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### Oral History Interview on Sheff vs. O'Neill (with video)

Leo Harrington

Karen Harrington

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## **Harrington, Leo and Karen**

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Location: Harrington's home in West Hartford, CT

Recording format: Video

File name: HarringtonLeoKaren\_medium20110627.m4v

Length: 1:10:43 (see inserted timestamps)

Transcribed by: Anique Thompson, Jack Dougherty

Additional files: none

### **Abstract:**

Karen and Leo Harrington (both born in 1949) recall their activism for school integration in Greater Hartford through their involvement in the 1989 Sheff v O'Neill lawsuit. Previously, in the early 1970s, they became active in housing discrimination testing with Boyd Hinds and the Education/Instruccion organization. They also describe their experiences as West End residents and parents of children in the Hartford Public Schools, followed by their decision to move to suburban West Hartford in the mid-1990s, and the sharp differences in educational quality and student expectations between the two districts.

Submitted as part of the [OnTheLine web-book](http://ontheline.trincoll.edu) by Jack Dougherty and colleagues (<http://ontheline.trincoll.edu>).

### **Speaker key:**

KH: Karen Harrington

LH: Leo Harrington

AT: Anique Thompson

JD: Jack Dougherty

[All comments by transcriber in brackets]

AT: So I'll give you basically like a rundown of what the structure of the interview is and then we can go ahead. So I have three big questions and the first batch of questions well one big question and then the follow-ups are about the origins like how you first got involved in the case like what was your thinking behind why you wanted to do it and stuff like that and then I'm going to move on to ask you questions about the legal process like the actual court case sitting in the courtroom how that went and what that experience was like and then I'm going to move on to long-term reflections like what did you learn from the case and you-know in hindsight looking back what would you have done differently or anything like that. So that's the basic setup. [0:40]

KH: OK.

AT: Okay. So the first the first question I have his: what is your earliest memory about your role or involvement in the case? [0:53]

KH: I mean it goes back a little bit before then. We had come to Hartford, we moved to Hartford in 1978 and got to know a man named Boyd Hinds who ran a – he was a civil rights, he had a civil rights organization called Education/Instruccion and both of us had been pretty – well my family was very actively involved in various causes as I was growing up and when Leo and I met in college it was something that was important to the both of us so we got to know Boyd Hinds and we stated to do housing testing. We became a couple – a white couple to look at discrimination housing around Hartford so we got to know Boyd and we got to know some people that he worked with and we did that for a few years but our real involvement [1:55]

LH: .... Well actually coming out of that we lived at an apartment in the South End of Hartford which was primarily white and not Hispanic at that time and the building we were living in was all white and it was managed by a company named Robert C. White who ended up being sued and we were – we filed a lawsuit because one of the, they actually were discriminating in the building that we lived in. So I remember as we moved out it was a little bit scary as we were moving out so those were the first two things that we... [2:37]

KH: Right so it was about housing and kinda getting a sense of Hartford and how neighborhoods were setup and access to housing for everybody and clearly when we were moving into Hartford we were very much steered into certain neighborhoods and we had this sense. So that kinda started us on a roll. [2:56]

LH: We were aware of that, at the very elementary level and we were steered away from, actively steered away from. . .

KH: ... Many neighborhoods.

LH: You know in the North End of Hartford or even Asylum Hill at that time which was about 50% white and 50% black. Sort of a dividing line but we were steered away from that and then of course rapidly what happened was Asylum Hill became heavily black and Hispanic because no whites were being steered away from there. So we saw that happen in our own life. [3:32]

