....(oh, you don't...)...

Jim: What I'm fishing for is there seems to be an implication that she was against the textbooks without ever looking at them.

Nellie: There is no implication there, that is a fact. If you want me to say that, I will be happy to say it, I mean, I will say worse!

Jim: She appears to have been against the textbooks without ever looking at them, so she must have been....

Nellie: Well, she said, she, that she had not read them, but she was opposed if they had the ideas of the National Education Association (I remember you saying that, yes), she knew she was opposed to them, because she had never agreed with anything they had said.

Jim: Okay. What was the...I may be moving you into an area that you're heading for and you don't want to go there yet, but what was all the hubbub about? Alice Moore now is on the school board and she is determined or it appears she's determined to get rid of textbooks that are offensive, and I....

Nellie: Alice Moore was opposed to the public schools. (did she as much say that?) Yes! I have heard her say that she was not sure we should have public schools.

Jim: Well, then why, what could she hope to accomplish being a school board member? Why would she be a school board member if she was not interested in public schools? Do you have any ideas about that?

Nellie: Of course, have you read Machiavelli? (yes, oh, well)

Jim: I suppose then that she felt like she could uh, (there is)...you're saying the end justifies the means.

Nellie: I'm saying that she was a beautiful woman, soft-spoken with a Mississippi accent, she served on a board of education with four men who were southern gentlemen, with people who found it very difficult to look a beautiful woman in the eye and say, you're a liar, you are manipulative, you are using things for your own benefit, even when they knew that.

Jim: You feel then that Alice Moore was a liar and that she was using things for her own benefit?

Nellie: Oh, yes.

Jim: You don't think she was honest at all in her approach to the opposition she took to the textbooks?

Nellie: At points, yes. She was very honest. And she was very committed. But, she...she was no saint. And let...let me go directly. (okay) I...I have a sheet in front of me where I have noted statements that she said. On May 16th, she said, "I am a politician". That was at the May board meeting to look at the books. And she turned to me as a member of the textbook committee, and said, "who have you been associating with"? Uh, we'll get back to that later. She uh, said that we ought to include in the literature, material by Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society. One of the articles on communication in the book dealt with him, with his techniques. Most of her comments at the May 16th meeting dealt with black authors, (in other words, she was, she was in opposition to them) yes. Authors who had some political activity, she attacked not what was being said, but the reputation, the James Baldwin (the credibility of the author) the credibility of the author, because of some doctor in his background....

Jim: Okay, well, let me ask you this, what ...you, your committee devised a rationale, a philosophy behind adopting these kinds of materials. What was the purpose in adopting books that presented men like Eldridge....

Nellie: Back up. (okay) Our committee did not do it. (okay) The state of West Virginia did. (I see) These are resolutions adopted by the WV Board of Education, on December 11th, 1970.

Jim: They make a recommendation, do they not?

Nellie: The inclusion of interethnic concepts and they said that books must be multi-ethnic, multi-racial in content.

Jim: Okay, so the state school board, the state superintendent's office....

Nellie: The state school board. Now, once again here I am at fault, because I genuinely believe that we're all God's children, and red and yellow, black and white, we are precious in his sight. I might have been a little slower than the others to pick up on it. Believe me, the initial objection to these books was racial. That was all we heard May 16th. There was however, some objection to the interpretation of satire, or a literal interpretation of symbolic material.

Jim: Can you give an example of...you remember or recall an example of that literal interpretation of symbolic material? Are you talking about...

Nellie: I'm talking about if a word was used, then we had to be teaching somebody to be that. (oh) If ...if somebody in a story was a prostitute, then we were encouraging prostitution by including the story.

Jim: There was a, there was one anti-textbook person I talked to, Elmer Fike, uh, sorry to mention his name, I'm sure he wouldn't care.

Nellie: I'll mention him if you don't. I'm sorry, I can't...one hour or two hours are not gonna be enough for me because if you're gonna get anything out of me, you're gonna have to talk to me more than that. (yeah) I know more than anybody else (I can see that), about this, and I'm sorry, I like you already. I hadn't decided until I saw you whether I could trust you. (thank you) But I decided if I could trust you, I would level completely with you (I appreciate that), and I've got more to say. And I am painfully honest (I want you to be), so...

Jim: This is historical research, this is what it's for.

Nellie: So, you can't get what I know in one hour. (I can see that) Okay. (we may even have to do this again, I don't know)

Jim: I've got another tape with me today and we'll go until you think you have to stop and then we'll do it again.

Nellie: Now, you were asking a question.

Jim: Yes. The question was, that there was a book that was being proposed or the statement was made there's a book being proposed and I forget the author, and it may have been Baldwin, who did something on, on, he was talking about jobs, very, different kinds of jobs. Here's a woman who's a secretary, here's a man who's a gas station attendant, here's a woman who's a teacher, here's a man who's something else. And they include in that list of jobs, you may recall the book, I don't, uh, the prostitute and when you said that it reminded me of that. There was a prostitute, a masseur, someone who worked in a message parlor, and this author, now I haven't read the book so I'm just taking what's, that this author was presenting a picture that these were legitimate, these were good occupations, and that this is something that you might,

as a teacher you might want to say, this is an occupation, or it might suggest you might want to get into this.

Nellie: I'm not sure what he's talking about, but I have a feeling. There's a book, a man went around this country, right now it escapes me, and recorded people talking about what they do in America. And this was a selection from that book. It will come to me when I leave this, and....

Jim: I've got it at home, too, I think.

Nellie: Okay, well, anyway, let me back up. In April after the books were officially adopted, we were, the textbook committee, prepared two days, one for elementary school teachers, department chairmen and principals and one for secondary principles and teachers, days when they could come to the board office, look over the books, we would explain books to them, talk over the rationale, for using them. You understand we had basic texts on several levels, basic texts in literature and language and uh, then we had uh, (supplemental), supplementary books and books that would take care of all these courses. You understand, we had students doing, have you seen this? (no, I haven't) That's my concept of showing, making it _____ to show how this whole extremely complex thing is rooted in the philosophy of teaching english in the county and the state. It begins with the skills, the skills, the trunk of the tree. (mmm-hmm) Now, that's not nonsense, that's fact. Then in the elementary level we had, we already had Holt reading that was being used, and we adopt, and Economy reading. Those two on the right were already being used. Now, elementary teachers are very careful about their programs, so the communicating that we adopted was a supplementary kind of thing. And too, it was not a duplication of the kinds of things they already had. Incidentally, this is communicating, this is book two, and several times I had this book pointed out to me. And in fact, at one of the meetings one of the protesters said, "this is what it's all about". Look at that book.

Jim: That particular book?

Nellie: This particular book. The cover of the book. Now, if you can't figure it out with that cover....

Jim: This is what it's all about.

Nellie: This is what it's all about. This is what the protest is all about. (on the cover...) If you will notice that on the cover you had a telephone with children on the cover, that's Jack the Beanstalk there, and uh, the fox is all dressed up, but if you notice in the center of the telephone there's a little girl with a bouquet and a little black boy smelling the bouquet. (mmm-hmm) And my contention is that this began racism in March. By the next meeting we had invited members of the NAACP and the black community to come and be a part of the meeting, and to listen and to observe and so it was in June that the emphasis switched from racism to Christianity.

Jim: Was this an obvious switch?

Nellie: It was obvious. It was obvious to anyone who wasn't blind and deaf.

Jim: Now you said there was a switch made. By whom?

Nellie: Mrs. Moore.

Jim: She now switched from racism to Christianity.

Nellie: Oh, yes, at first uh, she attacked the books for black authors, use of dialect, again black, for uh, (pause), well, she attacked specific authors.

Jim: Were there uh, in these books that she was attacking on the racism side, were there objectionable words, language that would be offensive to a Christian, uh, four letter words, gutter type language? I've heard that call, I heard a call like that by some of those who opposed the textbooks. Was there that kind of language in the textbooks?

Nellie: There was an occasional damn. This book I have marked. This is Book Two in the Communicating series.

Jim: This will be an elementary.

Nellie: This is an elementary, yes. On page one they objected to the story of the travels of a fox, which was a folktale. The objection said that he taught trickery and deceit. On uh, page twenty-eight they object to the selection called "The Dangerous Cowboy", bad Benny is a boy, he's incidentally black and he's playing cowboy and they objected to it because he ties up his mother and that illustrates disrespect to parents. These quotations are taken directly from a volume that they prepared. On page sixty-four they object to "Jack and The Beanstalk". Because it promotes stealing and killing. On page ninety-seven they objected to "Pinochio", because it illustrates disrespect for parents, and lying. Now, anybody who knows the Pinochio story, knows that Pinochio's nose grew because he told a lie, and Pinochio learned to value significant things. He learned not to lie, he learned to be honest and moral. But I still think the thing there on the cover is ...anyway, this, this thing, and you may have it, shows how we use the twin branches of language and literature, and how we had the higher level of dynamics of language, and then the contemporary english, which was maybe a grade or two below level. For the student like my two older sons, who had never been prepared for what they were needing and found a little easier approach in a language that they could understand that would build them up....

Jim: Now you said a language they could understand, I see on this tree a branch that's labeled "Language of Man". Would that, does that mean, and I'm asking you, would that mean that they would be uh, taught on this level....?

Nellie: This was only a supplementary text. You notice, Language of Man could be used as a supplementary text there, (oh, yes) and up here on the higher level, too. And in the same way, interaction level three could be used. Now, no school in the county had to buy anything, except basic texts as they wanted to fit their program. And those two days we met with the principals and teachers to plan what they could buy. To explain this, to say match your selections to the needs of your students, of your school system, what you need to teach on the level. Now, at George Washington we were operating four levels of high school english. We had students doing advanced level work, getting college credit, for what they were doing. And it was material that was in the selections for them that caused a lot of the problems.

Jim: Extra reading material? (yes) That was in that class?

Nellie: Yes, for advanced levels. And you notice here in literature we have the "America Reads" series, and that I had taught with from the first year I was teaching in Pineville High School in Wyoming County. It had undergone an number of changes. Now, incidentally I didn't push that, I must say that. It's a fine series, there were many fine series. Galaxy was once again the level about two years below grade level. In other words, someone who's reading about an 8th grade level would manage fine in the 10th grade book. (mmm-hmm) But there were always in these lower levels, skill builders to move somebody up to level. But anyway, see, these four were the major high school series that all of this other was supplementary, which they might use. And then we did have a heavily remedial uh, program called "Breakthrough", down there which was written on second, third, fourth, fifth grade level for heavily remedial students. And uh....

Jim: That's good, I'll...(okay)...that's interesting. At least it gives me an idea of what you were trying to accomplish in your....

Nellie: And the idea that we had not prepared is in fact the funniest thing about the whole thing. Some people actually believed that. Incidentally, let me tell you something else. All along, sometimes our friends were our worse enemies. (mmmh, during the controversy you're talking about?) Uh, yes, because before the controversy developed, people didn't do, a lot of them didn't do what they were supposed to do. When we had the high school meeting for secondary principals and english department chairmen to study these books, there were only three principals there. There was some kind of uh, tournament or something uh, basketball, probably, and only three principals appeared. Now, later on, when principals had to defend these books, see they, they were not prepared because they hadn't been there. (right)

Jim: So, they had, in self defense they had to get prepared.

Nellie: Okay, now that was April. And also in addition to this, we made arrangements for the entire faculty to come, and uh,

attend the board meeting. Not attend, but attend a meeting at the board office, where they could get questions....

Jim: And this was in relation to the textbooks, right?

Nellie: And we were saying, if you need help in preparing, prep...preparing your selections, planning how you're going to use it, we'll come and talk with you, tell you what we know about any of these selections, because we'd spent a lot of time studying. And we knew how important it was to know. We were volunteering extra time. Anyway, then the May meeting, all the books now, the May meeting, we were asked to attend, at which time questions were raised, objections were raised. In the interval, sometime before May, Mrs. Moore had asked that a copy of all the books be sent to her house, and that was done. Uh, we also understood that she was having outside help examining the books. We did discover that was so. The same people crop up in these textbook things all over the country.

Jim: Bill and Norma Gabler (yes). Were they helping her at this time give evidence?

Nellie: Yes, oh, yes. (this is in May?) Un-huh, this is before the May meeting. Incidentally, I told you about the, the ...the thing about understanding that if a word was in something, it was going to be, the approach was going to be that it was taught. From some of the questions or something, I'm not even sure how I know. But I do know that the afternoon before that meeting, I went to my church library and used a Bible concordance, and I'm almost appalled to say this, because the point was lost in the meeting, but I looked up the word "whore" to find out how many times it was used in the King James version of the Bible. And in all of the complex whoredom and other variations, I think it was 96 times.

Jim: I was gonna say a hundred, a guess.

Nellie: Well, I counted them. My minister was much amused by it. And I even carried my mother's Bible with me, because I knew that some of these things were going to come up. And that (this was in the May meeting?)yes, and when I was asked, when one of those points was made, I made that point. Now, it was lost in the shuffle. Another point that was made there, was Mrs. Moore asked me to read something. (I think I heard about that) I don't even know what it was now, but I refused. And my refusal came with the thing, I said, neither would I stand up and read aloud from the Bible, it was, I don't know if it was 1 Kings or 2 Kings something or other. I would not read that without an explanation and understanding that we, that _____ understood what was meant. And the reference was the phrase, 'He that Pisseth Against the Wall'. I'm not ashamed to say it, I also know that that is a figure of speech for a man, as to distinguish a man from a woman. Now, that was lost in the shuffle. (mmm-hmm) Incidentally, one of the things that happened and I'm sorry ...I don't believe to this day that we were given a fair answer. Board meetings are taped

KCTC.10B - TAPE #2

KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Nellie Teaford Wood

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 15, 1985

Jim: ...no, no. As you said, and I want to put this on the front of this tape, we may, this will be the 2nd tape of this continuing interview with Mrs. Nellie Wood, concerning the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy. I want to make it clear that we may even have to at your convenience, set down again with another tape or two or whatever, because this information is so vital. You see, I've been interviewing people now for some weeks, and the information you're giving me is detailed information that is so vital to the truth of this thing, so I want to make sure....

Nellie: Well, I think the thing that I wanted to make clear was that I was not willing to go into it for a superficial examination. And I realized when I said that at that point in the interview, we'll have to do this again, if I'm going to drag this out and suffer through this, you're gonna have to suffer with me. (laughing) Hear all I have to say.

Jim: Well, I'm not suffering at all, I just don't want to infringe...

Nellie: Anyway, it occurred to me, at that May meeting, uh,

Jim: You mentioned that she asked, she, Mrs. Moore, asked you to read something and you refused to read it, and your reason for refusing to read it was the same reason you would not read I Kings, the thing you mentioned...

Nelli: Because it would be taken out of context, it would be, to be exposed to ridicule something that should not be ridiculed and would not be ridiculed. I would not permit anyone to ridicule the Bible. (mmm-hmm) Nor would I permit anyone to ridicule a selection by taking it out...I think I remember what it is. I'm not sure, but I believe it was a selection by (my information was it was a poem, that's what someone told me, it was a poem she asked you to read, that may or may not be true)...it may be. I ...I'm not sure. I thought it was something by and I can't remember the fellow, but he's a puerto rican author who's writing about life in the ghetto. And he (can't think of his name either but I...) I..I had the book somewhere, and it talked, it made the depression clear to me, and I read it in my church, later.

Jim: Oh, you read the poem in your church?

Nellie: My pastor asked me to read it in a book examination that was held at my church. The father loses his job and he doesn't know how to uh, uh, to combat the depression and he says, "damn". And the, the wife and mother says to him, says, don't say "damn". And then the author says something about uh, he understood that life was no damn good, he couldn't cope with the damn look on the face of his damn kids. Am I mak...am I telling enough of it to ...

Jim: I think so. I think I'm beginning to understand.

Nellie: You see, the absolute frustration that comes to people when they can't get a job, they can't support their families honestly, he was saying "damn" because it was absolute frustration. His wife was saying "don't say it". Because they were not profane people. The man recalling what it was like as a child knew that only this powerful profanity could any way approach the frustration people felt during the depression.

Jim: So you're, you were saying as an english teacher that it was legitimate to use that word "damn" to express frustration?

Nellie: Yes. And the inability to cope with the depression. I'm almost sure that this is the article, I may be wrong. If I am, I'm not inadvertently ... (mmm-hmm) I probably. I know I could go through a box of material and find exactly what it is. I'm not sure any how. That night, on the May 16th, she said uh, something to the effect that who were we associating with, I was sure we had been maligned, that we had been uh...what's the word I want, I was sure that after that meeting was over, that I had cause for a personal suit against Mrs. Moore (You had been slandered?) Slandered, that's the word. And I asked Mike Bell for a tape of the meeting, first saying that I wanted to hear exactly what I had remembered, because I might well do it. There was no tape of that meeting. (mmh) I got kind of a song and dance. I may be terribly wrong, but I had a feeling that there had been a tape of the meeting and it was destroyed. (mmmh)

Jim: I'm sure there's a transcript of that meeting. I know there are transcripts of all the school board meetings, on file as public record, at the school board office. There are transcripts.

Nellie: Word for word? (yes) The machine didn't work. (ah, well, maybe, I may check on that meeting, just for curiosity, because I'll be looking at those records.) I may be wrong. Now I like Mike Bell. (that's May 16, '74) May 16th meeting.

Jim: Yes, I know Mike. He's been very helpful to me thus far.

Nellie: But there were too many kind of embarrassing sorts of things that happened there early when people did not understand the seriousness or the thrust of the thing, or the danger of the thing. Uh, now, at all, all during May and June, Mrs. Moore was taking these books that she had in her home to prayer meeting type meetings in churches in the area, and showing them and at one of the church rallies, whatever you want to call it, she uh, this was in June, she said words to the affect, that members of this textbook committee could be placed on administrative transfer, implying that our jobs were at stake and at another church rally she said, no member of the textbook committee would ever serve on another Kanawha County committee as long as she was a board member. It was confirmed by Roscoe Keeney, who was then president of the Teacher's Association in a conversation later, and Roscoe later mentioned it in a board meeting and Mrs. Moore did not object to it. In other words, she was accepting that she had said it. (mmm-hmm) Any way, we uh, not only were the uh, books going

held in July or August, a public rally. Incidentally, one of the five members of the textbook committee attended those meetings. (these are anti-textbook rallies) The anti-textbook rallies. Now, these are long before anybody really knew there was a problem. (yeah, this was in the summer of '74, yeah) The summer of '74.

Jim: Now, up to this point, now, you've been involved in several meetings of the school board, you had confrontations with Alice Moore at this point, several or a couple...

Nellie: And there were uh, there was this June meeting, which was really explosive. That's when they looked yeah, on June 27th, that was when the board members voted 3 to 2 to purchase the books, recommended by the committee after delegating 8 books. That was the big mistake.

Jim: They took 8 books (8 books) out, yeah, I was told that by Harry Stansbury. He said, we took the worse 8 that we felt were offensive...now, Harry told me himself that he actually read some of those books and they were offensive to him, and so, he wouldn't have had his kids read them, wouldn't want his kids to read them.

Nellie: All right, now, I'll tell you something that has never to my knowledge been said anywhere. Those books were in a series that we had not had all the books. We had been told by the superintendent staff, the office staff, that we would use selective uh, examination on that series and one other. And it was on those two series that the problems came. There were some books that we had not seen, but appeared all at once.

Jim: Oh, as a committee member, you had seen some of those books? That were the most offensive.

Nellie: Yeah.

Jim: So the 8 that were kicked out or set aside...

Nellie: We were not in control of that decision (mmm-hmm). In other words, everything that we had seen we had studied, every book that was there, that had been provided for us, we had read.

Jim: Every book that had been provided for you? (yeah) But there were some that were not provided.

Nellie: But this was the series they had done a random sampling, and the books were tremendous. (what was the reason they kicked 'em out?) The level, well, you see, there were so many books, there were so many books and the county staff somewhere made a decision that on these that had 66 or 70 books, they wouldn't buy we're talking about a high school committee, we're talking about the five textbooks committee members and the 12 (sub-committees) sub-committees, we're talking about 17 copies of each one of those books. And that's where a part of the problem came.

Jim: So 17 copies had to be distributed, you're saying, among all of these people?

Nellie: In the study, but now, these are only in two series... (pause)... I guess... Interaction was the one, level three. But anyway, that was something we had no control over.

Jim: You said when they made that decision to delegate those eight books, that that was a mistake.

Nellie: Yes, because it indicated the chink of the armour.

Jim: So, you're saying it was the hole in the dike, so to speak.

Nellie: Absolutely. That's what I mean by mistake. It would... looking back on it now it was a mistake not to give us every book. And I, I am being very honest with you in saying I have never said that to anyone else before.

Jim: You were, you were uh, hurt, upset that they took the 8 books out.

Nellie: I came out of this thing feeling that I had been used by everybody. Not used exactly, uh, I guess that's, that's a part of it, too.

Jim: Well, Thelma Conley told me on the phone that she felt like she was in the middle of something and she was, couldn't, she was in a no-win situation because she was in the middle.

Nellie: No way. And I tried to operate as honestly and as fairly as I could, not being overly moved by the attention. Now, it's a tremendous ego trip to get a standing ovation from 2,000 of your colleagues. You got to watch it, 'cause that's dangerous. And I am sorry, but I think Mrs. Moore was on an ego trip. She was on a righteous crusade. I watched it happen a few years later to Anita Bryant. And when, I prayed for Anita Bryant. I prayed for Alice Moore. (mmmh)

Jim: Well, I think as Christians we are supposed to do that. Do you want to stop?

Nellie: No, let's go on. I prayed that this would not happen to me, that I would be able to move through this thing and emerge the same person with my integrity intact. I don't know whether I had, but I tried. (mmmh) And there are going to be people who are angry with you. There are teachers that I taught with who will never forgive me for trying to keep the teachers from walking out that day. There would have been a teacher strike.

Jim: What day?

Nellie: That was in September, the 5th, 6th, 7th, somewhere along there, after the books were removed. The teachers would have

voted. Now, I had the power that day to move that group of teachers, either way I wanted. That's scary.

Jim: It sure is. Let me ask you this...did you have an objection or did you have a feeling about how much input should be allowed from mother, from parents about the selection of textbooks for their children? Was that ever a problem with you during this thing?

Nellie: Never until the thing went on. I had never seen any parents have any desire to have any more input, they may have.

Jim: It's alright, Nellie, because today, in Kanawha County, Mike Bell, no, Harry Stansbury told me this, that as the years went on, after the controversy, in the late '70's, up until today, he said now in the '80's, it's just to the point where we can't get parents to look at any textbooks.