KH: So then, and then we started having children and our son our first son was born 1979 and we had settled into the West End of Hartford at the time our son David and he entered Noah Webster school which is now I guess a magnet school. He entered in kindergarten in about 1984, '85. 85 I guess and you know we were very surprised it was a fairly integrated neighborhood which was very important to us and we got into the school and it was not an integrated school and you know we kinda looked around and was wondering where all the neighborhood kids were going and started looking into it more and was starting to realize that either people were opting to send their children to private school mostly, not necessarily religious based but private schools or else people were radically starting to move. In his kindergarten year the roster for the first day of school changed radically within the first months and there was the sense that people were scared. They were scared to send their kids to a Hartford school and that was really disturbing to us

cause we had specifically chosen Hartford because we wanted our kids to grow up in a more integrated environment. And at the time... [5:11]

LH: I remember distinctly taking David to school every morning. That was my job for some reason I think probably that was my job because of my work schedule but anyway I would talk him and he was a very shy kid. So I would take him to the schoolyard and he was standing there like... and so I would say, "David point out the kids who are in your class" and then this kid over here I would go over and introduce him to the kid and sort of get him, try to get him to know some of the kids. And I'd ask, "Oh, where do you live?" and what I found out was a very large number of the black kids – there weren't too many Hispanics were outside of the school district and what ended up happening was that David's class where he was one of a couple of white boys they split the class up into two and then he was either one of two white boys in the class. So it was a strange setting because.... So we asked the principal what was going on with the school. They had this huge influx of kid the kindergarten year and it just doubled from what they had expected and all the new kids were primarily black and we had some white parents just running away as they saw the composition of the school. So we sort of got interested in – this is really out of whack. This is not why we moved to where we moved to be in, and have my kid the only white boy in the class and when we got involved with the... [6:57]

KH: No I mean I just want to clarify something. From the very early beginning it was an issue around very few boys being left in Hartford Public Schools and that became a theme for us and that actually got bigger as the years went on because there were very few boys. There were many girls there were very few boys. But we had initially approached, we knew Wes Horton and we knew Boyd and we started talking with them about our perceptions and they were really interested. [7:35]

LH: Well actually it went the other way. Boyd was leaving Hartford he sort of said 'I've had enough' and he was moving out to Colrain, Massachusetts in his house in the country. So we said, "Hold on buddy before you go, we're just getting started here what should we do?" And he said, "Go see Wes Horton." And Wes was living, had been living in Canton and had just moved to the West End. So we called him up and he and his wife... [8:08]

KH: Jane

LH: came over and we got to know each other and he said, "What do you want to do?" We said, "We want to file a lawsuit" Nothing else is going to work clearly this is way beyond what I can do, what a couple of parents can do, what the PTA can do. The Hartford Board of Ed didn't want to touch the issue of what was going on they just kept it real quiet and refused to give us numbers and statistics that we were asking for just to kind of get a handle on the situation so he said, "Great." He was kind of looking for somebody to be a plaintiff and so we agreed to do that and then as it turned out my mother was very sick. She had cancer, it was coming back and we knew that she was going to die. So we said, it was going on for about a year. So we said, "We'll talk to you after this is over." So we just put it on hold and after we were kind of ready to get back into doing something like this, we called him up and Wes said, "Guess what? We've got lots of other people interested in doing this. There's a group associated with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], there was a group from the... Puerto

Rican... what was the group? Anyway there was a whole bunch of groups about four groups. And some of the groups were looking for plaintiffs. Wes already had a plaintiff and then they were fighting about, not fighting but they were arguing about, "Shall we sue in federal court? Or shall we sue in State court?" and Wes of course had sued in the state of Connecticut a couple times and won a couple times before that so he wanted to go in State court. So eventually they all agreed to go in State court, which I thought was great [10:05]

KH: And that was when we met Elizabeth who became the lead plaintiff family and we had a number of meetings

LH: Elizabeth Horton Sheff.

KH: Yea, Elizabeth Horton Sheff. We had a number of get-togethers with other potential plaintiffs and families to sort of build up a - try to build up a community among us.

LH: and we got started and we've been going ever since. Our kids are now 31 and 28 and...

KH: Well that will be the last...

LH: Well there's a lot of in-between. [10:50]

AT: So I just have a quick question. What were the dates that you originally met with Wes and then...

KH: I think it was about 1980

LH: Yea he was still in Kindergarten

KH: He was just in Kindergarten so it must have been 1985-86 it's hard to remember

AT: Okay, so how did you come about making the decision to be committed to becoming a plaintiff on the case?

KH: I think it was something that we felt that we really wanted to do, that we felt that we could, we had the energy, we had the interest. We cared about the city a great deal we were incredibly committed to making Hartford work not just for us but for other people. So we thought that it wasn't a huge decision for us as a couple it was a little bigger decision for us in terms of our kids' the irony is that our son Michael was only three at the time and a little bit of naïveté I thought, "Well, this wont impact him too much" but we decided to do it with our kids cause we thought they would obviously benefit from it and it would be a good thing to do as a family. [12:12]

LH: We thought that it would actually, it was an easy decision because we were involved in civil rights suits before and we had given sworn testimony with FBI agents in our living room and gone through all kinds of stuff like that so this was kind of like easy in a sense because it was a whole group of people and there was some comfort in numbers but we felt that there was nothing else that we really could do. It was either that or just give up on it cause we really committed to

public education and we felt that in our public educational work it has to be sort of representative of the whole community it doesn't work to just have Whites here and Hispanics here and Blacks here it just doesn't work well for any of us so it was an easy... [13:05]

KH: ... It was very easy. I also think we had both gone to graduate school in this area and we had been married already but we had gone to graduate school so we knew a lot of people and we were seeing the people we knew moving out en masse and we had all come to Hartford with this resolve that we were gonna be involved and we were gonna be committed and that we were gonna make Hartford a vibrant community and then everybody started to leave and we said that we wanted to do something to see if we could change that. [13:39]

AT: Okay so can you just describe what the neighborhood [was] that you lived in? You said you lived in the South End. When you first came to Hartford.

KH: Right.

AT: What it was like, and the schools.

KH: No well, we moved to the West End for schools, yeah.

AT: Okay, okay.

KH: Yeah.

AT: So can you describe that? And what that was like?

KH: The West End was a very friendly, warm neighborhood. Its people had big houses and big porches. Some of the dwellings are single-family, a lot of them are quite large some are multi-family. There was, the West End has been has been and it still continues to be a little bit divided with Farmington Avenue being the dividing points so north of Farmington was definitely more Caucasian and mixed and but the south side of Farmington avenue was a little more – I think a little more – many more renters, not as many home owners. Although there were some home owners, more were apartment buildings. But everybody fed into the local school, which was Noah Webster Elementary School – a big old building on Cone Street and it was a wonderful neighborhood and we developed wonderful friendships. [14:55]

LH: It was a nice walking neighborhood. A lot of people walked around. Some of this changed a little bit we had a neighborhood grocery store and drug store and places to eat and [a] bowling alley and banks and you would walk around and go to everything. So that was a good feeling cause you could get to know some of your neighbors. [15:17]

KH: A lot of big porches. People hung out on porches. We had a volleyball team. Not team, we had a group of neighbors play volleyball together and the school was a real central force for many of us and a lot of activity originated at the school and kind of built out. As parents of people who sent their kids to school we were really involved. In some ways Noah Webster was the envy of a lot of other schools because the parent involvement was huge and probably that

was because we had to work hard to make sure the school worked well for our kids. Because there were deficits there was a lack of money for a lot of supplies. We would do fundraisers and buy things and do as much as we could and there was also a good spirit and the spirit and the people and it was a really a nice group of people, it was just a real good mix of people it wasn't, it was a real coming-together to make the school work for our kids so we loved the West End. [16:32]

LH: Coincidentally we sort of after first we were on Beacon Street, then we moved to Cone street which was just exactly right across from the elementary school. So things were happening in our yard. People would drop by our front porch on their way to school or after school. I was involved in the PTA, and they delivered the PTA mail to my house. [16:58]

KH: It was a great neighborhood. A really wonderful neighborhood. [17:04]

AT: So how did you make the move to West Hartford? How did that happen?