Nellie: Let me tell you something. One of the things that I opened, this satchel, was a satchel that I carried with me (like a bookbag) uh, to places where I talked about this. (mmm-hmm) And there's an odd assortment of things. I discovered I planned 10 or 15 minutes of comment and then let people ask questions; that was the best way, so it was never exactly...now, here are my notes for one of these, and I have well, they're two pages of it. Hours, days, over a period of four months, we spent studying books. We felt wise decisions was made, we carefully prepared, carefully written rationales for the use of the books, meetings with principals and department head, a wise selection of books from the lists, the books were on display 5 weeks in the public library. There were, there was little interest, what went wrong, everything. Before I go further, let me make a rather provocative statement. Books had little or nothing to do with the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy. The quarrel over books was really a symptom of the disease. And as a, as spreading a soothing lotion over a skin rash will not cure the rash, so as long as the patient is exposed to the allergen, so dealing with the objections to the books did not cause, cure the allergies of some people in Kanawha County, who were allergic to the 1970's. Once we come to understand that, we can understand the textbook controversy. Now, I have here, this was for a talk I made somewhere uh, (on the issue?) yes, on the issue. Local factors that caused this. I had the sex education campaign, which campaigned four years early.

Jim: Yes, Alice Moore ran for the school board on that issue. (yes) Mmm-hmm

Nellie: There's very strong belief in segments in Kanawha County that she was uh, strongly supported and funded by the John Birch Society, I don't know whether you've heard that. (oh, yes, I've heard it) okay. As I say, I believe in saying things, though, (well, surely, I appreciate that), and uh, it, if I'm going to be wrong, I'll be honestly wrong. There had been a 15 year program of school consolidation and there were people who were still mad about that. (mm-hmm) Uh, there were the differences in local

communities, and the jealousies of one community with, for another. There was hidden racism. But now, it wasn't so hidden, because in...on one of the overpasses or bridges or something, "get the nigger books out of the school". (yes, I've heard of that) Okay.

Jim: And there, Dr., or Reverend English told me yesterday that the racial issue was not really a surface like it would have been in a place like Atlanta, but it was still there. And he knew that racism was a part of this whole....

Nellie: Uh, I went to one of the board meetings with Ruth somebody, the name escapes me, she was president of the Teacher's Association. And we sat together and I felt somebody come behind us at one time, and uh, didn't turn around, because board meetings were very unfriendly places. And I looked down and there was a card lying under my seat, and it said, you have just been paid a friendly visit by the klan. Would you like us to pay you a real visit? (mmmh, someone laid that under your seat?) Laid that under my seat at a board meeting. Okay, now, other things that happened locally was this mistrust of an outside superintendent. (Kenneth Underwood?) Kenneth Underwood (yes), yeah. It, very brilliant man, but he, he rubbed some people the wrong way. Now, his plan for listing all the those skills was a tremendous amount of work, and there are people who find a strong resistance to work. (laughter) (yes) Or change. (oh, yes) Change is very, very threatening. Okay, now those were the local factors that I, I was able to look at. There was also internal dissension in the ...the local and state NEA affiliates. Uh, there were some problems between the professional teachers, shall we say. And the classroom teacher. (you need to change your tape?) Yeah. One of the reasons I wanted to do this was so I could find out later and make sense of what I do or don't say (mmm-hmm), in order to know what I've left out. From national factors, I list the post-Watergate syndrome. Believe me, there was a real concern about have we lost all our moral fibers, are we really all, it's still around. And there was this post-Vietnam syndrome, too, where the uh, there was a reaction to the violence of the '60's, where there was a great deal of separation of child from parent and some of it happened with education, too, with college. Going away and becoming different, not being able to come home. So, we had a lot of people who uh, felt that education had ruined their kids, whether it had or hadn't. (mmm-hmm) There also was a discovery of the power of minorities. I've already hinted to you something of this appalachian myth, and there was a tremendous level worked on the media. With a almost a uh, con game worked on the media. And the media bought it. Uh, the uh, NBC weekend crew came in and uh, did a rather uh, in-depth kind of thing, they thought. But the opening of the show panned across the books and they played hillbilly music. (laughs) Sixty minutes went to one of the churches singing uh, about as badly as you could hope to sing. (that's how they opened their program) Yes. (I remember the comments about that) Okay. I tried to tell them. Also, they were not able to sort out, they refused to believe that I am a typical West Virginian, (the media) the media, yes. I gave the

man from the weekend crew a piece of lye soap, homemade lye soap, made with lard, not lard, but with grease, saved from my kitchen. And he couldn't see what I was trying to tell him. In other words, I had kept the mountain art, but because I was articulate, uh, educated, I could not possibly be (typical) typical. And the idea that the people who were objecting to the books were the minority. The real minority in this whole thing were the teachers. (mmm-hmm) (laughing) We were the down-trodden at least. Okay, and then there was, there is a distrust of organized education. The system had been threatening people some how or other. I'm not sure teachers had been doing it, but I used the term educators as a kind of nasty code word, uh, professional educators have intimidated people for too long. And I do not call myself, I never did, an educator, I was a teacher. And I see a difference. Uh, I'm sorry, but I saw a very strong factor, whether it was faced or not, the desire to create a climate for Christian schools. To force people into going to Christian schools in order to keep from functioning. Avis Hill was probably the guiltiest, although there were a lot of others. Uh, now, I'm someone who uh, has nieces and nephews attending Christian schools, I have a nephew who taught in a Christian school, and a niece who taught in a Christian school, not in this state, but in others. So, I am not totally opposed to Christian schools. But I did have a few reservations about it. I also have a few reservations about how Christian are the Christian schools, when the leader of one of them publicly praised that God will strike three board members dead. (you're referring to Charles Quigley, was Avis Hill?) That was Avis Hill (oh, I thought it was Quigley), no, that was Avis Hill. I also had a friend who told me in all seriousness that she had to take real thought to her, the care of her soul, because she had a vision of what Hell would be like. Sharing a rock for eternity with Alice Moore on one side and Avis Hill on the other. It behooves one to tend to the soul! (laughs) I also had a minister who took up running, tell me that he was running for Christians, and my comment is "Christians scare the Hell out of me"! And I mean that that is not a profane statement (I know what you're saying, yeah). And that is exactly what I meant when I said, oh, Lord, the other day, because it was a prayer. I didn't know at the time you asked that whether I could get in this or not. (mmm-hmm) So, Christian schools I think have had...had a positive effect, rightly or wrongly. There was a man down in the Cross Lanes area who came in to operate a Christian school there, I'm not even sure who he was, but he meddled in these summer meetings....

Jim: Well, there was a pastor there that I interviewed, his name was Jim Efaw, Cross Lanes Bible Church, Cross Lanes Christian Academy, I think is the name of his school. But....

Nellie: I don't think that was the one. There was a name of somebody who came in as an organizer down in that area, and he didn't stay. So, he's still there. I'm sure this gentleman is not the one. (okay) Anyway, there was a...a nationally, a discovery of the power of minorities. And we picked up on it very quickley, that minorities have the power to spot things

completely. And this ...we were into the age of violence, and the idea, "I'll get my way or I'll destroy everything". And that was very strong there. Now, I must comment on the, the miner strikes and that kind of thing. That too, I'm taking with a bit more sophistication than some outsiders, because I know that you can walk across a mine entrance with a sign saying "I object to jello", and you'll get a couple of miners to(laughs)...(I agree), I'm sorry, my husband has roots in West Virginia and West Virginia mining, so uh, once again I feel that I could say (sacred ground) no, not really. But...everybody got involved. I mentioned the outside organizations, the Geolers were there early. Now, there was an August meeting uh...August 1975, mass meeting, I'm not sure...it was open somewhere...

Jim: Well, there were two meetings, I think you're talking about held, public meetings, and they were around Labor Day, they were Labor Day type rallies, if you're referring to those, and I think you are. One of them was held in the eastern part of the county, one in the western part of the county, one was in the Campbell's Creek area, one was up near St. Alabans, one was ran by Avis Hill and some of his people, at that one, he was invited, he told me he was invited to that and they spoke and had a big rally. Another ran by Marvin Horan, down in the Campbell's Creek area, another pastor, another preacher, and those two meetings were public rallies. Then they had a big rally. Marvin Horan (Horan) Uh, did I say Horan? (yes, I had to think about that one, I'd forgotten the name) yeah. They had a big rally at Watt Powell Park (Watt Powell, okay), several thousand people were there. (that's the one)

Nellie: One of the members of the textbook committee attended that meeting, and at that meeting, they announced plans to launch this tremendous crusade against the un-Christian forces in Kanawha County, and they were going to put "Christian" in every office in Kanawha County. In other words, this was the, the announcement that this was a political campaign except that we five members of the textbook committee couldn't convince anybody that this was serious.

Jim: You couldn't convince anyone in the school board, you mean?

Nellie: In the school system, in the school board. (speaking simultaenously--inaudible)...this was a serious threat that this was a serious problem that...as back when Mrs. Moore first began holding her rallies in the little churches, we could not convince people that Mrs. Moore was a threat to the school system. She was dangerous.

Jim: Now, you made a statement earlier that Mrs. Moore switched or the emphasis switched from racism in the beginning to Christianity or a Christian movement in the later part of the thing. How did that manifest itself?

Nellie: Between May and June it switched.

Jim: Okay, in between May and June it switched like from racism emphasis, Mrs. Moore objecting to black little boy to the white little girl, so on and so forth, and then in the

Nellie: And objecting to James Baldwin.

Jim: Un-huh, and some of the other black authors, and ethnic things you were attempting (mm-hmm) to teach or asking to teach. Now, how did this anti-Christian or this Christian element get involved? What are some of the ways that this manifested itself? Well, the rally you mentioned, all these people getting together, there were several pastors there.

Nellie: Well, the books had been displayed at all of these churches. That went on May, June, uh, I think the meeting was June 27th, you know, so there were almost two months there involved between the May meeting and the June meeting. (and then in June...) And the uh, listening to the comments and....

END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 2

Nellie: Because Mrs. Moore was the boss. First of all, you can't have people, you have people who will not believe that the boss is set up to destroy the system. But I had heard her say that she wasn't even sure that we ought to have public schools. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: So, based on that idea that she was trying to tear down the structure of the public school system in Kanawha County, you think then she attacked the textbooks for that reason, that's the motive that she had. (mmm-hmm) In attacking textbooks. Well, as this controversy continued on into the winter or fall of 1974, uh, the thing began to kind of die out. It began to kind of get back down to the normal roar, you know, the miners went back to work and people began to go back home and quit picketing and all the rest of that. Uh...what do you think contributed to cooling off? Now, was it just the miners going back to work, was it because the Governor or whoever it was said a 30-day cooling off period must take place? What was it that made the thing start to settle down, do you think?

Nellie: (pause) I think she'd achieved some of what she wanted.

Jim: They removed all of the textbooks, took them out of the schools, you showed me a picture of that, kids turning in their textbooks, and then what was, what happened after they removed all the textbooks?

Nellie: Well, they were...I don't know how long, while these books were out and we worked with other things, and then these textbook review committees were set up. Only on the surface did things get better. For me, the ...the most difficult time was with a meeting of this textbook review committee, which was having public hearings. Has anybody mentioned to you, probably not, the fact that these board meetings became setups, that there were very uh, I can't believe that this happened accidentally, that you'd be

walking down the sidewalk to go to a meeting, and someone would kind of lean in to you with a lighted cigarette. It became very dangerous to move into a meeting. Uh, it was almost as if someone had taught intimidation techniques. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Well, I'm sure there were, I'm convinced in my research there were outside groups who were involved, and I'm sure there was some of that going on.

Nellie: Well, we had, we had Dornon who came (Robert Dornon, yes), Robert Dornon, and (he's now a congressman in California), now a congressman. And uh, we had a march down Kanawha Boulevard, led by Carl McIntyre.

Jim: Now, why would a man like Carl McIntyre, who was a radio preacher, and I don't know him personally, but he has a fairly good reputation. Why would he get involved in something like this? If he didn't really believe that he was doing right, that he was on the side of right and good and all, why would he get involved in something like this? Do you have, oh, I'm asking you to speculate. I know you don't, you don't know, but...

Nellie: No, I don't know, but I do know that Kanawha County became the media place to be (oh, sure). And if you wanted public attention, Kanawha County was the place to come. And once again, the people who were pro-textbook and I hate that phrase, the people who were for a more open education, or were just for education without all the problems, maybe is a better way to put it, a more honest way, they were quiet, because they kept hoping it was going to simmer down. (mmm-hmm) They kept trying to deal with this with logic, with common sense. Just as my, my use of the Bible in several incidents, failed completely, so did any attempt at using logic.

Jim: I think the thing that keeps coming to me is and from my background, I have this training, this idea has been put in my head, the idea that for some reason public education has been perverted, has been up 'til 1974, and still it's continuing, public education has been influenced by secular humanism to the point where teachers are if not directly subtly leading their children, their parents feel or felt at that time, that someone was leading their children, some stranger or teacher or principal, leading their children into some immoral or anti-family, anti-God type of thinking. That I think was a legitimate danger, a legitimate fear in some of these people in Kanawha County. Everything I've researched so far pointed in that direction. People were actually stirred, people would be told that these people are telling your children or teaching your children subtle or direct ways to be against America, to be against God, they compared the fable of uh, Jack and The Beanstalk, with Daniel In the Lion's Den and that's saying that a myth is a, that Daniel In the Lion's Den is just a myth, and it can be compared to a story about Jack and The Beanstalk. That was a fear that these people had. They were afraid that if you taught their children, that Jack and The Beanstalk was on the same level with Daniel In The

Lion's Den, that they would begin to question Daniel In The Lion's Den. That was a fear that...

Nellie: Now, I can answer one of those from... (I'm sorry, I was so... I kind of unloaded on you), no, I... I and that's maybe, maybe what we need to do, to think about. Now, this uh, like this, (yeah, I couldn't make that out), that shows, that's an illustration showing a hand burning a draft card, and this says "Burning of draft card called the Noblest Duty of a Free Citizen". Galaxy series rejected in Texas, accepted in Kanawha County. Uh, this story from which this appears, was a story, it was a letter written by a father to his son who is in the Marine Corps, serving his country, and the father is trying to understand what makes people burn their draft cards. It's a very patriotic thing. It doesn't call, it calls into question people who do burn their draft cards, thinking that this is what their....

Jim: So, it's totally distorted then.

Nellie: It's a literal interpretation of everything.

Jim: Mmm-hmm, that one statement I think is a key statement. A literal interpretation of everything may be a key to understanding some of the fundamentalist attitude because they're very literal minded, apparently. Everything is literal. When the Bible says that uh, a star fell out of Heaven in the book of Revelation and crushed the earth, fell on the earth, they believe that literally was a star. I'm grasping for things here....

Nellie: Well, yeah, I... I... I hate to come off like someone who thinks everybody there was out with some ax to grind because I know there were some who weren't. But then, as they tried to have, tried to get the people who objected to look at books, many of them said there wouldn't be any books that we would agree to.

Jim: Avis Hill told me that. He said, I asked him in my interview with him, I said, Avis, if the, I said, if the school board had said to you, alright, let's sit down and compromise, and they used to have some Wednesday, they had several Wednesday noon time meetings, (oh, I know!) where they would meet and try to iron this thing out, and I said, Avis, what did you want? He said, all the textbooks had to go, every, that's the only thing that made us happy. Well, that was his statement.

Nellie: Well, I read something uh... I had it here somewhere, uh, Larry Freeman, wait a minute, no, that's not the one. (by the way) He said, if any member of the committee had an ounce of human decency, they could never have selected the books. That was not what I was looking for, though.

Jim: Now, who said that?

Nellie: Larry Freeman.

Jim: Who was he?

Nellie: He was a business man, I'd gone to college with him, but uh, that was not, I had a quotation, not Larry Freeman, Nick Staton (Nick Staton), Nick Staton was the one. And Larry Freeman...Nick Staton said that if any citizen had an objection to any book, that book had to be removed.

Jim: Didn't he later become superintendent of schools?

Nellie: No, he became a congressman (oh, yes, yes, you're right), but he, now remember that I told you that this was a political thing, and he was one who emerged after this with his political ax to grind.

Jim: He made the statement that if one...one citizen (one citizen had an objection)...

Nellie: Now, see, one of the things that had always been made perfectly clear was that if you had an objection to your child seeing this, we will not teach your child from this material. We'll go, there are many ways (yes, that's been stated, yes) to teach. Over and over again, but you don't have a right to keep my child from it. And I'll fight for that right. (mmm-hmm) One of the crazy things that emerged from this, I told you about my background (mmm-hmm), I did consider myself a fundamental Christian. (mmm-hmm) I thought I was what was called a fundamental. I discovered I wasn't, you know. (laughs)

Jim: And you weren't necessarily taken aback by these books. You felt they were perfectly legitimate, perfectly right for the school system, and so on. As a fundamental Christian.

Nellie: Yes, because, yes, because I see that often it is in a matter of interpretation, and I know how carefully most teachers deal with things which are sacred to people, how not to change. I don't think I'm putting my attitudes on other people. I have seen teachers handle what would be sensible material without causing damage to someone's beliefs. (mm-hmm) And I know that it happened at my school, and I don't believe that my school is the only school where good teachers taught carefully. You know, I'm that foolish. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Well, that's interesting and that's the kind of thing that helps me understand....

Nellie: I taught a course called "Great Books", and in this we dealt with the Bible. We used Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs. (mmm-hmm) And we had Jewish students, we had all sorts of uh, Christian beliefs. A couple of times I had Hindu (mmmh) or some other, and always we would deal with whatever version of the Bible that particular student happened to have, and if it was a question of Theology that came up in the discussion, always I would say, go to your priest, go to your minister, go to your rabbi, because these would come up. (mmm-hmm) And....

Jim: You're saying it's not the position of, it's not the job of public education to uh, to influence or to teach religion. (no, it isn't) Yeah.

Nellie: Nor to change it.

Jim: Do you feel like the textbook people, the anti, and I know you don't like that term, but I....(that's about all I know to do)...that's all I use because that's all I know to call 'em. The anti-textbook people uh, were trying to censor, do you feel they were actually trying to censor...to dictate what would be taught in the public schools?

Nellie: Oh, there was no question of it. That's what they were doing.

Jim: They were censors, in other words. (un-huh) And they were trying, what do you think they were trying to accomplish in all of this? Or is that too broad a question?

Nellie: That's too broad a question, and you're asking me to get into the minds of someone I had enough difficulty understanding (mmm-hmm), because always when thinking people would approach this, they would assume that you could just offer logical explanations. And they would work. That logic did not appeal, logic did not work to the, the hardcore protestors. Uh, (there were...) in other words, you wouldn't say, we can, if you object to your child using this particular book or these selections in it, we don't see any particular problem because we constantly use a number of selections. Uh...we'll be happy to make it work for your child, without any kind of exclusion or banishment. And I told you early about how I taught english in groups, and it was no problem. But that didn't work. (mmm-hmm) You know, it...short of throwing everything out and starting over again with McCuffey's Reader.

Jim: Would that have been objectionable to you? Starting with McCuffey's Reader?

Nellie: (laughs) In Adam's fall, we sinned all!

Jim: Well, that's what some people were asking. (yeah, I know there were) If you throw all the textbooks...and let's go back to basics. Now, that was a big cry during the time, we want to get back to the basics, we want to get back to readin', writin' and 'rithmetic.

Nellie: And that is something that infuriated me because I never left the basics. You know....

Jim: Yeah, yeah, so in your mind you were still teaching, I know it's time, (I've got to go), you were still teaching reading, writing and arithmetic....

END OF SIDE 2 - TAPE 2

KCTC.10C - TAPE #3

KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Nellie Teaford Wood

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 19, 1985

Jim: Alright, this is tape #3 of a continuing interview with Mrs. Nell Wood. This interview is being conducted in her home on March the 19th, 1985. And uh, this, the interviewee is Mrs. Wood, of course, interviewer is Jim Deeter, history student at Marshall University and this particular interview is a continuing interview on the Kanawha Valley Textbook Controversy in 1974 and '75. Mrs. Wood was chairman of the textbook selection committee and a teacher, english teacher in Kanawha County during that time. So we're just gonna pick up Nell, from where we left off last time and let you continue with your comments and what all.

Nellie: All right. The material that I had last time that I dealt with was material I had stored in a room upstairs. It was all material that I had carried with me throughout the country as I spoke to teachers' groups and other organizations about what had happened in Kanawha County. In the time since we've talked, Saturday afternoon, and all day yesterday, and some of the time this morning, I've been going back through all the material I've had, re-reading, organizing, uh, frankly remembering some of the things that I've forgotten, clarifying some of the points. Now, I did try to organize this material so that I would, would save time. One of the things we talked about before was the May 16th meeting, and so I'd like to begin with that. One of the things that happened there and I wasn't sure on Friday when we last talked, I referred to a selection but it was a poem, it was a poem by E.E. Cummings that Mrs. Moore asked me to read. I had not been able to find it. (mmm-hmm) I did find a letter written to me by Mrs. Sally Cody, -no, it's actually, she sent me one letter and then gave me a copy of a letter she wrote to uh, Mr. Ken Solving, who was a member of the Board of Education, in which she refers to that. And I would like to read it. (okay)

Reading from letter:

I was so thankful that Mr. Stansbury finally read the E.E. Cummings poem. No teacher is going to spend the afternoon studying that poem with a group of 4th graders. And that tells me it was from level four of Interaction, the level that was for advanced high school students. But I do want that 12th grade seminar to discover Cummings wrote about little lame balloon men in the park, and that he also wrote about sexual intercourse, which he found pleasurable. His poem was not obscene. The one I found tucked into a textbook last week written by an 8th grader, was. The letter is interesting because Mrs. Cody was the teacher that I referred to uh, who helped me get into it. She also refers to another selection. Do you remember the scene from the play set during the depression in which Mrs. Moore objected to the word damn? We did discuss that. I couldn't remember the author's name. It was Pirry Thomas and I have not been able to find it. I did find the manual for that book (mmm-hmm), in which I'll look through. I remembered that the thing that upset the father so much, was that he had not been able to get a job, he had fought working for the WPA, but he finally did get a job when war came and he was so upset that it was war, that finally brought him to have work. And Mrs. Cody goes on, "I need a scene such as that to show the girl in the expensive pantsuit that not all fathers come

home from work in Lincoln, and that there was a time in the history of our country that caused a frustrated father, backed against a cold wall, to say damn. And I did have Mrs. Moore's letter to the board, or to the Gazette, in which she refers to that. "At the last board meeting I asked one of the teachers who selected the books to read a poem aloud. Her obvious embarrassment and repeated refusals to read such a poem to an adult audience should be sufficient cause for alarm". I also have my letter in answer to that. (a letter to the editor?) That was a letter to the editor. I also wrote a letter to the editor on June 10th, in which I repeated that phrase. I found it odd that Mrs. Moore could interpret as obvious embarrassment. My refusal was both lengthy and explicit. The point at issue was a refusal to extract isolated examples without examining the total context. I explained I would not read out of context from the King James version of the Bible: 1 Samuel 25:22, 2 Kings 98, Isaiah 36:12, or Isaiah 57:3. My explanation for the refusal to read these passages was not that they contained expressions which might offend some, but that they were not the message of the Bible. Focusing on them would obscure the message. Then I quoted specific verses from both the Old and New Testament sources, to illustrate the total content and it's importance, as opposed to isolated excerpts. The parallel of such an examination of the Bible to such an examination of the textbooks was apparent to me. I'm sorry it was not so to Mrs. Moore. My refusal to read was not from embarrassment but from a need to examine the total program before dissection of minute parts. I'm going into this because it seems to be that this was the position in which I found myself constantly during the textbook controversy. Always under attack, rarely being accurately quoted or even accurately represented in the press. Always having to go back and defend again. Now, I have the new stories from that May 16th meeting, and I have commented on those, in that particular time, you remember that I said, there the emphasis was on racism (mmm-hmm), you asked and it was only later that it switched to uh, (religion?) religion. And you asked me how I could support that, and it's very difficult. But I can do it. Uh, for myself I made notes at the time, and uh, one of the stories says, quotes Mrs. Moore, "I'm asking you to show me something pro-America". Mrs. Moore told the members of the selection committee, who were at the meeting to explain their books, selection of books. I'm not asking for something anti-black but we've got to have something from both sides. I want to see something patriotic in those books. And I was so proud of my perfectly calm answer at that meeting, because I said, "Would the Declaration of Independence do"? And picked up the basic text for junior english and show how it included the Declaration of Independence. But you see there's no reference there, there was never a reference in the paper, at that particular meeting. And even when she talks about something anti-Black, remember I told you she violently objected to James Baldwin (mmm-hmm), and yet the article from James Baldwin says, "I love America more than any other country in the world, and for exactly that reason I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually". And uh, all the way through, that's the type of thing. And since I'm talking about that May 16th meeting, I want

to make a couple more points about it. I did suggest that I ask for a tape of that meeting and it was not available, and I have cultivated selective _____ . (laughs)

Jim: I think we all do that.

Nellie: I told you that in order, and in the time since you have left, I had purposely tried to remember everything. And it occurred to me, after I read some of these notes on that meeting, that what she had implied was a kind of payoff that we had been _____ in some way, we had been paid off, and that was the statement that I had wanted, an actual reference....

Jim: Oh, I see, she was accusing the textbook publishers of paying you off to buy their textbooks.

Nellie: In order that we would (buy their books) buy their books. Now, I would like to go back and repeat very carefully how the books were selected. And I told you, I saved paper in our opening remarks and I was, I was surprised how much I had. I even have my calendar for that time, which shows exactly how the textbook study operated. This is my calendar provided by Kanawha County schools for 1973, 1974, and I recorded notes in it for very brief details of what I was doing in every class, as well as the meetings I had to attend and that sort of thing. And you'll notice that the first meetings occurred in October 23, 24, 25, at the board office from 4-7 each day. And I had, for some reason, maybe because I do think I'm logical, recorded all the textbook meetings in red. And then we met for two days uh, in November, the 1st and the 2nd, from 8:30 to 3:30, and as we go on you can see those meetings in red here, here, here and I did count those. We had 13 full days at the board office. These were days where we met 7 hours each, from 8:30 to 3:30 and then we had 11-3 hour days, making a total of 124 hours spent in the discussion phase, and then this was simply to go over what we'd done outside there. Uh, I have the form that was used, the Kanawha County form for evaluating a textbook. If you wish one, you may have that. I have extra copies. I have original material given to me by a textbook, and all members of the committee, by a textbook publishing company, their basic background material, I even found page after page of handwritten notes as I went through these meetings, where the representatives of the textbook committee, I mean the textbook publishers presented their books and then I had notes when I read the books, and notes as we discussed them.

Jim: Well, it's obvious to me, looking at this material, I know you have a lot of it here, that you all spent many, many hours determining what kind of books, what the books should teach and all the rest of that, why couldn't the uh, why couldn't the people who were objecting to these books understand that it was more than just arbitrarily deciding to buy the Heath Series or whatever.

Nellie: They didn't want to. That and the ex, the explanations were made over and over and over again. Now, let's, let's go back. The accusation was made that young teachers, I read it some

of the newspaper things, young, inexperienced teachers picked the books. This is something that was prepared, it's my only copy but it's very interesting. It lists the names of the 24 sub-committee members and the 5 members of the committee, where they taught, the number of years teaching, the experience, the type of degree they had, and the number of children. There was also the implication that we knew nothing about children. (mmm-hmm) There were 213 years of teaching experience. The shortest number of years were 3, the most were 30. Six of us had only our AB's, a bachelor's degree plus additional, 11 had their masters degree, 23 children and a half, I think. Again, that was something and we kept hearing it over and over again, even L.T. Anderson, who wrote for the Gazette as an editorial writer, never got that point. Now, I wanted to repeat something that I said that I want to make sure won't be misunderstood. When I told you we had a random sampling of Interaction, that one series (oh, yes), uh, because I don't want somehow or other a minor statement to in any way undermine the number of hours that we spent preparing. First of all, we are readers, I still read, sometimes 10-15 books a week. I am a phenomenal reader, many english teachers are, and I have a rather remarkable memory for anything that I read. And I know a lot of english teachers who do that. I have always read widely, because I've always made an effort to teach students on all levels, so that I had some who are remedial students, along with some of the advanced, which means I have to read the kinds of things that would lure reluctant readers, as well as the great works of literature. Maybe it means that my mind is just a mish-mash of nothing, but I do read voraciously. (mmm-hmm) And we did read those books. We divided them up in the 5 member textbook committee, we had 2 elementary teachers, 1 basically taught 7th and 8th graders, I remember the other taught 9th graders. In the 2 senior high, one taught 10th and 11th, I was basically a senior level teacher. And then of course, we did as we looked at the books, each examine our level for sure, but we also examined others and we were looking at a series...we had, we tried to have at least two people look at every book. And then when we got together to discuss, we laid them out and talked about them, and all of us looked a part of the time at some of the books.

Jim: So you're familiar with books, basically books from every area?

Neillie: From every area. And we, we really did it, that's the only thing I can say. (mmm-hmm) And I did have here something else, this is a list of the books and I did tell you that the removing, the books I thought was a mistake, and I remembered something (un-huh), one of the books removed was from uh, a McGraw Hill series...I don't know how much cord I have here...(you're just about out), okay, if you'll go get it, I'll show you, because I have books from the level that I want to talk about. (see if you can reach it now), okay. I once again laid these out so we could look at them. (okay) This is McGraw Hill's series (turning pages), and I don't know what the series is called, but one of the books which was removed was here. One of the books in the series is called The Bible of Literature, one was called The Comic

zirconium, heroes, and the perfect plays, one was the classical Heritage, I do have that, Crime and Detection, one on science fiction, one on short stories. The book that was removed was Hero, Anti-Hero, and I can remember at the time the specific objection to that that one of the board members had was a story by Richard Wright from Black Boy, and it was felt that the language in that selection was uh, a little bit offensive. It was black english and there was some profanity. But also, in that particular book were a lot of ...fabulous stories about heroes. And uh, nobody ever uses all the selections and all the books and I think that's one of the things that I wanted to point out, because we had so many books, because we had so many kinds of classes. Some schools like Herbert Hoover and maybe DuPont were already having courses, maybe one called "Classical Literature", maybe one called "The Bible of Literature", maybe a course called "Hero, Anti-Hero", whatever. But we needed a lot of these books and a lot of them had already been in the county, being used for these many classes, as they were called. Now, I do think the many classes bothered a lot of people. Because english classes were not looking like they used to.

Jim: Now, let me stop you there for a moment. You say many classes, now these are classes for special students?

Nellie: No, many classes, I mean the 9 weeks, the semester courses, dividing up the english program into not the straight one-hour english class in which you study a little bit of grammar and a little bit of writing and a little bit of literature and a little bit of spelling, where you lump it all in one class and call it english. (mmm-hmm) They might be having a class in Shakespearean Comedy or Shakespearean Tragedy. In other words, it may be the high school curriculum looked a lot more like college curriculum. And it excited a lot of kids. One of the ironies was that the so-called progressive schools, George Washington for example, had the more traditional courses while the outlying schools like Hoover and DuPont were going into these 9 weeks semester courses. And that might have made a difference.

Jim: You think that's why some of the people got upset or were a little bit cautious of those, that type of approach to teaching, because it departed from the norm, because it was unusual?

Nellie: Yes. I did, I do have only two of those books from the Interaction series. And uh, I had, I even had a list where I marked, and it was only in level four that we had the random sampling. That's another thing that I wanted to say. We had examined totally levels one and/or levels two and three, and it was in level four, the advanced level for high school students that we had a random sampling. And again, these are one on limericks and one on _____. Kids love them, kinds of poetry and they help to teach a particular concept. Now, one of the things we had trouble, and Mrs. Cody referred to it in her letter there, a few minutes in a classroom would be all something would be given, but it was made to appear a major time element. Already in Kanawha County we were using in the elementary schools the Holt

Reading and the Economy Reading. We had a reading program, the communicating book that I showed you in there (yes) was a language book, in other words, to teach writing, uh, grammar uh, even speech, which is a language activity, and we've done a great deal of work in the last 20 years in ...insisting that all students have speech activities, because to graduate someone from high school who was not able to speak with a group, before a group, is a crime. And we were making sure that speech activities were involved early. One of the things people objected to. I have a paper here that explains how those books were laid side by side, the Holt Reading, and the communicating to see how one supplemented the other. How a lesson in Holt Reading could be supplemented in, by communicating, how they used the same terminology for grammar, you know, grammar terms have gone through 3 or 4 cycles. But to call a thing by the same name helped and how communicating would be used to teach the language portion and to supplement. The idea that communicating was going to be the only reading book the students saw was over and over emphasized when it was in addition to. I'm talking so fast because I'm trying to get it all in. I'm sorry.

Jim: No. Another thing that came to my mind as we were talking, I think we would up towards the end of our discussion last week, I questioned you about people who kept crying for "let's get back to the basics", reading, writing, arithmetic and your comment was if I recall, that's what we were doing.

Nellie: Yes, I had, you know, I made a list of things I wanted to say and I had said that it was not a progressive selection. Uh, we, it was not forsaking grammar, the whole program was the strongest grammar program available. It was called "Language", though, we referred to it not as grammar but as "Language Arts". It was the strongest writing program that had ever been given in the county. Because always you can't teach people to write in a vacuum, you have to write about something. And we were generating writing exercises from the reading, from the discussion, even the discussions in the language books in the elementary level, which parents so objected to, are the things which gets students to write.

Jim: What were they objecting to in the elementary....?

Nellie: To ask a kid a question. Uh, one story, a marvelous Jesse Stewart story, called A Penny's Worth of Character got a terrible review in the press. A boy named Shane somehow or other cheat's a grocer out of a penny, and it just worries him to death. And he's aware it's only a penny, but he is as guilty as if he had cheated the man out of a million dollars. And that's the point of the story. You don't cheat someone out of a penny. And over and over again we talked about that's why the kid's question "is it ever wrong to steal?" is one of the questions that is asked in that book. (Mmm-hmm) Well, Shane would have said yes, it's wrong to steal. It's wrong to steal a penny. (mmm-hmm) And...

Jim: So they were objecting to the book or the story...

Nellie: The story saying by the fact that the question is asked that we were teaching children to be dishonest. And you know, (laughs)...

Jim: It's hard to imagine how you could teach a....

Nellie: The mind just, just reels because what was under attack basically was the very foundation of teaching itself. In other words, how do we teach? I have a basic foundation in the socratic method of teaching. I was teaching great books at the time, and Plato's Republic was one of the books, and I have learned that much happened in classes when I shut up or when I ask a question and then listened and drew things out of kids and learned that uh, a nod or an eyebrow lifted was a response to be called upon, to be treated as something that was a part of the learning experience. (mmm-hmm) And so, I was tongue-tied. I still am, by the lack of understanding of what teaching is. And what became finally a major attack on all of the principles of education. In other words, how do we teach, what is teaching all about.

Jim: Is it possible this controversy is just that, or was just that? Uh, it was an arena to attack and do damage to the way we educate our children in those days. Do you think that, this controversy was that?

Nellie: Yes, because I think, and I think over and over again, and I have notes that say it, that it was basically a question on what is the purpose of schools. Is the purpose of the schools to teach a kid to think, or is the purpose of the school to indoctrinate? Now I have been conscious I would say, I have been conscious for the last 10 years of my teaching, preceding this textbook excitement, that the students I was teaching had to be somehow equipped to deal with the 20th Century.

Jim: Were they not being equipped before, let's say in the 1970's? Were they not equipped to deal with the 20th Century in the '60's?

Nellie: I don't know. I certainly don't think they were equipped to deal with change. And the parents I was seeing were if anything, the strongest indictment on the failure of the school system in this country, in that state, in West Virginia, because we had failed to prepare 30 years earlier, or 20 years earlier, those students for the '70's and '80's. They had struggled through the '60's and somehow or another had not come out whole. And what we were seeing in the protestors was the failure of the school. And....

END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 3

Nellie: ...I thought half the time, I was living in a Salvador Dali surrealist painting. You've seen that picture of the essence of time in which a clock is ...(oh, yes, yes)...it was, it was surrealist. If it hadn't happened to me, I would not have believed it. And trying to ...trying to deal honestly and

lovingly and carefully with the protestors was something that called for more patience than I had ever known and I was angry too, at what was happening to the way they were treated in the National Press. I was angry too, because I felt that we were all made less than we were by ...I have a couple of articles here, they make, that's what you brought back. Oh, here's one for example, the Appalachia Creekers literally a world apart. And here's a protestor holding signs saying, "Even hillbillies have constitutional rights". And here's another, that was I don't even know what paper it's from. Here's one from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, "West By God Virginia Fight Books", and all through here there are all of those smug, supercilious looking down their noses.

Jim: So you felt they were unfair to both sides.

Nellie: Yes, I..I felt they were making a circus of the protestors. Thereby, arousing their anger because they were serious, uh, they also played to the media and picked up their clues on how to behave, how to create a media...but at the same time there was genuine anger at being misunderstood. Now, I think when it, when it came time for the outside media to take sides, I think they took the sides of the protestors, because it's difficult to love the schools. Everybody has a gripe against some teacher somewhere. Most often english teachers. (laughing)

Jim: I have fond memories of my english teachers as a matter of fact.

Nellie: Well, you're a fortunate man.

Jim: Yeah, (speaking simultaneously--inaudible)...Mrs. Phipps, I'll never forget her.

Nellie: Back to this thing of needing to prepare students, I was conscious always of the responsibility of the english language to historically, the english language has adapted to change. It is a world language, because it is not a sterile language. It has changed, it has been corrected, if you will. But by the same token, it's capacity for change, it's crazy spelling has been it's, some of it's strength, the fact that we will borrow from anybody to combine words have made english, have helped to make english a world language. And one of the things this was doing was to help people to understand that a language helps to shape the way we think, because we think in a language, we think automatically in english in opposites, because our language is set up that way. We structure our sentences in two ways. We do a compound, because compounding is a part of the basic nature of english, and we do a series. In fact, if we try to teach people how to be articulate writers and speakers, we want them to study the King James version of the Bible. Not just for it's uh, but for the structure of language. Proverbs has the compounding and the triplets. Examine any great speaker, any great political speaker, Lincoln, Churchill and you will see this combination of compounding and series. You will see the magic of the english

language in it's use of short, strong words with a few bigger words thrown in for emphasis. All of these things you have to learn by studying language as a language. You have to learn about _____ and that kind of thing, by examining them. And that was a series which Mrs. Moore objected to. The Language of Man and the Literature of Man were two of the series.

Jim: If I might play the devil's advocate for a moment, and I'm not comfortable playing that part, but I want to...(that's all right, I'll fight)...uh, why and how excuse, how can teaching students in an english class the street language of black's enhance of the understanding of what you're, what you just got done telling me. How can that help?

Nellie: Alright, let me start by saying where did you get the idea that anywhere in this series we taught the street language of blacks?

Jim: Okay, you mentioned the series a minute ago, a little while ago uh, of something that used black, I'm not sure what you used, black language, black uh...(I was quoting Mrs. Moore)...oh, is that what you were doing? I'm sorry, I misunderstood you there. (Nellie laughing)

Nellie: Okay, now, but now you see, that was one of the things that happened, because there is some street language. Let's go to this communicating, whoops, what did I do to this? If I can find the article, here from this is the 3rd grade book, there's something on dialects that talks about the fact that informal language doesn't communicate. Take this in informal language and put it in standard english because that doesn't work.

Jim: Now, let me make sure I'm clear on this. You're, what you're saying the book says is that formal, informal language does not communicate (inaudible)...(that's right). Formal language does, so if I'm gonna communicate with someone in a letter, let's say I want to write someone a letter, that's gonna be formal, I won't use the word that I might use standing on the street talking to someone, is that what you're saying?

Nellie: That's right, and this is what I'm talking about. One book here is called levels of language. Uh, kidtalk, folk talk, and it uh, deals with uh, Carl Sandburg talking about the way kids spoke to one another and uh, the way they shared their particular language. Then another is and this is the reference you, you said Mrs. Moore referred to something, this is from the book Division Street America, and it's all informal language. And

Jim: In other words, this story, this article is informal language.

Nellie: It is about informal language (about informal language) okay, about informal language. And Studs Tirkel, Division Street America was the one I tried to remember the name, and he has recorded a number of people just what they said, how they talked

and the exercise here we read it in class and listen and what those, the way this person talks, tell us about him. In other words, our informal speech uh, this one, I don't notice the world, I'm very bored, I really don't know how I feel, and this was something Mrs. Moore objected...she totally missed the point of using the exercise that when we speak, we communicate ourselves and show ourselves and if we talk in this informal language, we ...in this lazy speech, we are showing a side of ourselves that we need to know we're showing. And in this unit, we also have formal language, Winston Churchill's Dunkirke's Speech. Now, you're going to do better than that? And Abraham Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby. Formal language and ____ Evans, who was an authority on language in this country had something called "Now Everyone is Hip About Slang", in which he discusses slang in this area. And there is an article about police language from the New York Times, that deals with Argot, the language that is used to confuse other people. It is the esoteric language that any group uses to keep other people out, whether it's the police, whether it's a group of steel workers, every profession, every job has it's own language that is known to the initiated. And then there's an article by Judith Kaplan, called Catch Phrases Don't Communicate. (okay, so...) There was one on Gobbledigook. But the whole point is we must speak standard language, we must speak standard english, in order to communicate.

Jim: Okay, well, the, I think the point that Alice Moore made, I wasn't there, I'm totally removed and again, I'm playing the devil's advocate, but it appears to me what they're, Alice Moore may have been saying in her protest, and the protestors was why do we need all of this material? Why not just teach our kids basic english, how to spell, how to write, how to construct a sentence and a paragraph, and what all, a whole, and why do we need all this to help them be better at what they're doing? Isn't that the question they were asking? (no) No?

Nellie: No. It would have been easier if that had been it. But it wasn't. It was the idea of looking at anything literally, and saying because this article is in there, you're gonna teach that (you're gonna teach that) you're teaching somebody to be like that (that's obvious), you're teaching them to speak like that.

Jim: You really think they believed that you were taking those books and ...and holding them up before a class and saying, I'm gonna teach you, this is the way you ought to talk. You ought to use this, you ought to be this way, do you really think they believed that? Or the philosophy...maybe they thought it was a subtle philosophy.

Nellie: Over and over and over again I heard charges that I had difficulty believing. One of the things that I heard is Mrs. Moore may be uh, wrong, she may be doing a lot of harm but she is sincere.

Jim: I've heard that everywhere I've gone, by the people I've talked to.

Nellie: (laughing) I'm sorry, I...I began to question some of that sincerity after awhile, because I couldn't believe that anyone could be that naive, and do that much harm and that much damage, in the name of sincerity.

Jim: She admitted to several people, I'm told, that she was uneducated, that she had not been beyond high school, and that she knew nothing of educational philosophies of material and she tried to get outside help and did get outside help from Norma and Mel Gabler from Texas and other people uh, to try to help her understand more. So, obviously she was not a person who was well versed in this material. I'm just wondering in my own mind and I'm speaking out loud, thinking out loud, that maybe she was naive, I'm suggesting maybe she was more naive than you give her ...than you give her credit for, if that's a good way to put it. Maybe you can react to that.

Nellie: I don't, you're entitled to your opinion, I have difficulty believing it. Uh...I felt rather that it was more a well-thought out plan. She looked at The America Reads series uh, have here incidentally, notes from those books. Remember that we talked about the prayer meeting type meetings that began in May (yes), I have here three pages of notes made by (Now those are the meetings Alice Moore attended) yes (and spoke) spoke at.

Jim: Then you had someone from your area.

Nellie: One of the members of the textbook committee (oh), Elaine Carr, one of the five members attended one of those meetings, and took these notes. (May I see that?) Uh, yes. Now, England and Literature is the Scott Foresman basic theory that's been around as long as I have known, it's been one of the uh, adopted series. It had been in Kanawha County for a number of years. She could look at that, the books that was going to be the basic literature series and I have quotations here, she says there is nothing uplifting in them. These are the books that have from the medieval period, the anglo-saxon period, the traditional _____ (these are english literature), english literature, mm-hmm. Canturbury Tales, Sir Thomas Mallory, from the Elizabethian Age, the Shakespearian Sonnet, Sir Thomas uh, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare sonnets, The Taming of the Shrew, MacBeth, the 17th Century, the Metaphysical Poets, John Dunn, his Holy Sonnets, Death Be Not Proud....

Jim: You know, as you read those, I, all those sound familiar because I read some of them in high school and later in college and I've read them, so, I think it's obvious these have been used in high school and....

Nellie: Milton on his blindness (well, John Milton...) (speaking simultaneously--inaudible) God does not need either man's worth nor...

Jim: And they were object, or she just said that series was not uplifting, is that what she was saying?

Nellie: There was nothing uplifting in the basic series, and here's the junior book, I mentioned the uh, (20th Century American Literature?) well, yes. It starts out with William Bradford and John Smith and Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather. Cotton Mather?! (laughing)

Jim: And they were objecting to these.

Nellie: And the founders of the nation, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Payne, Thomas Jefferson....

Jim: Well, it's obvious, it's obvious well I shouldn't say obvious, it's apparent that someone some, some, this group was just not informed or they were just misinterpreting everything that they looked at, because you know, I can't sit here and believe for a moment that I could take that book and I'm sure I could go through that book and find things that might be offensive to me, but....

Nellie: She called the basic series the worse ones of all.

Jim: Now, the basic series, the ones we just talked about?

Nellie: The ones I just mentioned some of the selections.

Jim: What was her reasons?

Nellie: She explained that the material had hidden and subtle meaning to corrupt the minds of the students. (I'd have a hard time with that, but I don't want to make) I had a hard time with it, too, but I just, I wanted you to know that when I say these things (yeah), I'm now, here, on the language of man, she uh, (she says ghetto language), she referred to informal language and informal language. She said in reference to these I want to point out that these are not literature books but language books. I don't think the teachers read the books. (well, let's...) Okay.