KH: Very sad.

LH: I had to force her to actually.

KH: It was very painful. Our son David was in Quirk Middle School and it was a really hard environment for him. And not that he talks that much about; it wasn't so much a fear. I think there were some issues for him was the time of some gang activity. David is... he speaks his mind but he also can be quiet so he didn't really, he had some issues but it wasn't that as much as the fact that the education was pretty poor. It was horrible to be honest. [17:54]

LH: It was a terrible disappointment.

KH: It was a terrible disappointment to us. He was in the gifted class and it was really an inferior education in any sphere. He happened to be quite gifted in art and there was like no supplies he was given at the time, believe it or not, you probably don't know what a mimeograph piece of paper is. They used to be these machines that they would make copies of like announcements for school and at Quirk and they would take the leftover paper and use it for art so there could be an announcement on one side for parents and that was like the art supplies and he was a kid who tried to be involved. He was on the swim team but they really couldn't get it going. [18:43]

LH: Well they session in the middle of the - they canceled the year - in the middle of the year.

KH: He played basketball that was a little more successful. So he really tried to be involved but

LH: Basketball didn't have anything to do with the school.

KH: Oh yeah, that was right.

LH: They cancelled the basketball team.

KH: But the biggest issue for us as parents of David was that he had no peer group. He has like I think out of the 24 kids in his class, 20 were girls and 3 were boys. So he didn't, and you know, middle school you need a peer group and he really didn't have boys to hang out with they just didn't have boys. [19:22]

LH: The boys who were in Noah Webster, which fed into Quirk, just like disappeared. They just you know, this one went over to a private school; this one went to a parochial school, this one... It was like \*boom\* they just disappeared and there were just a couple boys left. [19:38]

KH: And he just didn't have a peer group and that became harder as a 12-13 year old kid. If you don't have a peer group, life can be really tough. So it was a combination.

LH: The academics were horrible.

KH: The academics were really horrible and we tried to be involved in the school and they would get – just some computers would come into the school and they got a whole shipment of computers. But guess what? They were left in boxes and they weren't utilized. They were reading Shakespeare and they didn't have enough books to give to the class to read so it's really hard to get a class to read something if you can't provide the books for them to read and having both been English majors we have a gazillion copies of some of the books they were reading and like we'd rummage through and try to supply things but it was a constant battle just to get to the basis. And we're committed to public school education. Private school was not an option philosophically for us it was clearly not an option financially for us and I think even if it were it would not have been an option. It got to a point that as a parent your beliefs and your values are great and you hope that you instill them in your children but clearly David was – it kinda crystallized, one Christmastime in eight grade where he came downstairs and he started talking to us about school and he was really bummed out. He said, "We had a career day and he said they brought in someone from the US Postal service to talk to us about careers working for the post office" and he was outraged. He said, "Why don't they think kids in Hartford can do more than be – work for the postal service? Why is that what they're kind of pushing us to aspire to?" and he was very – those were the kinds of things that he would tell us that made us realize that he was... [21:46]

LH: Well they also treated the kids like animals. It only came in little bits and pieces and some of it came out after he even left but they would lock the boys urinals because they were afraid the kids were gonna smoke or fight or something and whatever and so the kids had no place to go so they peed in the hallways. [22:10]

AT: Oh no.