Jim: Let's uh, if we might, just spend the next few moments...do you have any other things you wanted to bring to my attention, or...for history's sake?

Nellie: Yes, for history's sake, yes. (okay) For history's sake, every time an adult with any kind of open mind sat down with these books and read them all the way through, there was an overwhelming response of praise. For example, Charles Lobe, who was a lawyer in Charleston, asked me for a series or went to the board office and said I want to read a whole series from cover to cover. He took the language of man series, the ones Mrs. Moore was attacked so violently, took them home in the evening and read them from cover to cover. I got a call from him the next morning, at 7 o'clock. He said, I went to college and then went to Yale and I have learned more overnight than I learned in all my college courses. What can I do to help? I want to point that out, because he was Jewish, and became very much upset. I have two

copies of things you may not see, but these he picked up at a Klu Klux Klan meeting at Richer Creek. He was a little bit leary about going, but he got a press pass and went and this calls for the right to monitor all classroom activities, sit in on all classwork, anything that is un-American, anti-Christian or immoral, resist all attempts to destroy their future, some of the disgusting filth of the media, ABC, NBC and CBS are run by Jews, heavy black-type bold face. The eye of the nation is upon you, the feds know that Kanawha County is inhabited by righteous, God-fearing Americans, and on....

Jim: Well, that's a typical reactionary literature. I...you see that, I think, at any, at any place where there are protests, there's the one in Greensboro, North Carolina 2 or 3 years ago, and there were in Alabama in the 1960's.

Nellie: We tried to point out that any parent, no parent would be turned away with a request that he did not want his child to read particular material. We also tried to point out that there would be no embarrassment because as we often had multiple assignments, read one of these three selections, not all three, but read one and then the groups that read that one would discuss that one selection with a teacher and in some way relate that to the student. And so we did have a form for reconsideration of a book. That was there, that was always pointed out and explained to parents how we would use it. These are copies of petitions of different organizations for the book. Now, the most important thing I have for you, that happened in September with the textbook review committee. Do you know anything much about that?

Jim: Well, uh, basic knowledge, but I don't know all the details. I mean uh, I know that when they, in September's when they began to work at Creed, Creed Warehouse, is that correct? They began to take committees, each board member, if I'm correct, had the right to appoint certain numbers, a certain number, three I think it was, people, to a selection committee that would go up to the Creed Warehouse in the evening and they would review the textbooks and make recommendations for

Nellie: And teachers were invited to go along and be there and answer questions. We had no voice, we did not speak unless we were called upon and asked a question. The first selection that was reviewed was The Dynamics of Language, it was overwhelmingly uh, accepted. See, here are the votes on those. In The Dynamics of Language, 11 voted for it, 6 were opposed and one abstained. And it was the Galaxy, 10 for for, there were no opposing votes. What I have here are all the...the notes of those meetings. I developed a technique for surviving. If I couldn't talk, and by then I couldn't crochet, because it appeared rude, I'd write. So I took notes on everything that everybody said. My notes are better than the minutes of the meeting. Because I have the comments that were made. (I might like to see those, I'd like to maybe copy those, if I could) Alright. I will let you copy the official ones, I won't let you copy my handwritten notes for reasons. I mean, I'd be glad to go over them with you (okay), but

and why, what was to have been a private meeting became a public meeting and the people who were on the committee, those citizens who were there, who also felt their lives were in danger, were livid! There was no state police protection. Mr. _____ said that he had been assured there would be. We could not get the police detachment on the phone, because I went personally to the phone to try to see...

Jim: You had no protection at all?

Nellie: ...no protection at all, except our own strength of character. (mmm-hmm) And...

Jim: How did that meeting end? Was it...did it just finally end and they went home?

Nellie: They listened to the people, no! That's one of the things that you can ...you can give the people credit for, that it did not...I mean, we stayed until 10 o'clock. We heard the 10 people but we listened to the screaming and the yelling and the standing ovation of maybe four or five hundred people as the speaker's spoke. And I marked them here...uh

Jim: This was a meeting where people would come on both sides and air their views to you in the committee, right?

Nellie: They were, they were uh, to have 10 speakers from either side, and they...all they had to do was to write in and there was a committee of the uh, the review committee to look at them. And over and over again uh, there were those things which happened which should not have happened, because somebody in authority was giving in to violence. It was as if this was the tip of the almost like the kind of violence we're seeing from the uh, the uh...protestors in uh, Lebanon and Syria. It's that kind of thing in this country. This was...this was the initial thrust there. This was the opening thrust of the kind of thing that we're seeing of bombing abortion clinics, which is the thing you mentioned. You know, if I can't get them to change, I will destroy. Now, the Board of Education office was bombed, (yes), a school was bombed, maybe two. A school bus was stopped by men who said we have these barrels of dynamite, or the barrels of gasoline and dynamite and if you don't turn back we'll blow up the ...a school bus with kids on it. Now, is it any wonder that people were afraid? (sure) The...and yet I think, I think that was the ...something happened to me, you see, that was about September 25th, something like that, and...

END OF SIDE 2 - TAPE 3.



ORAL HISTORY

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, Nellie Teaford Wood, the undersigned,
of Ashland, County of Boyd, State
of Kentucky, grant, convey, and transfer
to the James E. Morrow Library Associates, a division of
The Marshall University Foundation, INC., an educational and
eleemosynary institution, all my right, title, interest, and
literary property rights in and to my testimony recorded on
March 19, 1985, to be used for scholarly
purposes, including study and rights to reproduction.

- ntw (initial) Open and usable immediately.
- (initial) Open and usable after my review.
- (initial) Closed for a period of _____ years.
- (initial) Closed for my lifetime.
- (initial) Closed for my lifetime unless special permission is gained from me or my assigns.

DATE March 19, 1985

Nellie Teaford Wood
(Signature - Interviewee)

3509 Morgan Avenue
(Address)
Ashland, KY 41101

DATE _____

[Signature]
(Signature - Witness)

Wood, Nellie Teaford
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KCTC.10A - TAPE #1
KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Nellie Teaford Wood

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 15, 1985

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Jim: This tape is an interview being conducted on March 15th in Ashland, Kentucky with Mrs. Nell or Nellie Wood, is that correct Ms. Wood? (yes) Mrs. Wood was a teacher in Kanawha County, West Virginia during the 1974-75 textbook, Kanawha County Textbook Controversy. And this interview is being conducted for historical research for a thesis on that particular controversy. The interviewer is Jim Deeter, student at Marshall. This tape is for historical research at Marshall University in the history department. That being said, Mrs. Wood, let me begin by ...you've already told me a lot about your background. Just briefly again thumbnail sketch about your background.

Nellie: Alright. I grew up in southern West Virginia in Mullins, in Wyoming County, where I lived from the time I was three until I was about twenty-four. I went to West Virginia schools. My degree being from Concord College, Athens, West Virginia, with some work at West Virginia University the summer I was married. Uh...I was brought up in a Baptist church in a small town environment where the church and the home were the most important elements of our background. We were the Sunday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night kind of attendees at church. And uh, being a Christian, a born-again Christian was as much a part of life as breathing. Every decision in life was made in terms of how it affected our Christian life. Anyone I dated knew that he was going to see me at church or at home, many, many, many times before there was ever a question of a date or that sort of thing. So, I'm explaining this I think, because I want to indicate later on how...important the element of being a Christian came to me in this thing. I uh...became a teacher almost because there was nothing else to be. I was driven to it not because I didn't want to be, but I think because that was all I could be. I think I'm a born teacher. I found it later in those years when I wasn't teaching when I lined up friends and neighbors to teach them something (laughs), I still do. I was going to be a journalist, a librarian, perhaps write the great American novel, as many people do. But my decision to become a teacher was confirmed the year I was a junior when the 7th and 8th grade english teacher was out of school for some particular reason. It was a small school and the principal had me go in and teach those classes for a few days. I was not aware at the time that he had the public address system on listening in to the classroom, and uh, he began to talk with me about the importance of becoming a teacher and the teacher whom I replaced there also did. And at the time I was a senior then, I came to terms with sometimes we are born to do certain things and I realized that the flirting with journalism, with uh, library science even was the kind of fighting of what I could see as almost inevitable. I'd been reared on the tradition of Goodbye Mr. Chips and Good Morning, Ms. Dove (laughs), and even Jesse Stewart's The Thread That Runs So True. And I didn't expect teaching to be a profession that received much money or much praise. I did think that somewhere in my background there might become a time when I was an old lady, when somebody would really appreciate what I'd done. Once again, I recognized that those are going to be corollaries about teaching (mmm-hmm). I was fortunate in going to Concord College, and their teacher training program.

Because we'd had some what I would call hard-nosed, practical teachers who had done their work in the public school system, not these theorists, who had never come into a classroom, but people who were concerned uh, about dealing practically with what went on in a classroom. I was aware of that very much, because at the same time I was going through teacher training at Concord, a sister-in-law was at West Virginia University, where she was oh, uh, having this ivory tower kind of approach to teaching theory, and she afterward taught in Wyoming County as I did and had much trouble. And for years afterward had trouble reconciling practical considerations about teaching with the realities of the classroom. I went back and did my student teaching in my own high school under two of my former teachers. I also went back to the same elementary school that I'd attended and had ...it was a kind of special arrangement that ...because there were people who gave the support that you needed, the praise that we all crave at the same time giving the help and the sensible approach to teaching. I think I was fortunate in that.

Jim: It sounds as though you were.

Nellie: And uh, then I went back to teach in the same county. I did in that first year, I graduated in January because I'd gone to school the summer my husband and I were married. And I started in January teaching, replacing a teacher who had been run out of the classroom by impossible behavior problems in the classes she taught. My first inkling of that came the first day I approached the classroom when somebody said, "you're certainly gonna look different at the end of the day". And by the third time I heard that, the third classroom, I said, "if anybody's gonna look different at the end of the day, it is NOT going to be me". And I did discover that the teacher who had left because she was ill was ill because the classes had driven her to that. And so I had some very uh, interesting problems when I began. Never though, did I have the kind of problems that ran me out of teaching. I could...you know, kids who were interested in having their way, I had some remedial classes that first year, so I taught for three years at Pineville High School in Mullins, and then my husband took another job and we moved to Raleigh County, and I taught down the gulf there at East Gulf, Stocco High School. I approached that high school when there was that great exodus out of the mining area to Dayton, Cleveland, when the mines were mechanized. And 3/4 of the people we had in that school were in some way or other supported by (dog barking in room), public money. It was a defeated group of people, people didn't want to learn. I one year had all the sophomore's in school and I had a great many who could not read. I fought the county system to get reading materials on all levels. I conducted classes according to an elementary system with two or three groups going on at once, with little or no help from the county office. I...I should have mentioned that I have a public school certificate which involves training in elementary schools, too. I don't think it's any longer granted. (mmm-hmm) But also, that's a practical education, which a lot of high school english teachers don't get. So anyway, I used that elementary training to organize remedial reading classes, 2 or 3 different

groups on 2 or 3 different levels. And that was an innovative approach for Raleigh County. Then I, at the same time I was building up, I was teaching there, I was building up my spanish teaching degree by night classes, and Saturday classes, and I left Stocco High School when my husband and I adopted three children. Once again, I believe in doing things the hard way. (laughs) They were seven, and six and three when they came to us. And uh, kids who had been pretty badly scarred by their experiences. They had been a year and a half in the care of an agency. I mentioned this because I think this is important in the way I teach, the way I feel about teaching (mmm-hmm), things happened to my children in school. They were already what you might call culturally deprived children. I read the three bears, the three pigs to them for the first time. And so I know what happens to children who have slow starts, I know how much they need superior teaching, how much they need material that they can understand. My oldest son was always out of his depth because he had never had the background material of what he was supposed to have at any particular time. And I think some of this even came out in the textbook selection process as we were trying to see that there were materials for every level of student. So that there was something for everybody to read. (mmm-hmm) Now, Alex was a failure at six years old, at seven years old, and too many kids go all the way through school, always being failures, never having material that they can cope with, never having people meet them and teach right where they are and try to bring them on up. And he had too many of those experiences. Anyway, I never particularly thought I'd go back to teaching until after the children were grown. But uh, after one year at home, of course, Mark, the two older boys were in school, and I had just one at home, and all through the summer they kept calling me to teach spanish because they had no spanish teacher for Stocco High School or for Woodrow Wilson High School in Beckley, not for Stocco, for Shady Springs. And I wouldn't agree to go back until I think I finally agreed the week before school started, but I wouldn't sign a contract. I taught a whole year without a contract because I was placing my boys best interests, since they did have problems before, the teaching, and each time I would fight, they would bring me a check and say you must sign the contract before you receive the next check, and I would say to my principal, if I must sign a contract, then consider this my resignation, because I cannot be sure (mmm-hmm). It sounds stupid I know, but ...and that was the year I wasn't teaching english, because I taught spanish at Woodrow Wilson in the morning and at Shady Springs in the afternoon. But it seemed to work, and the adoption agency didn't feel that it interfered with the boys behavior. In fact, they thought the boys might be better off, you know, so that I wouldn't be the overprotective, clinging kind of parent. So I went back to teaching and taught then at Shady Springs, managed to teach there both spanish and english for three years, until we moved again. And then we...we moved to Rupert, Rainelle area. I didn't teach for that, we were there for that one year, and then we moved to Oak Hill. I didn't teach for another year, and finally was talked into going back once again because of the spanish/english kind of thing. And uh, I taught both classes. Then my husband was transferred again, and we went

to Montgomery and uh, we were there two years and I did teach both of those years. And then we moved to Charleston, I taught nine years at George Washington, and my husband was transferred, promoted again, (mmm-hmm), and we moved to Canton, so I taught three years in Canton. And basically that's, that's the educational background, the teaching background, the travel pattern. I taught in nine different high schools.

Jim: You taught nine years at G.W.?

Nellie: Nine years at G.W.

Jim: And that, that period...where did the 1974-75 textbook controversy fall in that period, beginning or the end or middle or...?

Nellie: Near the end of let's see... '74, '75, '75, '76 I was there one more year. I left in the summer of '76.

Jim: And you haven't taught since then?

Nellie: Yes, I taught the well, actually two and a half years [at Canton At Hoover High School in North Canton, Ohio. Then my husband was transferred again and I moved here and didn't teach anymore.

Jim: You were a teacher at George Washington High School, in Charleston. You were an english teacher.

Nellie: I started out teaching in both english and spanish, but that was departmental work and team teaching and it was difficult to work in two different departments. And so I switched into english completely. I had been english department chairman, uh, was english department chairman at the time we began the textbook study. I think it's interesting how I got involved in this. It's ironic

Jim: Let me clarify this for the tape. You are talking about the process of selecting the textbooks prior to them being presented to the school board. (yes) And you were involved in that directly. (yes) Selection of language/arts textbooks for...the whole county? (the whole county) Okay, tell us a little bit about that.

Nellie: That uh...we uh...select textbooks every five years, West Virginia in Kanawha County, and a member of the George Washington faculty, whom I admired very much, Sally Codie, had served on the previous textbook selection committee. And she told me it was important that people who were dedicated teachers, who were conscientious, hard workers, it was important that kind of person volunteered for serving on the committee. And she recommended that I do it. And since I admired her, I did. I almost, the same kind of you might say puritan ethics that got me into it, or the Christian service kind of thing, and it was a long, hard year. We worked a year on the study of the books. Now, I think there were

ten days that we met, ten full days, but each time the textbook committee met, we had spent hours in preparation and study on our own time before we went to that meeting. That day in the office, among the members of the committee, was to discuss the study and the work that we had done outside that committee meeting. And so when somebody totals up the number of hours involved in the textbook selection, they're not figuring the hours, because we actually studied those books.

Jim: You actually...that's an interesting question, 'cause I was told by someone else, I don't know who it was now, that textbook selection was kind of a I'll use his word, a joke....

Nellie: That's absurd! And that shows the person's ignorance of the process. Now, uh, we met and each textbook company presented an overview of his books and that kind of thing. Then we were organized into committees. Now, there were five people on the actual textbook committee. Two of us were senior high school students, two were junior high school students, teachers, two were junior high school teachers, one was an elementary teacher. Now, that was the official textbook committee. There were however, two sub-committees, made up of elementary teachers and secondary teachers. There were six elementary teachers and they would pick some from grades one through three, three of them that balanced, three from one I mean, from four through six. On the 12-member sub-committee for secondary, six of them were junior high school teachers. Six of them were high school teachers. Now, I can't say that the sub-committees were as careful about study as the five member textbook committee, because I didn't sit in on their meetings, although we met in the same office area about the same time. But I know that my five member committee did, because we came to the meetings with our notes that we had made on the series. We, we worked long and hard...in fact, at that time I quit singing in my church choir, because I did not have time. I was spending so much time working, studying on the textbooks. I just got back into church choirs a year and a half ago, too. That...uh. (oh, excuse me....)

Jim: I was gonna ask you one thing about this textbook and this question might come up, I'll interrupt you (sure), but I need to do this while this comes in my mind. You were working on this for a year, this textbook committee works for a year. Now, is that from spring of '73 to spring of '74, would that, is that a fair, chronological base there? Because my understanding is it was in the spring of '74 that the controversy, led by Alice Moore, kind of really got started. And it was after the textbooks were presented by your committee.

Nellie: I think it was the course of the year. I..now this sounds absurd to say, I think it was, I think we started in September, we volunteered back in the spring and that's when Sally Codie, my friend had suggested I volunteer. It began, I'm not sure whether it began in August with _____ or in September. As I tell you, I have forgotten much because I tried to forget. (I'm just trying to get a chronological....) It was in the fall of '73

and the Spring of '74. (okay) Now, I do have some notes on that, somewhere. I tried to organize this so I could tell what I had. We did uh, it's a long sheet.

Jim: Well, while you're looking for that, let me uh, ... (okay, go ahead with your question) ... I'm trying to move us into now, the first rumblings of the controversy, when did you first become aware, now, let's ... is this a safe assumption now, by the spring of '74 you had your committee?

Nellie: Let me tell you how the study happened (okay). We got together in February of '74 and prepared our submission to the board members because the submission went to the board member ah! here it is, and here is something you may want a copy. That is my only copy, by the way. But I will let you xerox and return (okay, yes, that would be nice to have). That was prepared, and I can (pause), alright, it does say, we did fill out and file forms on every group, every textbook that we studied. And we, we completed our work on February 28th, that's what I wanted to get here.

Jim: Okay, on February 28th of '74 your work was completed on the textbook committee.

Nellie: Yes. Now, we, we prepared at that time, you have no idea of reams of material that we prepared on those books. I even had some of it ... I have a rough draft. This is a rationale for the teaching of the books.

Jim: This thing states why you're choosing the books?

Nellie: Why we chose the books. Here is a final copy of materials that were filed with the board. This particular document is on the basic text, this is on the supplementary text. Then, we file with it a statement of philosophy for teaching and we uh, filed all of that at the board meeting on March 7th. Now, this is a board memo from March 7th, 1974. This was when the books were presented to the board members. Now, the board members had from March until the April board meeting to examine the books, the rationale. At the same time, we presented this to the board members, all the books were set aside in a room at the board office, 300 Elizabeth Street there, in that complex (yes) for board members to come at their convenience and examine them. At the same time, those books were placed in the library in (public library?) public library, the downtown public library, and St. Albans public library. It was interesting that not one board member went to examine the books, nor did more than a handful of people examine them in the public libraries. Now, later on there was the suggestion given that there was some kind of secret sort of thing going on. But that's absurd. Now, (pause), April 15th was the state uh, adopted deadline for the county to notify the state superintendent.

Jim: May I interrupt you one more time? Had any textbooks been purchased by this time? By April 15th....

Nellie: Heavens, no.

Jim: No textbooks were purchased. (no) Okay.

Nellie: We just had samples, copies. And so the ...the board of education had to adopt books on April 11th. All the board members knew this. This was state law. Now they did vote to adopt the books. And it was done on recommendation of Mrs. Moore, saying at the time, we'll adopt the books, we can get rid of the ones we don't want later.

Jim: Now, you're saying that on the meeting of April 11th, 1974, that the committee voted to adopt the books

Nellie: No, not the committee (oh), the board of education. The committee votes had been back in February.

Jim: Sorry, I meant school board of education, voted, the school board, voted to accept the books and that language/arts series, of which there were 318 I think, different volumes, if my memory's correct, and Mrs. Moore voted, she moved to adopt the books (yes), and voted to accept them and made a statement that later they would get rid of the ones they didn't want. (yes) Now, were you aware at that point in time of a controversy or was there a question with any of the books, by that time? By the April meeting?

Nellie: (laughs) I was a totally unsophisticated kind of person. I believed that all I had to do was to be a good teacher, a hard worker, and that that was my job. Few people understand the complexity of the school system. Teachers are nothing in the concept of a school system. Teachers have no power, they have no authority, they have no position. Teachers have a position openly in the their classrooms. And I was classroom teacher with uh, no pretensions, no ambitions for being anything else. Now, I think that's important. I did not want to climb anywhere in the school system. I wanted no position of power or authority. Because I believe in the 'Peter Principle', and I knew where I belonged. Now, there, Mrs. Conley was the english supervisor, relatively small fish in the pond. There was the whole hierarchy of that division, her supersivor's directly were Mrs., I forgotten her name (I can't recall either). Going through Mrs. Bird, I've forgotten the level (yes, I met Mrs. Bird). A dark haired woman, she had worked at George Washington in the IDEA office, and I cannot remember her name, then Roger Warner, who was assistant superintendent, and all of these people spoke, I had never been to a board meeting.

Jim: You went to this April 11th meeting?

Nellie: I went to that meeting for the 1st time. Because I was told to be there, in other words, dabbling in board meetings and board politics, even teacher politics, had never been my line. That's unfortunate for Kanawha County. (mmm-hmm) Because had I been more sophisticated, things might have been different all

along. And when a question was directed, even in subsequent meetings, about books, they went through channels, the general speaks to the colonel who speaks to the major and frankly, I was the private. For the longest time. And there were very few questions actually.

Jim: Now, at the April 11th meeting, were there questions about the textbooks at the time?

Nellie: (rustling paper) I have it (oh, good) Uh, a statement
END OF SIDE 1

Nellie: ...previous times I have this statement by Mrs. Moore on April 11th, she said she hadn't had time to examine the books, but she said something to the effect that if they followed the ideas of the National Council of Teachers of English, she knew she would be against the books. Because she had never agreed with anything they had said. And she said we can adopt the books later and remove what we don't like. Or words to that affect. And her husband who was in the back of the room, said at the time, go get 'em girl, go get 'em!

Jim: He said that openly?

Nellie: Openly, in the meeting. Now, if I had any idea your question a minute ago, I don't know how you said it....

Jim: Well, I asked you if you had any inclination of any rumblings or beginnings of controversy prior to the April 11th meeting. Your answer was no, because you were not involved in the process.

Nellie: And the answer was no, but if I ...I may be unsophisticated, but I am far from stupid. And that meeting told me more than I wanted to know about where the problems lay.

Jim: So Mr. Moore, Alice's husband, from the back of the room in that meeting said go get 'em girl, and you're implying then that there was, they had already determined that they were gonna get involved in getting the textbooks out of whatever. She made a statement that they would get them out later. (yes) Okay....

Nellie: Now the one question I can remember having been asked at that meeting was, was there anything said about dialects. And yes there was something said about dialects, because if we're gonna teach an understanding of language, we must teach something about how dialects operate, because there are many dialects, which each one of us use. I would use one dialect in speaking with you here in my own home, and another if I were making this as a formal presentation from a lectern, as you would use one dialect in speaking to me as a researcher and perhaps another from your pulpit.

Jim: Mmm-hmm, okay, I understand your point. Uh...

Nellie: Although a lot of people would not call those dialects, still they are. And that question about were there dialects used in the books, came up in the April 11th meeting.

Jim: So on the April 11th, the April 11th meeting, the motion was made to adopt the textbooks and Mrs. Moore said that later they would get rid of the ones they didn't want. (yes) Okay, what then was the, let's move along in the chronology. What then was the next contact you had about the books and uh, your first introduction to a?

Nellie: Well, all along we made uh, you mentioned that there were 318 books. I had no idea how many books. You...I doubt that few people understand other than the people who worked with the schools themselves, the complexity of a large system. And that's another thing that made me say something about outsiders. Kentuckians are used to small systems. A city system and then perhaps several within the county, as we have here. In Ohio there was that sort of thing. West Virginians are used to a county system, and are not frightened by it. Now within that county, we have, I don't know how many, were there eight or eleven or twelve high schools? The number has escaped, (I think there's 12), alright, 12 high schools then something like 22 junior highs, now they are as varied and different as the people involved in them, and Kanawha County was a complex county. We had high schools that were operating on a very traditional system, and high schools that had gone into many courses uh, six week courses, semester courses, and a very complex system. Those I think were Herbert Hoover and there was another of that type.

Jim: The urban, the urban-type school?

Nellie: No, they were not the urban. The urban were almost using a more traditional plan, George Washington offered senior english on several levels, but it was, we did not offer the complex mini-courses kind of thing. Herbert Hoover was one that was one of these, offering 40 perhaps 9 weeks or semester courses from which a student picked with certain backups. Anyway, we needed, we needed all of these books in order to meet a basic plan as well as the kind of complex system that we had. Also, in Kanawha County there was a plan instituted by Dr. Underwood to map out the skills needed in a particular class on a particular level from grades one through twelve and we set up techniques for teaching those skills so that we could move students through learning all the skills, at whatever level they were. In other words, if somebody needed to go back and pick up a skill on division of words into syllables, we could go to a packet of material, pull out lessons on that, and work with one student who had that problem on that level. (mmm-hmm) We were in the process of writing all this curriculum. Now, a lot of people were fighting Dr. Underwood over it. It's an extremely complex idea. And yet an extremely practical idea. In other words, it would work for the benefit of students, we would test, find out where there were weaknesses, where there were strengths, we'd go back and work on

the strengths. I'm doing this too, because I decided if...(pause)...

Jim: Might as well, might as well take advantage of this time of recollection and record it for yourself, of course, I would have been very happy to make copies.

Nellie: I haven't touched this material for seven years, and uh, I spent two days with it, by the way (oh), a half hour after you called the other night I realized the ten years had just melted away, and I was back in this. And that's where I've been for two days, although I tried not to get there. The best information about all this has been the information that I've given you in the last two days that you haven't been able to get. (laughter)

Jim: There's something still in my mind, I'm sorry I'm not up with you, but you said something to Alice Moore, it just popped in my mind, that that school board meeting on April 11th, she said she hadn't had a chance to read the textbooks yet, and then she said she voted to adopt them and then her husband said, she made a statement....

Nellie: Well, I don't know when....(oh, you don't...)...

Jim: What I'm fishing for is there seems to be an implication that she was against the textbooks without ever looking at them.

Nellie: There is no implication there, that is a fact. If you want me to say that, I will be happy to say it, I mean, I will say worse!

Jim: She appears to have been against the textbooks without ever looking at them, so she must have been....

Nellie: Well, she said, she, that she had not read them, but she was opposed if they had the ideas of the National Education Association (I remember you saying that, yes), she knew she was opposed to them, because she had never agreed with anything they had said.

Jim: Okay. What was the...I may be moving you into an area that you're heading for and you don't want to go there yet, but what was all the hubbub about? Alice Moore now is on the school board and she is determined or it appears she's determined to get rid of textbooks that are offensive, and I....

Nellie: Alice Moore was opposed to the public schools. (did she as much say that?) Yes! I have heard her say that she was not sure we should have public schools.

Jim: Well, then why, what could she hope to accomplish being a school board member? Why would she be a school board member if she was not interested in public schools? Do you have any ideas about that?

Nellie: Of course, have you read Machiavelli? (yes, oh, well)

Jim: I suppose then that she felt like she could uh, (there is)...you're saying the end justifies the means.

Nellie: I'm saying that she was a beautiful woman, soft-spoken with a Mississippi accent, she served on a board of education with four men who were southern gentlemen, with people who found it very difficult to look a beautiful woman in the eye and say, you're a liar, you are manipulative, you are using things for your own benefit, even when they knew that.

Jim: You feel then that Alice Moore was a liar and that she was using things for her own benefit?

Nellie: Oh, yes.

Jim: You don't think she was honest at all in her approach to the opposition she took to the textbooks?

Nellie: At points, yes. She was very honest. And she was very committed. But, she...she was no saint. And let...let me go directly. (okay) I...I have a sheet in front of me where I have noted statements that she said. On May 16th, she said, "I am a politician". That was at the May board meeting to look at the books. And she turned to me as a member of the textbook committee, and said, "who have you been associating with"? Uh, we'll get back to that later. She uh, said that we ought to include in the literature, material by Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society. One of the articles on communication in the book dealt with him, with his techniques. Most of her comments at the May 16th meeting dealt with black authors, (in other words, she was, she was in opposition to them) yes. Authors who had some political activity, she attacked not what was being said, but the reputation, the James Baldwin (the credibility of the author) the credibility of the author, because of some doctor in his background....

Jim: Okay, well, let me ask you this, what ...you, your committee devised a rationale, a philosophy behind adopting these kinds of materials. What was the purpose in adopting books that presented men like Eldridge....

Nellie: Back up. (okay) Our committee did not do it. (okay) The state of West Virginia did. (I see) These are resolutions adopted by the WV Board of Education, on December 11th, 1970.

Jim: They make a recommendation, do they not?

Nellie: The inclusion of interethnic concepts and they said that books must be multi-ethnic, multi-racial in content.

Jim: Okay, so the state school board, the state superintendent's office....

Nellie: The state school board. Now, once again here I am at fault, because I genuinely believe that we're all God's children, and red and yellow, black and white, we are precious in his sight. I might have been a little slower than the others to pick up on it. Believe me, the initial objection to these books was racial. That was all we heard May 16th. There was however, some objection to the interpretation of satire, or a literal interpretation of symbolic material.

Jim: Can you give an example of...you remember or recall an example of that literal interpretation of symbolic material? Are you talking about...

Nellie: I'm talking about if a word was used, then we had to be teaching somebody to be that. (oh) If ...if somebody in a story was a prostitute, then we were encouraging prostitution by including the story.

Jim: There was a, there was one anti-textbook person I talked to, Elmer Fike, uh, sorry to mention his name, I'm sure he wouldn't care.

Nellie: I'll mention him if you don't. I'm sorry, I can't...one hour or two hours are not gonna be enough for me because if you're gonna get anything out of me, you're gonna have to talk to me more than that. (yeah) I know more than anybody else (I can see that), about this, and I'm sorry, I like you already. I hadn't decided until I saw you whether I could trust you. (thank you) But I decided if I could trust you, I would level completely with you (I appreciate that), and I've got more to say. And I am painfully honest (I want you to be), so...

Jim: This is historical research, this is what it's for.

Nellie: So, you can't get what I know in one hour. (I can see that) Okay. (we may even have to do this again, I don't know)

Jim: I've got another tape with me today and we'll go until you think you have to stop and then we'll do it again.

Nellie: Now, you were asking a question.

Jim: Yes. The question was, that there was a book that was being proposed or the statement was made there's a book being proposed and I forget the author, and it may have been Baldwin, who did something on, on, he was talking about jobs, very, different kinds of jobs. Here's a woman who's a secretary, here's a man who's a gas station attendant, here's a woman who's a teacher, here's a man who's something else. And they include in that list of jobs, you may recall the book, I don't, uh, the prostitute and when you said that it reminded me of that. There was a prostitute, a masseur, someone who worked in a massage parlor, and this author, now I haven't read the book so I'm just taking what's, that this author was presenting a picture that these were legitimate, these were good occupations, and that this is something that you might,

as a teacher you might want to say, this is an occupation, or it might suggest you might want to get into this.

Nellie: I'm not sure what he's talking about, but I have a feeling. There's a book, a man went around this country, right now it escapes me, and recorded people talking about what they do in America. And this was a selection from that book. It will come to me when I leave this, and....

Jim: I've got it at home, too, I think.

Nellie: Okay, well, anyway, let me back up. In April after the books were officially adopted, we were, the textbook committee, prepared two days, one for elementary school teachers, department chairmen and principals and one for secondary principles and teachers, days when they could come to the board office, look over the books, we would explain books to them, talk over the rationale, for using them. You understand we had basic texts on several levels, basic texts in literature and language and uh, then we had uh, (supplemental), supplementary books and books that would take care of all these courses. You understand, we had students doing, have you seen this? (no, I haven't) That's my concept of showing, making it _____ to show how this whole extremely complex thing is rooted in the philosophy of teaching english in the county and the state. It begins with the skills, the skills, the trunk of the tree. (mmm-hmm) Now, that's not nonsense, that's fact. Then in the elementary level we had, we already had Holt reading that was being used, and we adopt, and Economy reading. Those two on the right were already being used. Now, elementary teachers are very careful about their programs, so the communicating that we adopted was a supplementary kind of thing. And too, it was not a duplication of the kinds of things they already had. Incidentally, this is communicating, this is book two, and several times I had this book pointed out to me. And in fact, at one of the meetings one of the protesters said, "this is what it's all about". Look at that book.

Jim: That particular book?

Nellie: This particular book. The cover of the book. Now, if you can't figure it out with that cover....

Jim: This is what it's all about.

Nellie: This is what it's all about. This is what the protest is all about. (on the cover...) If you will notice that on the cover you had a telephone with children on the cover, that's Jack the Beanstalk there, and uh, the fox is all dressed up, but if you notice in the center of the telephone there's a little girl with a bouquet and a little black boy smelling the bouquet. (mmm-hmm) And my contention is that this began racism in March. By the next meeting we had invited members of the NAACP and the black community to come and be a part of the meeting, and to listen and to observe and so it was in June that the emphasis switched from racism to Christianity.

Jim: Was this an obvious switch?

Nellie: It was obvious. It was obvious to anyone who wasn't blind and deaf.

Jim: Now you said there was a switch made. By whom?

Nellie: Mrs. Moore.

Jim: She now switched from racism to Christianity.

Nellie: Oh, yes, at first uh, she attacked the books for black authors, use of dialect, again black, for uh, (pause), well, she attacked specific authors.

Jim: Were there uh, in these books that she was attacking on the racism side, were there objectionable words, language that would be offensive to a Christian, uh, four letter words, gutter type language? I've heard that call, I heard a call like that by some of those who opposed the textbooks. Was there that kind of language in the textbooks?

Nellie: There was an occasional damn. This book I have marked. This is Book Two in the Communicating series.

Jim: This will be an elementary.

Nellie: This is an elementary, yes. On page one they objected to the story of the travels of a fox, which was a folktale. The objection said that he taught trickery and deceit. On uh, page twenty-eight they object to the selection called "The Dangerous Cowboy", bad Benny is a boy, he's incidentally black and he's playing cowboy and they objected to it because he ties up his mother and that illustrates disrespect to parents. These quotations are taken directly from a volume that they prepared. On page sixty-four they object to "Jack and The Beanstalk". Because it promotes stealing and killing. On page ninety-seven they objected to "Pinnochio", because it illustrates disrespect for parents, and lying. Now, anybody who knows the Pinnochio story, knows that Pinnochio's nose grew because he told a lie, and Pinnochio learned to value significant things. He learned not to lie, he learned to be honest and moral. But I still think the thing there on the cover is ...anyway, this, this thing, and you may have it, shows how we use the twin branches of language and literature, and how we had the higher level of dynamics of language, and then the contemporary english, which was maybe a grade or two below level. For the student like my two older sons, who had never been prepared for what they were needing and found a little easier approach in a language that they could understand that would build them up....

Jim: Now you said a language they could understand, I see on this tree a branch that's labeled "Language of Man". Would that, does that mean, and I'm asking you, would that mean that they would be uh, taught on this level....?

Nellie: This was only a supplementary text. You notice, Language of Man could be used as a supplementary text there, (oh, yes) and up here on the higher level, too. And in the same way, interaction level three could be used. Now, no school in the county had to buy anything, except basic texts as they wanted to fit their program. And those two days we met with the principals and teachers to plan what they could buy. To explain this, to say match your selections to the needs of your students, of your school system, what you need to teach on the level. Now, at George Washington we were operating four levels of high school english. We had students doing advanced level work, getting college credit, for what they were doing. And it was material that was in the selections for them that caused a lot of the problems.

Jim: Extra reading material? (yes) That was in that class?

Nellie: Yes, for advanced levels. And you notice here in literature we have the "America Reads" series, and that I had taught with from the first year I was teaching in Pineville High School in Wyoming County. It had undergone an number of changes. Now, incidentally I didn't push that, I must say that. It's a fine series, there were many fine series. Galaxy was once again the level about two years below grade level. In other words, someone who's reading about an 8th grade level would manage fine in the 10th grade book. (mmm-hmm) But there were always in these lower levels, skill builders to move somebody up to level. But anyway, see, these four were the major high school series that all of this other was supplementary, which they might use. And then we did have a heavily remedial uh, program called "Breakthrough", down there which was written on second, third, fourth, fifth grade level for heavily remedial students. And uh....

Jim: That's good, I'll...(okay)...that's interesting. At least it gives me an idea of what you were trying to accomplish in your....

Nellie: And the idea that we had not prepared is in fact the funniest thing about the whole thing. Some people actually believed that. Incidentally, let me tell you something else. All along, sometimes our friends were our worse enemies. (mmmh, during the controversy you're talking about?) Uh, yes, because before the controversy developed, people didn't do, a lot of them didn't do what they were supposed to do. When we had the high school meeting for secondary principals and english department chairmen to study these books, there were only three principals there. There was some kind of uh, tournament or something uh, basketball, probably, and only three principals appeared. Now, later on, when principals had to defend these books, see they, they were not prepared because they hadn't been there. (right)

Jim: So, they had, in self defense they had to get prepared.

Nellie: Okay, now that was April. And also in addition to this, we made arrangements for the entire faculty to come, and uh,

attend the board meeting. Not attend, but attend a meeting at the board office, where they could get questions....

Jim: And this was in relation to the textbooks, right?

Nellie: And we were saying, if you need help in preparing, prep...preparing your selections, planning how you're going to use it, we'll come and talk with you, tell you what we know about any of these selections, because we'd spent a lot of time studying. And we knew how important it was to know. We were volunteering extra time. Anyway, then the May meeting, all the books now, the May meeting, we were asked to attend, at which time questions were raised, objections were raised. In the interval, sometime before May, Mrs. Moore had asked that a copy of all the books be sent to her house, and that was done. Uh, we also understood that she was having outside help examining the books. We did discover that was so. The same people crop up in these textbook things all over the country.

Jim: Bill and Norma Gabler (yes). Were they helping her at this time give evidence?

Nellie: Yes, oh, yes. (this is in May?) Un-huh, this is before the May meeting. Incidentally, I told you about the, the ...the thing about understanding that if a word was in something, it was going to be, the approach was going to be that it was taught. From some of the questions or something, I'm not even sure how I know. But I do know that the afternoon before that meeting, I went to my church library and used a Bible concordance, and I'm almost appalled to say this, because the point was lost in the meeting, but I looked up the word "whore" to find out how many times it was used in the King James version of the Bible. And in all of the complex whoredom and other variations, I think it was 96 times.

Jim: I was gonna say a hundred, a guess.

Nellie: Well, I counted them. My minister was much amused by it. And I even carried my mother's Bible with me, because I knew that some of these things were going to come up. And that (this was in the May meeting?)yes, and when I was asked, when one of those points was made, I made that point. Now, it was lost in the shuffle. Another point that was made there, was Mrs. Moore asked me to read something. (I think I heard about that) I don't even know what it was now, but I refused. And my refusal came with the thing, I said, neither would I stand up and read aloud from the Bible, it was, I don't know if it was 1 Kings or 2 Kings something or other. I would not read that without an explanation and understanding that we, that _____ understood what was meant. And the reference was the phrase, 'He that Pisseth Against the Wall'. I'm not ashamed to say it, I also know that that is a figure of speech for a man, as to distinguish a man from a woman. Now, that was lost in the shuffle. (mmm-hmm) Incidentally, one of the things that happened and I'm sorry ...I don't believe to this day that we were given a fair answer. Board meetings are taped

KCTC.10B - TAPE #2

KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Nellie Teaford Wood

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 15, 1985

Jim: I think so. I think I'm beginning to understand.

...

Nellie: My pastor asked me to read it in a book examination that was held at my church. The father loses his job and he doesn't know how to uh, uh, to combat the depression and he says, "damn". And the wife and mother says to him, says, don't say "damn". And then the author says something about uh, he understood that life was no damn good, he couldn't cope with the damn look on the face of his damn kids. Am I mak...aw I telling enough of it to

Jim: Oh, you read the poem in your church?

Nellie: Because it would be taken out of context, it would be, to be exposed to ridicule something that should not be ridiculed and I would not permit anyone to ridicule the Bible. (mm-hmm) Nor would I permit anyone to ridicule a selection by taking it out...I think I remember what it is. I'm not sure, but I believe it was a selection by (my information was it was a poem, that's what someone told me, it was a poem she asked you to read, that way or may not be true)...it may be. I remember the fellow, but he's a Puerto Rican author who's writing about life in the ghetto. And he (can't think of his name either but I...) I had the book somewhere, and it talked, it made the depression clear to me, and I read it in my church, later.

Jim: You mentioned that she asked, she, Mrs. Moore, asked you to read something and you refused to read it, and your reason for refusing to read it was the same reason you would not read I kings, the thing you mentioned...

Nellie: Anyway, it occurred to me, at that May meeting, uh,

infringe...

Jim: Well, I'm not suffering at all, I just don't want to

Nellie: Well, I think the thing that I wanted to make clear was that I was not willing to go into it for a superficial examination. And I realized when I said that at that point in the interview, we'll have to do this again, if I'm going to drag this out and suffer through this, you're gonna have to suffer with me. (laughing) Hear all I have to say.

Jim: ...no, no, as you said, and I want to put this on the front of this tape, we may, this will be the 2nd tape of this continuing interview with Mrs. Nellie Wood, concerning the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy. I want to make it clear that we may even have to at your convenience, set down again with another tape or two or whatever, because this information is so vital. You see, I've been interviewing people now for some weeks, and the information you're giving me is detailed information that is so vital to the truth of this thing, so I want to make sure...

Nellie: You see, the absolute frustration that comes to people when they can't get a job, they can't support their families honestly, he was saying "damn" because it was absolute frustration. His wife was saying "don't say it". Because they were not profane people. The man recalling what it was like as a child knew that only this powerful profanity could any way approach the frustration people felt during the depression.

Jim: So you're, you were saying as an english teacher that it was legitimate to use that word "damn" to express frustration?

Nellie: Yes. And the inability to cope with the depression. I'm almost sure that this is the article, I may be wrong. If I am, I'm not inadvertently(mmm-hmm) I probably, I know I could go through a box of material and find exactly what it is. I'm not sure any how. That night, on the May 16th, she said uh, something to the effect that who were we associating with, I was sure we had been maligned, that we had been uh...what's the word I want, I was sure that after that meeting was over, that I had cause for a personal suit against Mrs. Moore (You had been slandered?) Slandered, that's the word. And I asked Mike Bell for a tape of the meeting, first saying that I wanted to hear exactly what I had remembered, because I might well do it. There was no tape of that meeting. (mmh) I got kind of a song and dance. I may be terribly wrong, but I had a feeling that there had been a tape of the meeting and it was destroyed. (mmmh)

Jim: I'm sure there's a transcript of that meeting. I know there are transcripts of all the school board meetings, on file as public record, at the school board office. There are transcripts.

Nellie: Word for word? (yes) The machine didn't work. (ah, well, maybe, I may check on that meeting, just for curiosity, because I'll be looking at those records.) I may be wrong. Now I like Mike Bell. (that's May 16, '74) May 16th meeting.

Jim: Yes, I know Mike. He's been very helpful to me thus far.

Nellie: But there were too many kind of embarrassing sorts of things that happened there early when people did not understand the seriousness or the thrust of the thing, or the danger of the thing. Uh, now, at all, all during May and June, Mrs. Moore was taking these books that she had in her home to prayer meeting type meetings in churches in the area, and showing them and at one of the church rallies, whatever you want to call it, she uh, this was in June, she said words to the affect, that members of this textbook committee could be placed on administrative transfer, implying that our jobs were at stake and at another church rally she said, no member of the textbook committee would ever serve on another Kanawha County committee as long as she was a board member. It was confirmed by Roscoe Keeney, who was then president of the Teacher's Association in a conversation later, and Roscoe later mentioned it in a board meeting and Mrs. Moore did not object to it. In other words, she was accepting that she had said it. (mmm-hmm) Any way, we uh, not only were the uh, books going

Neilie: But this was the series they had done a random sampling, and the books were tremendous. (what was the reason they kicked 'em out?) The level, well, you see, there were so many books, there were so many books and the county staff somewhere made a decision that on these that had 66 or 70 books, they wouldn't buy the five textbooks committee members and the 12 (sub-committees) sub-committees, we're talking about 17 copies of each one of those books. And that's where a part of the problem came.

Jim: Every book that had been provided for you? (yeah) But there were some that were not provided.

Neilie: We were not in control of that decision (mm-hmm). In other words, everything that we had seen we had studied, every book that was there, that had been provided for us, we had read.

Jim: So the 8 that were kicked out or set aside...

Neilie: Yeah.

Jim: Oh, as a committee member, you had seen some of those books? That were the most offensive.

Neilie: All right, now, I'll tell you something that has never to my knowledge been said anywhere. Those books were in a series that we had not had all the books. We had been told by the superintendent staff, the office staff, that we would use selective uh, examination on that series and one other. And it was on those two series that the problems came. There were some books that we had not seen, but appeared all at once.

Jim: They took 8 books (8 books) out, yeah, I was told that by Harry Stansbury. He said, we took the worse 8 that we felt were offensive... now, Harry told me himself that he actually read some of those books and they were offensive to him, and so, he wouldn't have had his kids read them, wouldn't want his kids to read them.

Neilie: And there were uh, there was this June meeting, which was really explosive. That's when they looked yeah, on June 27th, that was when the board members voted 3 to 2 to purchase the books, recommended by the committee after delegating 8 books.

That was the big mistake.

Jim: Now, up to this point, now, you've been involved in several meetings of the school board, you had confrontations with Alice Moore at this point, several or a couple...

Neilie: And there were uh, there was this June meeting, which was really explosive. That's when they looked yeah, on June 27th, that was when the board members voted 3 to 2 to purchase the books, recommended by the committee after delegating 8 books. That was the big mistake.

Neilie: And there were uh, there was this June meeting, which was really explosive. That's when they looked yeah, on June 27th, that was when the board members voted 3 to 2 to purchase the books, recommended by the committee after delegating 8 books. That was the big mistake.

Jim: So 17 copies had to be distributed, you're saying, among all of these people?

Nellie: In the study, but now, these are only in two series... (pause)... I guess... Interaction was the one, level three. But anyway, that was something we had no control over.

Jim: You said when they made that decision to delegate those eight books, that that was a mistake.

Nellie: Yes, because it indicated the chink of the armour.

Jim: So, you're saying it was the hole in the dike, so to speak.

Nellie: Absolutely. That's what I mean by mistake. It would... looking back on it now it was a mistake not to give us every book. And I, I am being very honest with you in saying I have never said that to anyone else before.

Jim: You were, you were uh, hurt, upset that they took the 8 books out.

Nellie: I came out of this thing feeling that I had been used by everybody. Not used exactly, uh, I guess that's, that's a part of it, too.

Jim: Well, Thelma Conley told me on the phone that she felt like she was in the middle of something and she was, couldn't, she was in a no-win situation because she was in the middle.

Nellie: No way. And I tried to operate as honestly and as fairly as I could, not being overly moved by the attention. Now, it's a tremendous ego trip to get a standing ovation from 2,000 of your colleagues. You got to watch it, 'cause that's dangerous. And I am sorry, but I think Mrs. Moore was on an ego trip. She was on a righteous crusade. I watched it happen a few years later to Anita Bryant. And when, I prayed for Anita Bryant. I prayed for Alice Moore. (mmmh)

Jim: Well, I think as Christians we are supposed to do that. Do you want to stop?

Nellie: No, let's go on. I prayed that this would not happen to me, that I would be able to move through this thing and emerge the same person with my integrity intact. I don't know whether I had, but I tried. (mmmh) And there are going to be people who are angry with you. There are teachers that I taught with who will never forgive me for trying to keep the teachers from walking out that day. There would have been a teacher strike.

Jim: What day?

Nellie: That was in September, the 5th, 6th, 7th, somewhere along there, after the books were removed. The teachers would have

voted. Now, I had the power that day to move that group of teachers, either way I wanted. That's scary.

Jim: It sure is. Let me ask you this...did you have an objection or did you have a feeling about how much input should be allowed from mother, from parents about the selection of textbooks for their children? Was that ever a problem with you during this thing?

Nellie: Never until the thing went on. I had never seen any parents have any desire to have any more input, they may have.

Jim: It's alright, Nellie. because today, in Kanawha County, Mike Bell, no, Harry Stansbury told me this, that as the years went on, after the controversy, in the late '70's, up until today, he said now in the '80's, it's just to the point where we can't get parents to look at any textbooks.

Nellie: Let me tell you something. One of the things that I opened, this satchel, was a satchel that I carried with me (like a bookbag) uh, to places where I talked about this. (mmm-hmm) And there's an odd assortment of things. I discovered I planned 10 or 15 minutes of comment and then let people ask questions; that was the best way, so it was never exactly...now, here are my notes for one of these, and I have well, they're two pages of it. Hours, days, over a period of four months, we spent studying books. We felt wise decisions was made, we carefully prepared, carefully written rationales for the use of the books, meetings with principals and department head, a wise selection of books from the lists, the books were on display 5 weeks in the public library. There were, there was little interest, what went wrong, everything. Before I go further, let me make a rather provocative statement. Books had little or nothing to do with the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy. The quarrel over books was really a symptom of the disease. And as a, as spreading a soothing lotion over a skin rash will not cure the rash, so as long as the patient is exposed to the allergen, so dealing with the objections to the books did not cause, cure the allergies of some people in Kanawha County, who were allergic to the 1970's. Once we come to understand that, we can understand the textbook controversy. Now, I have here, this was for a talk I made somewhere uh, (on the issue?) yes, on the issue. Local factors that caused this. I had the sex education campaign, which campaigned four years early.

Jim: Yes, Alice Moore ran for the school board on that issue.
(yes) Mmm-hmm

Nellie: There's very strong belief in segments in Kanawha County that she was uh, strongly supported and funded by the John Birch Society, I don't know whether you've heard that. (oh, yes, I've heard it) okay. As I say, I believe in saying things, though, (well, surely, I appreciate that), and uh, it, if I'm going to be wrong, I'll be honestly wrong. There had been a 15 year program of school consolidation and there were people who were still mad about that. (mm-hmm) Uh, there were the differences in local

communities, and the jealousies of one community with, for another. There was hidden racism. But now, it wasn't so hidden, because in...on one of the overpasses or bridges or something, "get the nigger books out of the school". (yes, I've heard of that) Okay.

Jim: And there, Dr., or Reverend English told me yesterday that the racial issue was not really a surface like it would have been in a place like Atlanta, but it was still there. And he knew that racism was a part of this whole....

Nellie: Uh, I went to one of the board meetings with Ruth somebody, the name escapes me, she was president of the Teacher's Association. And we sat together and I felt somebody come behind us at one time, and uh, didn't turn around, because board meetings were very unfriendly places. And I looked down and there was a card lying under my seat, and it said, you have just been paid a friendly visit by the Klan. Would you like us to pay you a real visit? (mmmh, someone laid that under your seat?) Laid that under my seat at a board meeting. Okay, now, other things that happened locally was this mistrust of an outside superintendent. (Kenneth Underwood?) Kenneth Underwood (yes), yeah. It, very brilliant man, but he, he rubbed some people the wrong way. Now, his plan for listing all the those skills was a tremendous amount of work, and there are people who find a strong resistance to work. (laughter) (yes) Or change. (oh, yes) Change is very, very threatening. Okay, now those were the local factors that I, I was able to look at. There was also internal dissension in the ...the local and state NEA affiliates. Uh, there were some problems between the professional teachers, shall we say. And the classroom teacher. (you need to change your tape?) Yeah. One of the reasons I wanted to do this was so I could find out later and make sense of what I do or don't say (mmm-hmm), in order to know what I've left out. From national factors, I list the post-Watergate syndrome. Believe me, there was a real concern about have we lost all our moral fibers, are we really all, it's still around. And there was this post-Vietnam syndrome, too, where the uh, there was a reaction to the violence of the '60's, where there was a great deal of separation of child from parent and some of it happened with education, too, with college. Going away and becoming different, not being able to come home. So, we had a lot of people who uh, felt that education had ruined their kids, whether it had or hadn't. (mmm-hmm) There also was a discovery of the power of minorities. I've already hinted to you something of this appalachian myth, and there was a tremendous level worked on the media. With a almost a uh, con game worked on the media. And the media bought it. Uh, the uh, NBC weekend crew came in and uh, did a rather uh, in-depth kind of thing, they thought. But the opening of the show panned across the books and they played hillbilly music. (laughs) Sixty minutes went to one of the churches singing uh, about as badly as you could hope to sing. (that's how they opened their program) Yes. (I remember the comments about that) Okay. I tried to tell them. Also, they were not able to sort out, they refused to believe that I am a typical West Virginian, (the media) the media, yes. I gave the

man from the weekend crew a piece of lye soap, homemade lye soap, made with lard, not lard, but with grease, saved from my kitchen. And he couldn't see what I was trying to tell him. In other words, I had kept the mountain art, but because I was articulate, uh, educated, I could not possibly be (typical) typical. And the idea that the people who were objecting to the books were the minority. The real minority in this whole thing were the teachers. (mmm-hmm) (laughing) We were the down-trodden at least. Okay, and then there was, there is a distrust of organized education. The system had been threatening people some how or other. I'm not sure teachers had been doing it, but I used the term educators as a kind of nasty code word, uh, professional educators have intimidated people for too long. And I do not call myself, I never did, an educator, I was a teacher. And I see a difference. Uh, I'm sorry, but I saw a very strong factor, whether it was faced or not, the desire to create a climate for Christian schools. To force people into going to Christian schools in order to keep from functioning. Avis Hill was probably the guiltiest, although there were a lot of others. Uh, now, I'm someone who uh, has nieces and nephews attending Christian schools, I have a nephew who taught in a Christian school, and a niece who taught in a Christian school, not in this state, but in others. So, I am not totally opposed to Christian schools. But I did have a few reservations about it. I also have a few reservations about how Christian are the Christian schools, when the leader of one of them publicly praised that God will strike three board members dead. (you're referring to Charles Quigley, was Avis Hill?) That was Avis Hill (oh, I thought it was Quigley), no, that was Avis Hill. I also had a friend who told me in all seriousness that she had to take real thought to her, the care of her soul, because she had a vision of what Hell would be like. Sharing a rock for eternity with Alice Moore on one side and Avis Hill on the other. It behooves one to tend to the soul! (laughs) I also had a minister who took up running, tell me that he was running for Christians, and my comment is "Christians scare the Hell out of me"! And I mean that that is not a profane statement (I know what you're saying, yeah). And that is exactly what I meant when I said, oh, Lord, the other day, because it was a prayer. I didn't know at the time you asked that whether I could get in this or not. (mmm-hmm) So, Christian schools I think have had...had a positive effect, rightly or wrongly. There was a man down in the Cross Lanes area who came in to operate a Christian school there, I'm not even sure who he was, but he meddled in these summer meetings....

Jim: Well, there was a pastor there that I interviewed, his name was Jim Efaw, Cross Lanes Bible Church, Cross Lanes Christian Academy, I think is the name of his school. But....

Nellie: I don't think that was the one. There was a name of somebody who came in as an organizer down in that area, and he didn't stay. So, he's still there. I'm sure this gentleman is not the one. (okay) Anyway, there was a...a nationally, a discovery of the power of minorities. And we picked up on it very quickley, that minorities have the power to spot things

completely. And this ...we were into the age of violence, and the idea, "I'll get my way or I'll destroy everything". And that was very strong there. Now, I must comment on the, the miner strikes and that kind of thing. That too, I'm taking with a bit more sophistication than some outsiders, because I know that you can walk across a mine entrance with a sign saying "I object to jello", and you'll get a couple of miners to(laughs)...(I agree), I'm sorry, my husband has roots in West Virginia and West Virginia mining, so uh, once again I feel that I could say (sacred ground) no, not really. But...everybody got involved. I mentioned the outside organizations, the Gablers were there early. Now, there was an August meeting uh...August 1975, mass meeting, I'm not sure...it was open somewhere....

Jim: Well, there were two meetings, I think you're talking about held, public meetings, and they were around Labor Day, they were Labor Day type rallies, if you're referring to those, and I think you are. One of them was held in the eastern part of the county, one in the western part of the county, one was in the Campbell's Creek area, one was up near St. Alabans, one was ran by Avis Hill and some of his people, at that one, he was invited, he told me he was invited to that and they spoke and had a big rally. Another ran by Marvin Horan, down in the Campbell's Creek area, another pastor, another preacher, and those two meetings were public rallies. Then they had a big rally. Marvin Horan (Horan) Uh, did I say Horan? (yes, I had to think about that one, I'd forgotten the name) yeah. They had a big rally at Watt Powell Park (Watt Powell, okay), several thousand people were there. (that's the one)

Nellie: One of the members of the textbook committee attended that meeting, and at that meeting, they announced plans to launch this tremendous crusade against the un-Christian forces in Kanawha County, and they were going to put "Christian" in every office in Kanawha County. In other words, this was the, the announcement that this was a political campaign except that we five members of the textbook committee couldn't convince anybody that this was serious.

Jim: You couldn't convince anyone in the school board, you mean?

Nellie: In the school system, in the school board. (speaking simultaenously--inaudible)...this was a serious threat that this was a serious problem that...as back when Mrs. Moore first began holding her rallies in the little churches, we could not convince people that Mrs. Moore was a threat to the school system. She was dangerous.

Jim: Now, you made a statement earlier that Mrs. Moore switched or the emphasis switched from racism in the beginning to Christianity or a Christian movement in the later part of the thing. How did that manifest itself?

Nellie: Between May and June it switched.

Jim: Okay, in between May and June it switched like from racism emphasis, Mrs. Moore objecting to black little boy to the white little girl, so on and so forth, and then in the

Nellie: And objecting to James Baldwin.

Jim: Un-huh, and some of the other black authors, and ethnic things you were attempting (mm-hmm) to teach or asking to teach. Now, how did this anti-Christian or this Christian element get involved? What are some of the ways that this manifested itself? Well, the rally you mentioned, all these people getting together, there were several pastors there.

Nellie: Well, the books had been displayed at all of these churches. That went on May, June, uh, I think the meeting was June 27th, you know, so there were almost two months there involved between the May meeting and the June meeting. (and then in June...) And the uh, listening to the comments and....

END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 2

Nellie: Because Mrs. Moore was the boss. First of all, you can't have people, you have people who will not believe that the boss is set up to destroy the system. But I had heard her say that she wasn't even sure that we ought to have public schools. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: So, based on that idea that she was trying to tear down the structure of the public school system in Kanawha County, you think then she attacked the textbooks for that reason, that's the motive that she had. (mmm-hmm) In attacking textbooks. Well, as this controversy continued on into the winter or fall of 1974, uh, the thing began to kind of die out. It began to kind of get back down to the normal roar, you know, the miners went back to work and people began to go back home and quit picketing and all the rest of that. Uh...what do you think contributed to cooling off? Now, was it just the miners going back to work, was it because the Governor or whoever it was said a 30-day cooling off period must take place? What was it that made the thing start to settle down, do you think?

Nellie: (pause) I think she'd achieved some of what she wanted.

Jim: They removed all of the textbooks, took them out of the schools, you showed me a picture of that, kids turning in their textbooks, and then what was, what happened after they removed all the textbooks?

Nellie: Well, they were...I don't know how long, while these books were out and we worked with other things, and then these textbook review committees were set up. Only on the surface did things get better. For me, the ...the most difficult time was with a meeting of this textbook review committee, which was having public hearings. Has anybody mentioned to you, probably not, the fact that these board meetings became setups, that there were very uh, I can't believe that this happened accidentally, that you'd be

walking down the sidewalk to go to a meeting, and someone would kind of lean in to you with a lighted cigarette. It became very dangerous to move into a meeting. Uh, it was almost as if someone had taught intimidation techniques. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Well, I'm sure there were, I'm convinced in my research there were outside groups who were involved, and I'm sure there was some of that going on.

Nellie: Well, we had, we had Dornon who came (Robert Dornon, yes), Robert Dornon, and (he's now a congressman in California), now a congressman. And uh, we had a march down Kanawha Boulevard, led by Carl McIntyre.

Jim: Now, why would a man like Carl McIntyre, who was a radio preacher, and I don't know him personally, but he has a fairly good reputation. Why would he get involved in something like this? If he didn't really believe that he was doing right, that he was on the side of right and good and all, why would he get involved in something like this? Do you have, oh, I'm asking you to speculate. I know you don't, you don't know, but...

Nellie: No, I don't know, but I do know that Kanawha County became the media place to be (oh, sure). And if you wanted public attention, Kanawha County was the place to come. And once again, the people who were pro-textbook and I hate that phrase, the people who were for a more open education, or were just for education without all the problems, maybe is a better way to put it, a more honest way, they were quiet, because they kept hoping it was going to simmer down. (mmm-hmm) They kept trying to deal with this with logic, with common sense. Just as my, my use of the Bible in several incidents, failed completely, so did any attempt at using logic.

Jim: I think the thing that keeps coming to me is and from my background, I have this training, this idea has been put in my head, the idea that for some reason public education has been perverted, has been up 'til 1974, and still it's continuing, public education has been influenced by secular humanism to the point where teachers are if not directly subtly leading their children, their parents feel or felt at that time, that someone was leading their children, some stranger or teacher or principal, leading their children into some immoral or anti-family, anti-God type of thinking. That I think was a legitimate danger, a legitimate fear in some of these people in Kanawha County. Everything I've researched so far pointed in that direction. People were actually stirred, people would be told that these people are telling your children or teaching your children subtle or direct ways to be against America, to be against God, they compared the fable of uh, Jack and The Beanstalk, with Daniel In the Lion's Den and that's saying that a myth is a, that Daniel In the Lion's Den is just a myth, and it can be compared to a story about Jack and The Beanstalk. That was a fear that these people had. They were afraid that if you taught their children, that Jack and The Beanstalk was on the same level with Daniel In The

Lion's Den, that they would begin to question Daniel In The Lion's Den. That was a fear that...

Nellie: Now, I can answer one of those from... (I'm sorry, I was so...I kind of unloaded on you), no, I...I and that's maybe, maybe what we need to do, to think about. Now, this uh, like this, (yeah, I couldn't make that out), that shows, that's an illustration showing a hand burning a draft card, and this says "Burning of draft card called the Noblest Duty of a Free Citizen". Galaxy series rejected in Texas, accepted in Kanawha County. Uh, this story from which this appears, was a story, it was a letter written by a father to his son who is in the Marine Corps, serving his country, and the father is trying to understand what makes people burn their draft cards. It's a very patriotic thing. It doesn't call, it calls into question people who do burn their draft cards, thinking that this is what their....

Jim: So, it's totally distorted then.

Nellie: It's a literal interpretation of everything.

Jim: Mmm-hmm, that one statement I think is a key statement. A literal interpretation of everything may be a key to understanding some of the fundamentalist attitude because they're very literal minded, apparently. Everything is literal. When the Bible says that uh, a star fell out of Heaven in the book of Revelation and crushed the earth, fell on the earth, they believe that literally was a star. I'm grasping for things here....

Nellie: Well, yeah, I...I...I hate to come off like someone who thinks everybody there was out with some ax to grind because I know there were some who weren't. But then, as they tried to have, tried to get the people who objected to look at books, many of them said there wouldn't be any books that we would agree to.

Jim: Avis Hill told me that. He said, I asked him in my interview with him, I said, Avis, if the, I said, if the school board had said to you, alright, let's sit down and compromise, and they used to have some Wednesday, they had several Wednesday noon time meetings, (oh, I know!) where they would meet and try to iron this thing out, and I said, Avis, what did you want? He said, all the textbooks had to go, every, that's the only thing that made us happy. Well, that was his statement.

Nellie: Well, I read something uh...I had it here somewhere, uh, Larry Freeman, wait a minute, no, that's not the one. (by the way) He said, if any member of the committee had an ounce of human decency, they could never have selected the books. That was not what I was looking for, though.

Jim: Now, who said that?

Nellie: Larry Freeman.

Jim: Who was he?

Nellie: He was a business man, I'd gone to college with him, but uh, that was not, I had a quotation, not Larry Freeman, Nick Staton (Nick Staton), Nick Staton was the one. And Larry Freeman...Nick Staton said that if any citizen had an objection to any book, that book had to be removed.

Jim: Didn't he later become superintendent of schools?

Nellie: No, he became a congressman (oh, yes, yes, you're right), but he, now remember that I told you that this was a political thing, and he was one who emerged after this with his political ax to grind.

Jim: He made the statement that if one...one citizen (one citizen had an objection)...

Nellie: Now, see, one of the things that had always been made perfectly clear was that if you had an objection to your child seeing this, we will not teach your child from this material. We'll go, there are many ways (yes, that's been stated, yes) to teach. Over and over again, but you don't have a right to keep my child from it. And I'll fight for that right. (mmm-hmm) One of the crazy things that emerged from this, I told you about my background (mmm-hmm), I did consider myself a fundamental Christian. (mmm-hmm) I thought I was what was called a fundamental. I discovered I wasn't, you know. (laughs)

Jim: And you weren't necessarily taken aback by these books. You felt they were perfectly legitimate, perfectly right for the school system, and so on. As a fundamental Christian.

Nellie: Yes, because, yes, because I see that often it is in a matter of interpretation, and I know how carefully most teachers deal with things which are sacred to people, how not to change. I don't think I'm putting my attitudes on other people. I have seen teachers handle what would be sensible material without causing damage to someone's beliefs. (mm-hmm) And I know that it happened at my school, and I don't believe that my school is the only school where good teachers taught carefully. You know, I'm that foolish. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Well, that's interesting and that's the kind of thing that helps me understand....

Nellie: I taught a course called "Great Books", and in this we dealt with the Bible. We used Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs. (mmm-hmm) And we had Jewish students, we had all sorts of uh, Christian beliefs. A couple of times I had Hindu (mmmh) or some other, and always we would deal with whatever version of the Bible that particular student happened to have, and if it was a question of Theology that came up in the discussion, always I would say, go to your priest, go to your minister, go to your rabbi, because these would come up. (mmm-hmm) And....

Jim: You're saying it's not the position of, it's not the job of public education to uh, to influence or to teach religion. (no, it isn't) Yeah.

Nellie: Nor to change it.

Jim: Do you feel like the textbook people, the anti, and I know you don't like that term, but I....(that's about all I know to do)...that's all I use because that's all I know to call 'em. The anti-textbook people uh, were trying to censor, do you feel they were actually trying to censor...to dictate what would be taught in the public schools?

Nellie: Oh, there was no question of it. That's what they were doing.

Jim: They were censors, in other words. (un-huh) And they were trying, what do you think they were trying to accomplish in all of this? Or is that too broad a question?

Nellie: That's too broad a question, and you're asking me to get into the minds of someone I had enough difficulty understanding (mmm-hmm), because always when thinking people would approach this, they would assume that you could just offer logical explanations. And they would work. That logic did not appeal, logic did not work to the, the hardcore protestors. Uh, (there were...) in other words, you wouldn't say, we can, if you object to your child using this particular book or these selections in it, we don't see any particular problem because we constantly use a number of selections. Uh...we'll be happy to make it work for your child, without any kind of exclusion or banishment. And I told you early about how I taught english in groups, and it was no problem. But that didn't work. (mmm-hmm) You know, it...short of throwing everything out and starting over again with McCuffey's Reader.

Jim: Would that have been objectionable to you? Starting with McCuffey's Reader?

Nellie: (laughs) In Adam's fall, we sinned all!

Jim: Well, that's what some people were asking. (yeah, I know there were) If you throw all the textbooks...and let's go back to basics. Now, that was a big cry during the time, we want to get back to the basics, we want to get back to readin', writin' and 'rithmetic.

Nellie: And that is something that infuriated me because I never left the basics. You know....

Jim: Yeah, yeah, so in your mind you were still teaching, I know it's time, (I've got to go), you were still teaching reading, writing and arithmetic....

END OF SIDE 2 - TAPE 2

KCTC.10C - TAPE #3

KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Nellie Teaford Wood

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 19, 1985

Jim: Alright, this is tape #3 of a continuing interview with Mrs. Nell Wood. This interview is being conducted in her home on March the 19th, 1985. And uh, this, the interviewee is Mrs. Wood, of course, interviewer is Jim Deeter, history student at Marshall University and this particular interview is a continuing interview on the Kanawha Valley Textbook Controversy in 1974 and '75. Mrs. Wood was chairman of the textbook selection committee and a teacher, english teacher in Kanawha County during that time. So we're just gonna pick up Nell, from where we left off last time and let you continue with your comments and what all.

Nellie: All right. The material that I had last time that I dealt with was material I had stored in a room upstairs. It was all material that I had carried with me throughout the country as I spoke to teachers' groups and other organizations about what had happened in Kanawha County. In the time since we've talked, Saturday afternoon, and all day yesterday, and some of the time this morning, I've been going back through all the material I've had, re-reading, organizing, uh, frankly remembering some of the things that I've forgotten, clarifying some of the points. Now, I did try to organize this material so that I would, would save time. One of the things we talked about before was the May 16th meeting, and so I'd like to begin with that. One of the things that happened there and I wasn't sure on Friday when we last talked, I referred to a selection but it was a poem, it was a poem by E.E. Cummings that Mrs. Moore asked me to read. I had not been able to find it. (mmm-hmm) I did find a letter written to me by Mrs. Sally Cody, no, it's actually, she sent me one letter and then gave me a copy of a letter she wrote to uh, Mr. Ken Solving, who was a member of the Board of Education, in which she refers to that. And I would like to read it. (okay)

Reading from letter:

I was so thankful that Mr. Stansbury finally read the E.E. Cummings poem. No teacher is going to spend the afternoon studying that poem with a group of 4th graders. And that tells me it was from level four of Interaction, the level that was for advanced high school students. But I do want that 12th grade seminar to discover Cummings wrote about little lame balloon men in the park, and that he also wrote about sexual intercourse, which he found pleasurable. His poem was not obscene. The one I found tucked into a textbook last week written by an 8th grader, was. The letter is interesting because Mrs. Cody was the teacher that I referred to uh, who helped me get into it. She also refers to another selection. Do you remember the scene from the play set during the depression in which Mrs. Moore objected to the word damn? We did discuss that. I couldn't remember the author's name. It was Pirry Thomas and I have not been able to find it. I did find the manual for that book (mmm-hmm), in which I'll look through. I remembered that the thing that upset the father so much, was that he had not been able to get a job, he had fought working for the WPA, but he finally did get a job when war came and he was so upset that it was war, that finally brought him to have work. And Mrs. Cody goes on, "I need a scene such as that to show the girl in the expensive pantsuit that not all fathers come

home from work in Lincoln, and that there was a time in the history of our country that caused a frustrated father, backed against a cold wall, to say damn. And I did have Mrs. Moore's letter to the board, or to the Gazette, in which she refers to that. "At the last board meeting I asked one of the teachers who selected the books to read a poem aloud. Her obvious embarrassment and repeated refusals to read such a poem to an adult audience should be sufficient cause for alarm". I also have my letter in answer to that. (a letter to the editor?) That was a letter to the editor. I also wrote a letter to the editor on June 10th, in which I repeated that phrase. I found it odd that Mrs. Moore could interpret as obvious embarrassment. My refusal was both lengthy and explicit. The point at issue was a refusal to extract isolated examples without examining the total context. I explained I would not read out of context from the King James version of the Bible: 1 Samuel 25:22, 2 Kings 98, Isaiah 36:12, or Isaiah 57:3. My explanation for the refusal to read these passages was not that they contained expressions which might offend some, but that they were not the message of the Bible. Focusing on them would obscure the message. Then I quoted specific verses from both the Old and New Testament sources, to illustrate the total content and it's importance, as opposed to isolated excerpts. The parallel of such an examination of the Bible to such an examination of the textbooks was apparent to me. I'm sorry it was not so to Mrs. Moore. My refusal to read was not from embarrassment but from a need to examine the total program before dissection of minute parts. I'm going into this because it seems to be that this was the position in which I found myself constantly during the textbook controversy. Always under attack, rarely being accurately quoted or even accurately represented in the press. Always having to go back and defend again. Now, I have the new stories from that May 16th meeting, and I have commented on those, in that particular time, you remember that I said, there the emphasis was on racism (mmm-hmm), you asked and it was only later that it switched to uh, (religion?) religion. And you asked me how I could support that, and it's very difficult. But I can do it. Uh, for myself I made notes at the time, and uh, one of the stories says, quotes Mrs. Moore, "I'm asking you to show me something pro-America". Mrs. Moore told the members of the selection committee, who were at the meeting to explain their books, selection of books. I'm not asking for something anti-black but we've got to have something from both sides. I want to see something patriotic in those books. And I was so proud of my perfectly calm answer at that meeting, because I said, "Would the Declaration of Independence do"? And picked up the basic text for junior english and show how it included the Declaration of Independence. But you see there's no reference there, there was never a reference in the paper, at that particular meeting. And even when she talks about something anti-Black, remember I told you she violently objected to James Baldwin (mmm-hmm), and yet the article from James Baldwin says, "I love America more than any other country in the world, and for exactly that reason I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually". And uh, all the way through, that's the type of thing. And since I'm talking about that May 16th meeting, I want

to make a couple more points about it. I did suggest that I ask for a tape of that meeting and it was not available, and I have cultivated selective _____ . (laughs)

Jim: I think we all do that.

Nellie: I told you that in order, and in the time since you have left, I had purposely tried to remember everything. And it occurred to me, after I read some of these notes on that meeting, that what she had implied was a kind of payoff that we had been _____ in some way, we had been paid off, and that was the statement that I had wanted, an actual reference....

Jim: Oh, I see, she was accusing the textbook publishers of paying you off to buy their textbooks.

Nellie: In order that we would (buy their books) buy their books. Now, I would like to go back and repeat very carefully how the books were selected. And I told you, I saved paper in our opening remarks and I was, I was surprised how much I had. I even have my calendar for that time, which shows exactly how the textbook study operated. This is my calendar provided by Kanawha County schools for 1973, 1974, and I recorded notes in it for very brief details of what I was doing in every class, as well as the meetings I had to attend and that sort of thing. And you'll notice that the first meetings occurred in October 23, 24, 25, at the board office from 4-7 each day. And I had, for some reason, maybe because I do think I'm logical, recorded all the textbook meetings in red. And then we met for two days uh, in November, the 1st and the 2nd, from 8:30 to 3:30, and as we go on you can see those meetings in red here, here, here and I did count those. We had 13 full days at the board office. These were days where we met 7 hours each, from 8:30 to 3:30 and then we had 11-3 hour days, making a total of 124 hours spent in the discussion phase, and then this was simply to go over what we'd done outside there. Uh, I have the form that was used, the Kanawha County form for evaluating a textbook. If you wish one, you may have that. I have extra copies. I have original material given to me by a textbook, and all members of the committee, by a textbook publishing company, their basic background material, I even found page after page of handwritten notes as I went through these meetings, where the representatives of the textbook committee, I mean the textbook publishers presented their books and then I had notes when I read the books, and notes as we discussed them.

Jim: Well, it's obvious to me, looking at this material, I know you have a lot of it here, that you all spent many, many hours determining what kind of books, what the books should teach and all the rest of that, why couldn't the uh, why couldn't the people who were objecting to these books understand that it was more than just arbitrarily deciding to buy the Heath Series or whatever.

Nellie: They didn't want to. That and the ex, the explanations were made over and over and over again. Now, let's, let's go back. The accusation was made that young teachers, I read it some

of the newspaper things, young, inexperienced teachers picked the books. This is something that was prepared, it's my only copy but it's very interesting. It lists the names of the 24 sub-committee members and the 5 members of the committee, where they taught, the number of years teaching, the experience, the type of degree they had, and the number of children. There was also the implication that we knew nothing about children. (mmm-hmm) There were 213 years of teaching experience. The shortest number of years were 3, the most were 30. Six of us had only our AB's, a bachelor's degree plus additional, 11 had their masters degree, 23 children and a half, I think. Again, that was something and we kept hearing it over and over again, even L.T. Anderson, who wrote for the Gazette as an editorial writer, never got that point. Now, I wanted to repeat something that I said that I want to make sure won't be misunderstood. When I told you we had a random sampling of Interaction, that one series (oh, yes), uh, because I don't want somehow or other a minor statement to in any way undermine the number of hours that we spent preparing. First of all, we are readers, I still read, sometimes 10-15 books a week. I am a phenomenal reader, many english teachers are, and I have a rather remarkable memory for anything that I read. And I know a lot of english teachers who do that. I have always read widely, because I've always made an effort to teach students on all levels, so that I had some who are remedial students, along with some of the advanced, which means I have to read the kinds of things that would lure reluctant readers, as well as the great works of literature. Maybe it means that my mind is just a mish-mash of nothing, but I do read voraciously. (mmm-hmm) And we did read those books. We divided them up in the 5 member textbook committee, we had 2 elementary teachers, 1 basically taught 7th and 8th graders, I remember the other taught 9th graders. In the 2 senior high, one taught 10th and 11th, I was basically a senior level teacher. And then of course, we did as we looked at the books, each examine our level for sure, but we also examined others and we were looking at a series...we had, we tried to have at least two people look at every book. And then when we got together to discuss, we laid them out and talked about them, and all of us looked a part of the time at some of the books.

Jim: So you're familiar with books, basically books from every area?

Nellie: From every area. And we, we really did it, that's the only thing I can say. (mmm-hmm) And I did have here something else, this is a list of the books and I did tell you that the removing, the books I thought was a mistake, and I remembered something (un-huh), one of the books removed was from uh, a McGraw Hill series...I don't know how much cord I have here...(you're just about out), okay, if you'll go get it, I'll show you, because I have books from the level that I want to talk about. (see if you can reach it now), okay. I once again laid these out so we could look at them. (okay) This is McGraw Hill's series (turning pages), and I don't know what the series is called, but one of the books which was removed was here. One of the books in the series is called The Bible of Literature, one was called The Comic

Vision, Themes and the One-Act Plays, one was The Classical Heritage, I do have that, Crime and Detection, one on science fiction, one on short stories. The book that was removed was Hero, Anti-Hero, and I can remember at the time the specific objection to that that one of the board members had was a story by Richard Wright from Black Boy, and it was felt that the language in that selection was uh, a little bit offensive. It was black english and there was some profanity. But also, in that particular book were a lot of ...fabulous stories about heroes. And uh, nobody ever uses all the selections and all the books and I think that's one of the things that I wanted to point out, because we had so many books, because we had so many kinds of classes. Some schools like Herbert Hoover and maybe DuPont were already having courses, maybe one called "Classical Literature", maybe one called "The Bible of Literature", maybe a course called "Hero, Anti-Hero", whatever. But we needed a lot of these books and a lot of them had already been in the county, being used for these many classes, as they were called. Now, I do think the many classes bothered a lot of people. Because english classes were not looking like they used to.

Jim: Now, let me stop you there for a moment. You say many classes, now these are classes for special students?

Nellie: No, many classes, I mean the 9 weeks, the semester courses, dividing up the english program into not the straight one-hour english class in which you study a little bit of grammar and a little bit of writing and a little bit of literature and a little bit of spelling, where you lump it all in one class and call it english. (mmm-hmm) They might be having a class in Shakespearean Comedy or Shakespearean Tragedy. In other words, it may be the high school curriculum looked a lot more like college curriculum. And it excited a lot of kids. One of the ironies was that the so-called progressive schools, George Washington for example, had the more traditional courses while the outlying schools like Hoover and DuPont were going into these 9 weeks semester courses. And that might have made a difference.

Jim: You think that's why some of the people got upset or were a little bit cautious of those, that type of approach to teaching, because it departed from the norm, because it was unusual?

Nellie: Yes. I did, I do have only two of those books from the Interaction series. And uh, I had, I even had a list where I marked, and it was only in level four that we had the random sampling. That's another thing that I wanted to say. We had examined totally levels one and/or levels two and three, and it was in level four, the advanced level for high school students that we had a random sampling. And again, these are one on limericks and one on _____. Kids love them, kinds of poetry and they help to teach a particular concept. Now, one of the things we had trouble, and Mrs. Cody referred to it in her letter there, a few minutes in a classroom would be all something would be given, but it was made to appear a major time element. Already in Kanawha County we were using in the elementary schools the Holt

Jim: So they were objecting to the book or the story...?

Nellie: To ask a kid a question. Uh, one story, a marvelous Jesse Stewart story, called 'A Penny's Worth of Character' got a terrible review in the press. A boy named Shane somehow or other cheated a grocer out of a penny, and it just worries him to death. And he's aware it's only a penny, but he is as guilty as if he had cheated the man out of a million dollars. And that's the point of the story. You don't cheat someone out of a penny. And over and over again we talked about that's why the kid's question "is it ever wrong to steal?" is one of the questions that is asked in that book. (Mm-hmm) Well, Shane would have said yes, it's wrong to steal. It's wrong to steal a penny. (mhm-hmm) And...?

Jim: What were they objecting to in the elementary...?

Nellie: Yes, I had, you know, I made a list of things I wanted to say and I had said that it was not a progressive selection. Uh, we, it was not forsaking grammar, the whole program was the strongest grammar program available. It was called "Language", though, we referred to it not as grammar but as "Language Arts". It was the strongest writing program that had ever been given in the county. Because always you can't teach people to write in a vacuum, you have to write about something. And we were generating writing exercises from the reading, from the discussion, even the discussions in the language books in the elementary level, which parents so objected to, are the things which gets students to write.

Jim: No. Another thing that came to my mind as we were talking, I think we would up towards the end of our discussion last week, I questioned you about people who kept crying for "let's get back to the basics", reading, writing, arithmetic and your comment was if I recall, that's what we were doing.

Jim: Yes, I had, you know, I made a list of things I wanted to say and I had said that it was not a progressive selection. Uh, we, it was not forsaking grammar, the whole program was the strongest grammar program available. It was called "Language", though, we referred to it not as grammar but as "Language Arts". It was the strongest writing program that had ever been given in the county. Because always you can't teach people to write in a vacuum, you have to write about something. And we were generating writing exercises from the reading, from the discussion, even the discussions in the language books in the elementary level, which parents so objected to, are the things which gets students to write.

Nellie: The story saying by the fact that the question is asked that we were teaching children to be dishonest. And you know, (laughs)...

Jim: It's hard to imagine how you could teach a....

Nellie: The mind just, just reels because what was under attack basically was the very foundation of teaching itself. In other words, how do we teach? I have a basic foundation in the socratic method of teaching. I was teaching great books at the time, and Plato's Republic was one of the books, and I have learned that much happened in classes when I shut up or when I ask a question and then listened and drew things out of kids and learned that uh, a hand or an eyebrow lifted was a response to be called upon, to be treated as something that was a part of the learning experience. (mmm-hmm) And so, I was tongue-tied. I still am, by the lack of understanding of what teaching is. And what became finally a major attack on all of the principles of education. In other words, how do we teach, what is teaching all about.

Jim: Is it possible this controversy is just that, or was just that? Uh, it was an arena to attack and do damage to the way we educate our children in those days. Do you think that, this controversy was that?

Nellie: Yes, because I think, and I think over and over again, and I have notes that say it, that it was basically a question on what is the purpose of schools. Is the purpose of the schools to teach a kid to think, or is the purpose of the school to indoctrinate? Now I have been conscious I would say, I have been conscious for the last 10 years of my teaching, preceding this textbook excitement, that the students I was teaching had to be somehow equipped to deal with the 20th Century.

Jim: Were they not being equipped before, let's say in the 1970's? Were they not equipped to deal with the 20th Century in the '60's?

Nellie: I don't know. I certainly don't think they were equipped to deal with change. And the parents I was seeing were if anything, the strongest indictment on the failure of the school system in this country, in that state, in West Virginia, because we had failed to prepare 30 years earlier, or 20 years earlier, those students for the '70's and '80's. They had struggled through the '60's and somehow or another had not come out whole. And what we were seeing in the protestors was the failure of the school. And....

END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 3

Nellie: ...I thought half the time, I was living in a Salvador Dali surrealist painting. You've seen that picture of the essence of time in which a clock is ...(oh, yes, yes)...it was, it was surrealist. If it hadn't happened to me, I would not have believed it. And trying to ...trying to deal honestly and

lovingly and carefully with the protestors was something that called for more patience than I had ever known and I was angry too, at what was happening to the way they were treated in the National Press. I was angry too, because I felt that we were all made less than we were by ...I have a couple of articles here, they make, that's what you brought back. Oh, here's one for example, the Appalachia Creekers literally a world apart. And here's a protestor holding signs saying, "Even hillbillies have constitutional rights". And here's another, that was I don't even know what paper it's from. Here's one from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, "West By God Virginia Fight Books", and all through here there are all of those smug, supercilious looking down their noses.

Jim: So you felt they were unfair to both sides.

Nellie: Yes, I..I felt they were making a circus of the protestors. Thereby, arousing their anger because they were serious, uh, they also played to the media and picked up their clues on how to behave, how to create a media...but at the same time there was genuine anger at being misunderstood. Now, I think when it, when it came time for the outside media to take sides, I think they took the sides of the protestors, because it's difficult to love the schools. Everybody has a gripe against some teacher somewhere. Most often english teachers. (laughing)

Jim: I have fond memories of my english teachers as a matter of fact.

Nellie: Well, you're a fortunate man.

Jim: Yeah, (speaking simultaneously--inaudible)...Mrs. Phipps, I'll never forget her.

Nellie: Back to this thing of needing to prepare students, I was conscious always of the responsibility of the english language to historically, the english language has adapted to change. It is a world language, because it is not a sterile language. It has changed, it has been corrected, if you will. But by the same token, it's capacity for change, it's crazy spelling has been it's, some of it's strength, the fact that we will borrow from anybody to combine words have made english, have helped to make english a world language. And one of the things this was doing was to help people to understand that a language helps to shape the way we think, because we think in a language, we think automatically in english in opposites, because our language is set up that way. We structure our sentences in two ways. We do a compound, because compounding is a part of the basic nature of english, and we do a series. In fact, if we try to teach people how to be articulate writers and speakers, we want them to study the King James version of the Bible. Not just for it's uh, but for the structure of language. Proverbs has the compounding and the triplets. Examine any great speaker, any great political speaker, Lincoln, Churchill and you will see this combination of compounding and series. You will see the magic of the english

language in it's use of short, strong words with a few bigger words thrown in for emphasis. All of these things you have to learn by studying language as a language. You have to learn about _____ and that kind of thing, by examining them. And that was a series which Mrs. Moore objected to. The Language of Man and the Literature of Man were two of the series.

Jim: If I might play the devil's advocate for a moment, and I'm not comfortable playing that part, but I want to... (that's all right, I'll fight)...uh, why and how excuse, how can teaching students in an english class the street language of black's enhance of the understanding of what you're, what you just got done telling me. How can that help?

Nellie: Alright, let me start by saying where did you get the idea that anywhere in this series we taught the street language of blacks?

Jim: Okay, you mentioned the series a minute ago, a little while ago uh, of something that used black, I'm not sure what you used, black language, black uh... (I was quoting Mrs. Moore)...oh, is that what you were doing? I'm sorry, I misunderstood you there. (Nellie laughing)

Nellie: Okay, now, but now you see, that was one of the things that happened, because there is some street language. Let's go to this communicating, whoops, what did I do to this? If I can find the article, here from this is the 3rd grade book, there's something on dialects that talks about the fact that informal language doesn't communicate. Take this in informal language and put it in standard english because that doesn't work.

Jim: Now, let me make sure I'm clear on this. You're, what you're saying the book says is that formal, informal language does not communicate (inaudible)... (that's right). Formal language does, so if I'm gonna communicate with someone in a letter, let's say I want to write someone a letter, that's gonna be formal, I won't use the word that I might use standing on the street talking to someone, is that what you're saying?

Nellie: That's right, and this is what I'm talking about. One book here is called levels of language. Uh, kidtalk, folk talk, and it uh, deals with uh, Carl Sandburg talking about the way kids spoke to one another and uh, the way they shared their particular language. Then another is and this is the reference you, you said Mrs. Moore referred to something, this is from the book Division Street America, and it's all informal language. And

Jim: In other words, this story, this article is informal language.

Nellie: It is about informal language (about informal language) okay, about informal language. And Studs Tirkel, Division Street America was the one I tried to remember the name, and he has recorded a number of people just what they said, how they talked

and the exercise here we read it in class and listen and what those, the way this person talks, tell us about him. In other words, our informal speech uh, this one, I don't notice the world, I'm very bored, I really don't know how I feel, and this was something Mrs. Moore objected...she totally missed the point of using the exercise that when we speak, we communicate ourselves and show ourselves and if we talk in this informal language, we ...in this lazy speech, we are showing a side of ourselves that we need to know we're showing. And in this unit, we also have formal language, Winston Churchill's Dunkirke's Speech. Now, you're going to do better than that? And Abraham Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby. Formal language and ____ Evans, who was an authority on language in this country had something called "Now Everyone is Hip About Slang", in which he discusses slang in this area. And there is an article about police language from the New York Times, that deals with Argot, the language that is used to confuse other people. It is the esoteric language that any group uses to keep other people out, whether it's the police, whether it's a group of steel workers, every profession, every job has it's own language that is known to the initiated. And then there's an article by Judith Kaplan, called Catch Phrases Don't Communicate. (okay, so...) There was one on Gobbledigook. But the whole point is we must speak standard language, we must speak standard english, in order to communicate.

Jim: Okay, well, the, I think the point that Alice Moore made, I wasn't there, I'm totally removed and again, I'm playing the devil's advocate, but it appears to me what they're, Alice Moore may have been saying in her protest, and the protestors was why do we need all of this material? Why not just teach our kids basic english, how to spell, how to write, how to construct a sentence and a paragraph, and what all, a whole, and why do we need all this to help them be better at what they're doing? Isn't that the question they were asking? (no) No?

Nellie: No. It would have been easier if that had been it. But it wasn't. It was the idea of looking at anything literally, and saying because this article is in there, you're gonna teach that (you're gonna teach that) you're teaching somebody to be like that (that's obvious), you're teaching them to speak like that.

Jim: You really think they believed that you were taking those books and ...and holding them up before a class and saying, I'm gonna teach you, this is the way you ought to talk. You ought to use this, you ought to be this way, do you really think they believed that? Or the philosophy...maybe they thought it was a subtle philosophy.

Nellie: Over and over and over again I heard charges that I had difficulty believing. One of the things that I heard is Mrs. Moore may be uh, wrong, she may be doing a lot of harm but she is sincere.

Jim: I've heard that everywhere I've gone, by the people I've talked to.

Nellie: (laughing) I'm sorry, I...I began to question some of that sincerity after awhile, because I couldn't believe that anyone could be that naive, and do that much harm and that much damage, in the name of sincerity.

Jim: She admitted to several people, I'm told, that she was uneducated, that she had not been beyond high school, and that she knew nothing of educational philosophies of material and she tried to get outside help and did get outside help from Norma and Mel Gabler from Texas and other people uh, to try to help her understand more. So, obviously she was not a person who was well versed in this material. I'm just wondering in my own mind and I'm speaking out loud, thinking out loud, that maybe she was naive, I'm suggesting maybe she was more naive than you give her ...than you give her credit for, if that's a good way to put it. Maybe you can react to that.

Nellie: I don't, you're entitled to your opinion, I have difficulty believing it. Uh...I felt rather that it was more a well-thought out plan. She looked at The America Reads series uh, have here incidentally, notes from those books. Remember that we talked about the prayer meeting type meetings that began in May (yes), I have here three pages of notes made by (Now those are the meetings Alice Moore attended) yes (and spoke) spoke at.

Jim: Then you had someone from your area.

Nellie: One of the members of the textbook committee (oh), Elaine Carr, one of the five members attended one of those meetings, and took these notes. (May I see that?) Uh, yes. Now, England and Literature is the Scott Foresman basic theory that's been around as long as I have known, it's been one of the uh, adopted series. It had been in Kanawha County for a number of years. She could look at that, the books that was going to be the basic literature series and I have quotations here, she says there is nothing uplifting in them. These are the books that have from the medieval period, the anglo-saxon period, the traditional _____ (these are english literature), english literature, mm-hmm. Canturbury Tales, Sir Thomas Mallory, from the Elizabethian Age, the Shakespearian Sonnet, Sir Thomas uh, Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare sonnets, The Taming of the Shrew, MacBeth, the 17th Century, the Metaphysical Poets, John Dunn, his Holy Sonnets, Death Be Not Proud....

Jim: You know, as you read those, I, all those sound familiar because I read some of them in high school and later in college and I've read them, so, I think it's obvious these have been used in high school and....

Nellie: Milton on his blindness (well, John Milton...) (speaking simultaneously--inaudible) God does not need either man's worth nor...

Jim: And they were object, or she just said that series was not uplifting, is that what she was saying?

Nellie: There was nothing uplifting in the basic series, and here's the junior book, I mentioned the uh, (20th Century American Literature?) well, yes. It starts out with William Bradford and John Smith and Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather. Cotton Mather?! (laughing)

Jim: And they were objecting to these.

Nellie: And the founders of the nation, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Payne, Thomas Jefferson....

Jim: Well, it's obvious, it's obvious well I shouldn't say obvious, it's apparent that someone some, some, this group was just not informed or they were just misinterpreting everything that they looked at, because you know, I can't sit here and believe for a moment that I could take that book and I'm sure I could go through that book and find things that might be offensive to me, but....

Nellie: She called the basic series the worse ones of all.

Jim: Now, the basic series, the ones we just talked about?

Nellie: The ones I just mentioned some of the selections.

Jim: What was her reasons?

Nellie: She explained that the material had hidden and subtle meaning to corrupt the minds of the students. (I'd have a hard time with that, but I don't want to make) I had a hard time with it, too, but I just, I wanted you to know that when I say these things (yeah), I'm now, here, on the language of man, she uh, (she says ghetto language), she referred to informal language and informal language. She said in reference to these I want to point out that these are not literature books but language books. I don't think the teachers read the books. (well, let's...) Okay.

Jim: Let's uh, if we might, just spend the next few moments...do you have any other things you wanted to bring to my attention, or...for history's sake?

Nellie: Yes, for history's sake, yes. (okay) For history's sake, every time an adult with any kind of open mind sat down with these books and read them all the way through, there was an overwhelming response of praise. For example, Charles Lobe, who was a lawyer in Charleston, asked me for a series or went to the board office and said I want to read a whole series from cover to cover. He took the language of man series, the ones Mrs. Moore was attacked so violently, took them home in the evening and read them from cover to cover. I got a call from him the next morning, at 7 o'clock. He said, I went to college and then went to Yale and I have learned more overnight than I learned in all my college courses. What can I do to help? I want to point that out, because he was Jewish, and became very much upset. I have two

copies of things you may not see, but these he picked up at a Klu Klux Klan meeting at Richer Creek. He was a little bit leary about going, but he got a press pass and went and this calls for the right to monitor all classroom activities, sit in in all classwork, anything that is un-American, anti-Christian or immoral, resist all attempts to destroy their future, some of the disgusting filth of the media, ABC, NBC and CBS are run by Jews, heavy black-type bold face. The eye of the nation is upon you, the feds know that Kanawha County is inhabited by righteous, God-fearing Americans, and on....

Jim: Well, that's a typical reactionary literature. I...you see that, I think, at any, at any place where there are protests, there's the one in Greensboro, North Carolina 2 or 3 years ago, and there were in Alabama in the 1960's.

Nellie: We tried to point out that any parent, no parent would be turned away with a request that he did not want his child to read particular material. We also tried to point out that there would be no embarrassment because as we often had multiple assignments, read one of these three selections, not all three, but read one and then the groups that read that one would discuss that one selection with a teacher and in some way relate that to the student. And so we did have a form for reconsideration of a book. That was there, that was always pointed out and explained to parents how we would use it. These are copies of petitions of different organizations for the book. Now, the most important thing I have for you, that happened in September with the textbook review committee. Do you know anything much about that?

Jim: Well, uh, basic knowledge, but I don't know all the details. I mean uh, I know that when they, in September's when they began to work at Creed, Creed Warehouse, is that correct? They began to take committees, each board member, if I'm correct, had the right to appoint certain numbers, a certain number, three I think it was, people, to a selection committee that would go up to the Creed Warehouse in the evening and they would review the textbooks and make recommendations for

Nellie: And teachers were invited to go along and be there and answer questions. We had no voice, we did not speak unless we were called upon and asked a question. The first selection that was reviewed was The Dynamics of Language, it was overwhelmingly uh, accepted. See, here are the votes on those. In The Dynamics of Language, 11 voted for it, 6 were opposed and one abstained. And it was the Galaxy, 10 for for, there were no opposing votes. What I have here are all the...the notes of those meetings. I developed a technique for surviving. If I couldn't talk, and by then I couldn't crochet, because it appeared rude, I'd write. So I took notes on everything that everybody said. My notes are better than the minutes of the meeting. Because I have the comments that were made. (I might like to see those, I'd like to maybe copy those, if I could) Alright. I will let you copy the official ones, I won't let you copy my handwritten notes for reasons. I mean, I'd be glad to go over them with you (okay), but

simply because they're done in the hurry of the moment (yeah), but....

Jim: Well, I may later have a question about those and I may come back to you and ask you to...

Nellie: Now, what I wanted to talk to you about was the Big Chimney meeting. There was a discussion that the, this textbook review committee needed to hear people both for and against the books. And they set up two public hearings. People were allowed to write in and request the right to speak at the meetings. It was to be a closed hearing with t.v. coverage so that people could hear if they wanted to, but on the night of the anti-textbook they decided you know, let the people who are opposed to the books speak one time, the people who are for it speak once. (this is the meeting at Big Chimney?) Ten for either side. (in the fall?) It was supposed, yes, it was supposed to be held at the Creed Warehouse and about an hour before the meeting I was called and told that it would be at uh, Big Chimney School and when we got there, there were 400 or 500 protestors there. It was a very violent meeting. Now there were many violent meetings, but there I felt that my life was in danger. I can't emphasize that too much. I was driving a car with 5 other teachers; two of them were black. And everybody in the car wanted to leave and go home and particularly as the meeting went on. The...the comments, the uh, excitement, the mob kind of thing was frightening. I tell you, it's the most I've ever been scared in my entire life. And I..I vowed never again would I let any group of people make me afraid for my life or that of the people I was responsible for. Now, it does something to you when you have once been so terribly frightened. When I was teaching in North Canton, I was involved inadvertently in a strike, that's another story, but any way, they ran a school bus at a group of teachers and three didn't move. You can guess who one of the three was because people couldn't understand how you could stay there in the path of a moving school bus. I was afraid of being arrested for being on strike, because I respect the law. But I was not afraid of a school bus being driven at me in a crowd of teachers, because I had been afraid and never again. I don't know whether that even makes any sense. But I felt like I had to say that. (mmm-hmm) And I have the notes on the Big Chimney meeting. And I remember they asked, and I would uh....

Jim: I think all this...all you're saying to me, and if I might dare to interpret what you're saying, and I'm not trying to read your mind or put words into your mouth, is that this particular tactic or this particular uh, feeling that you have, that they used against you to instill fear in you, was a tactic perhaps. Maybe that's what you're saying, that people use fear as a weapon. They use uh....

Nellie: But I'm also, yes, fear was used. Also, they manipulate and maneuver. I still have not to this day received any satisfactory explanation of why that was moved from the Creed Warehouse (to the school) to that school, the Big Chimney school,

and why, what was to have been a private meeting became a public meeting and the people who were on the committee, those citizens who were there, who also felt their lives were in danger, were livid! There was no state police protection. Mr. _____ said that he had been assured there would be. We could not get the police detachment on the phone, because I went personally to the phone to try to see...

Jim: You had no protection at all?

Nellie: ...no protection at all, except our own strength of character. (mmm-hmm) And....

Jim: How did that meeting end? Was it...did it just finally end and they went home?

Nellie: They listened to the people, no! That's one of the things that you can ...you can give the people credit for, that it did not...I mean, we stayed until 10 o'clock. We heard the 10 people but we listened to the screaming and the yelling and the standing ovation of maybe four or five hundred people as the speaker's spoke. And I marked them here...uh

Jim: This was a meeting where people would come on both sides and air their views to you in the committee, right?

Nellie: They were, they were uh, to have 10 speakers from either side, and they...all they had to do was to write in and there was a committee of the uh, the review committee to look at them. And over and over again uh, there were those things which happened which should not have happened, because somebody in authority was giving in to violence. It was as if this was the tip of the almost like the kind of violence we're seeing from the uh, the uh...protestors in uh, Lebanon and Syria. It's that kind of thing in this country. This was...this was the initial thrust there. This was the opening thrust of the kind of thing that we're seeing of bombing abortion clinics, which is the thing you mentioned. You know, if I can't get them to change, I will destroy. Now, the Board of Education office was bombed, (yes), a school was bombed, maybe two. A school bus was stopped by men who said we have these barrels of dynamite, or the barrels of gasoline and dynamite and if you don't turn back we'll blow up the ...a school bus with kids on it. Now, is it any wonder that people were afraid? (sure) The...and yet I think, I think that was the ...something happened to me, you see, that was about September 25th, something like that, and...

END OF SIDE 2 - TAPE 3.

Narrator: Nellie Teaford Wood

Number:

Interviewer: Jim Deeter

Transcribed by: Morgan Thompson

Date: March 15, 1985

Transcription Date: April 9, 2009

Jim Deeter: I am continuing the interview with Ms. Nell Wood, this is tape number 4, and she was commenting on about the big Chaney meeting and the fear that instilled and the violence that had erupted and one or two schools had been bombed.

Nellie Wood: One of the interesting stereotypes that the media kept getting at was the helpless protester as a victim of this tremendous system that had sold them short. I had short strength for that, because I felt that the publicist was the people who had bought the myth of teaching. Myth was a word that found its way around and with much aligns; myths were something in books that were stories that helped to explain our world. Now I had subscribed to the myth of teaching. I think is something I had told you initially, a part of the message. A nest in, well I quoted an article, building bridges. A responsibility to do something for others out of all sorts of altruistic motives that myth was exploded in Kanawha County, because we discovered that teachers were the enemy, schools were the enemy, and that was a disturbing kind of thing. When we examined the myth which we knew we either had to discover that we had deeper reasons than the myths or we would soon collapse.

I think that I had deeper reasons for teaching than the myth but I think there were other teachers that had bought the myth. And who were totally destroyed by it. We

had teachers that were incapable of action, and were incapable of going back to their classrooms and remaining true to the ideas of teaching because they were afraid physically of afraid. I think that I was lucky to be physically afraid then if you have been physically afraid then there is nothing else people can do to you. And I think that before this was through that I was perhaps one of the strongest teachers in Kanawha Country. Then they fired me, it's an old cliché but it's true. We had to have others reasons than expecting to be beloved. Or being involved in teaching.

JD: I had a question that I wanted to ask you about. As we get to the point, I think maybe where we need to start drawing some conclusions from all of this. Did the text book protesters have anything at all to say or were they just like you had said that you thought that Alice Moore had had alternative motives. That she was against public schools and that she had made a statement one time, that there was no need for public education and that you commented that you felt that was one of her great motives. One of her greatest motives was to get rid of public schools. Did any of the protestors have anything legitimate to say at all in your prospective?

NW: They are always legitimate things to say in certain instances. I have never particularly subscribed to a thesis that we all must agree on everything. I think agreement is not only very dull but very unhealthy. For example, do you like a particular book? Why one earth should you like everything that you read. You ought to read something's and become angry as the protester did. I am not threaten by people's disliking of something that they read or becoming angry of ideas expressed

in the world. There were some legitimate complaints that were given operated from, given a particular reference of course. It would be absurd if there weren't. But where I differ from than them, is not only the fact that I don't think that we all have to agree, nor do I think that we all have to read the same book at the same time. Where I could not accept the protestors was in their absolute unwillingness to compromise. In their absolutes, they knew in their minds what was right for everybody in the county, everybody in the world. You've seen my tree drawing, it was as if they were trying to chop down this marvelous spreading tree of Education and make it into one little, I don't know a lot about biology but some thing with one tap root and one stalk, one stem, and a few leaves I guess. It was an effort to cut off and frankly I thought the purpose of school was to teach people to think, and they thought it was to doctor it.

JD: That may be the key to the whole thing. The purpose to education that I have seen coming up time after time after time because Elmer tried to get the school board to address that issue and he met with them several times at the Methodist church and he said they never could come to an agreement on the purpose of education. As I said before the phone rang. We're talking about the basic reason for education. You said that protestors in your opinion wanted to limit the schools into an indoctrinating type of atmosphere, where you are taught this and this and this. You're saying you wanted to teach the kids how to think.

NW: If you go back to the types of skills, one of the types of skills is repeating, parenting. But the top skill that comes from learning is sentence, it is putting it all together, correlating material, and coming up with...

JD: I hear Alice Moore saying, well people talking about her because I haven't talk to her yet, I have to get on this certain issue because I think it is vital to the whole thing. I think if I am correct and again I am putting words in Alice Moore's mouth perhaps but their main concern was you don't have to teach a 5th grader how to think. Let's teach them the basics, let's teach him how to read, write, that would be their biggest complaint would be why do we need to introduce them to this kind of material to get them to think. And I am thinking specifically values, clarification and that sort of thing.

NW: A 5th grader needs to be taught to think. He needs to make fine judgments, he needs to be able to see, he needs to be able to interpret height for one of the better words. Because our 5th graders are being met by drug pushers, and saying this will make you feel good. Now if he has not, and I am not saying just teaching morals judgments because even the serpent in the Garden of Eden made the apple look good, and this is the kind of thing that is being done. Evil is preventing in pleasant disguises and if he has not been taught to distinguish to make these various judgments to think about these kinds of decisions, then how can he say no? But you brought it up. Well all ways, these are notes from a speech from somewhere, and I had said, I have a phrase here, the Purpose of Book and I have another phrase here

the purpose of Education. I had to indoctrinate or to think and this is another thing is the attitude towards change. Not all change is bad nor good but we must deal with change because it does happen. And I have written phrases like inflexibility, and I go back over and over again to say the literal meaning constantly. I found any ability to, there was very little ability to understand satire, there was very little ability to understand symbolism. One of the poems that literally sent the protester wild was one called Christ Climbed Down by Lawrence Fromagette. I think it is in this book. Christ climbed down from his bare tree, it's a Christmas story, from the tinsel and the glitter and he wept and of course it is a symbolic way of saying in our unchristian tinsel Christmas celebration we crucify Christ.

JD: What were their particular objections to that poem?

NW: It ends something about he crawled back in the world. Well they objected because they said the Christ didn't climb down from his bare Christmas tree. Of course it is a symbolism of the cross, and that by abusing Christ at Christmas time. By neglecting him at Christmas time we are crucifying him all over again. We are destroying him again until he is born again in our hearts and rebirth each Easter.

JD: So they were not understanding the symbolism?

NW: That's right. Symbolism was totally lost. Another one that bothered them was by a British man named Roger McDonna something about Mother there is a strange man

knocking at the door. Says he is Jesus. He wants a cup of water but I told him we didn't have any. Looks kinda dirty I offered him a tenor but he said water is all that he really needed. And said he wept as he going away you think I should have given him some. Well basically that is the idea. Some did and some said there should never be any reference to God, to Christ. Any reference in literature other than from the church, they even objected to the reference from the bible. That are often given, but how can you get people to understand that literature includes all of the experiences of man.

JD: Well it is easy to see how the impasse could take place, and I can understand, being able to see from both sides. I can see the impasse there, especially from literature like that. I don't how I would react to that. Well I think, it doesn't matter what I think.

NW: Well I would be interested to know what you think. But I do know that there was this feeling that every reference to God after a while was bad. Outside the church. There were those who were extremely fundamental and could have accepted noble. Anyway what do I have here, I have all of the textbook review committee things, I have an article by Thelma Conley in the Journal of Research and Development and Education, I have an article on Ohio Schools which is extremely good, I have an article from Today's Education, I think I may have given you the rough draft of that. That was my answer. And this is something interesting because Charles Loge was the son of the man who read all night, and he was the young man who came to

terms in the course of this not only with a great deal about education but a great deal about himself, who he was historically. I mention because I think when people examine problems in the light of who they are historically, religiously, who they are in terms of their parents, they are often drawn closer to the belief of their parents. Particularly if they're allowed an open examination, this boy dealt with all of the problems and became more strongly Jewish than he had ever been. I have seen the same thing happen to many Christian young people who by dealing with this with their parents and with the minister have come out a stronger faith which would have been the reverse of what the protestors wanted.

JD: One of the questions I would have wanted to end up with in a normal interview, and this is far from a normal interview but one of the question I attempt the ask what good came out of this if anything, did it help or did it hurt and I know you said already that one man had put this in writing, I have a paper here that Ms. Wood had that he was affected by controversy.

NW: Yes, I am convinced that more harm finally came out of the thing than good. I felt the cause of education in Kanawha was set back 20 years. I felt that the rumors will never heal. I think there were many varying motives as there were people there. And what the initial motives were are how they emerged from them. I started out to study books and to provide a good programs in the Kanawha county school that would meet all of the needs and I think we did that and then I spent the rest of the time learning about it, defending it, learning about people. I saw a lot of ugliness

and horror but I think one of the things that I saw was how people could become to a cause when the notice was shared but that would work on either side really. I saw into the hearts of people when I had not dealt with in other ways but George Washington organized, they had already had a parent's advisory committee but they organized a Parents protection association. They would come to the school and when somebody came to examine the library the principal would say some of the parents have an organization, they will meet you here and these parents would talk with you and these parents would come to the school immediately. One time a medium tried to come set up a media event and the parents stopped it rather effectively.

JD: He told me, as a matter of a fact, I think it was the same incident and he said he went to the school to look at some books and they wouldn't let him look at the books. He made it seem as if the school wouldn't let him have access to the library.

NW: The parents did because they said you have no children in this school, if you had children in this school we would but you have come to cause trouble. Now if that is something, if you are a public servant you can't say that. Teachers are rather effectively muzzled but the parents could do that. I felt enraged by my incipience until the Collation for Quality Education was formed. Have you heard of that group? Well you've talked mostly to the protestor. These were people who organized a group to fight the protestors basically. They issued a flyer that dealt with, it looks much like their flyer it answers the questions that they raised. They

organized meetings all over the county will the textbooks were open for display and for interpretation we got an opportunity to explain over and over again how these books were used and how one would fit in with another. I told you one time about reading the article in my church. My minister asked me if I would read that particular one. But the collation who organized these would take the displays and invited the people in with the advertising and anyone who really wanted to find out about the book in the county could. So I saw the good through the collation, I saw good though the parent organization, I saw good through the ministry association that tried to look at the books warts and all.

JD: So it is obvious that there were some good things and some not good things as you already mentioned there as a set back in education.

NW: I think teachers were afraid to teach, I think they would do anything that was the least bit creative. For example in today's education, well in Ohio schools Roscoe mentioned that at DuPont they always taught a unit on communism. Understanding how it operates, once again they are not teaching the principals of communism but teaching how to understand how historically communism differs from communism on paper which is a totally different thing. They were afraid to teach it that year and I think many things I think the kids suffered.

JD: Someone said I read an article that someone said there was more damage done to the children because of the controversy than what had been done supposedly, theoretically that were used instead.

NW: Yes they were learning all of the wrong things. Now I kept hearing, I had letters from all over the world. I had a student traveling in Switzerland, one in England and they heard about this and wrote me telling me that they had faith in the books if I had selected it. I had become the center of a marvelous network of support. So I saw those things, and at the same time I saw the crippling effect, I know marriages that had suffered. I knew teachers whose relationships had suffered, I knew of friendships that had suffered. Families that had suffered. Roscoe who was president of the teacher's organization was the uncle of the boy who bombed the school, the Klu Klux Klan rally was on a cousins property and here is one family a long time Kanawha family who was involved on both sides and that was difficult. Those are the hard parts.

JD: I know this is not a fair question but do you think textbooks in Kanawha county today reflects controversy of the 1974 1975 era? In other words, can I go into a school and find a text book that people were screaming so loud about in 74 or that type of textbook do you think?

NW: Of course. You could before that because they were not new. Let me say that I have not kept up too closely because it was a very emotionally kind of thing for me.

Incidentally we didn't leave because I was run out of Kanawha county, no generally I think I was the most evil teacher in Kanawha county. No one would have dared me, now that is a terrible thing to say. Before the thing was over I became a symbol, I am not sure I like it. I was Kanawha county teacher of the year that year.

JD: Did that controversy make you want to stop teaching because you are not teaching right now?

NW: Yes because that controversy helped to destroy my health.

JD: So it was part of your health that made you stop?

NW: Probably although my husband made another move but I had some rather strong advice from an orthopedic specialist that told me if I wanted to continue to walk I had to change the way I lived. Not just on my feet but I don't know how to be a halfway teacher. I didn't know how to fight halfway. I don't know how to halfway honest. I couldn't be that in a classroom, I couldn't be less than what was needed. I'm a good teacher, and it is a tragedy that I am not in the classroom. I had planned to teach all of my life. I felt one day someone might recognize me.

JD: Is there anything else? But I do want to wind this up. Is there anything else that you would just like to say? Before we close the tape.

NW: I am bothered by the issue that surface there the parent input in the schools. There is something I have to say. First off I don't think parents understand how school is operated. That schools operate with the school's system separates as a different entity than the schools classroom. That there is a system, and they elect the school board members and that the school board members select the superintendent. Who basically is the instrument that the school is operated. People don't understand...