LH: This is how they were treating the kids you know and that wouldn't have... anyway that was one example and there was just no pushing the kids to do anything. We went to a request a conference, which they didn't have routinely, and they said, "Well why are you here? David's no trouble." And we said, "We know that he's no trouble, we want to know what he's doing." And that was the expectation just no trouble and I remember at the very end of the... and then we asked some questions about history and we said, "Why is he studying world history? Aren't they



supposed to..." and they said, "Because most of the kids, this is going to be the only history class they take. So we're going to give them one history class in eighth grade because most of them are not going to graduate." That was the approach and I said, "Well his class, kids are going to graduate." That small group. What they did was: "We just have to follow the curriculum..." which was so stupid it was geared to the lowest common denominator and then at graduation it was sort of called graduation and most of the awards they gave out were for attendance and nothing for achievement at all. They didn't expect these kids to do anything. Just sit there and don't fight. That was the expectation and it was horrible. It was just absolutely horrible. We still didn't give up. So we went, and we went to Hartford Public High School. The school he would go to and we said, "We would like to meet the teachers and tour the school" et cetera et cetera. Well that was a disaster. Hon, do you want to tell... [24: 11]

KH: Yeah, we just said it was one of our concerns at Quirk was that David didn't have good peer group and we wanted to know, get a sense of the feeder schools and what your projections are and I won't mention the person's name but he was assuming that we were just looking for white children for David and we kept on saying: "We're not talking about the color of the child, we're talking about... David has not had boys to interact with and that's been a huge concern for us and we just want to know..." and it was a very unsatisfactory meeting. He kept on saying, "Well you should send David here he's such a good student he'll do well he'll go to the best college..." and we said, "No, that's not what we're looking for we're looking for four years in our child's life where he'll have a peer group he'll have other things and it did not go anywhere and I guess we came, we finally came... [26:04]

LH: The physical plan was a disaster and some of the teachers basically said, "Well why would you send your kid here?" and so it became very, "We're not going to do this. We're committed but we're not stupid to go against all the evidence that was there." There was not one positive thing they could give – one good reason to go to the school so as it turned out of course Hartford Public was nearly lost its accreditation because they had so many problems from problems with the students, the classrooms, the facilities – everything. It was like nothing going right in that school. [25:50]

KH: ... and the other part, we had Michael coming along and Michael has other strengths and we didn't think that, we thought that he would have a really hard time at Quirk in different ways and he would – and I think we just as parents came to a point, a really hard point to say: "This is working for us but it's not working for them..." and it was incredibly painful process. [26:19]

LH: Well we quickly put our house for sale and we sold it and moved here... Leaving out a lot of... [26:28]

AT: Okay so, what schools did David and Michael attend when you moved to West Hartford?

KH: So Michael started, went through Noah Webster. So we left Hartford when Michael finished 6th grade then Michael came to King Phillip as a 7th grader at the King Phillip starts at 6, its 6-8 so he kind of came in the middle. I think an example of... we were also looking at resources so the irony is the day that we came to look at King Phillip for Michael David was a Quirk and there was a music lesson and it was obviously a state-wide music lesson and it was learning the

notes of a keyboard and David learned it on a piece of oak tag paper and they had the notes written out and everybody had it just like that [gestures in air] and we went to King Phillip and they had – the kids had actual keyboards and it was like: “Wait a second this schools are what? Three miles apart, four miles...” I don’t even think its four miles. “...why are the resources so different in West Hartford as opposed to Hartford? Why are the Hartford kids not getting to practice with real keyboards and why are West Hartford kids having that access?” So it was very, I mean it was, it made me cry. It was so unbelievably inequitable for these kids so David moved, so Michael came in middle and middle school is hard. One of the things we learned is that Quirk had its problems, King Phillip had its problems. You’re dealing with a middle school population that is tough. But David went to Hall High School and they both settled in pretty well. We chose this part of town only because the kids had – knew some kids at school and we thought the transition for them would be, at least they would know a few kids and I think they had some really good people to help with the transition including... [28:38]

LH: They made a very good transition, they were despite – I think Noah Webster was a very good school and they had very good foundations and so both of them made very easy transitions to the schools but we’re really pleased with a lot of the things. David was very interested in art and had been in elementary school. When he got to... [29:07]

KH: I told them...

LH: No, but when he got to Quirk they said: “Well we don’t have art, we don’t do art.” I think they did it for like three weeks out of the year or something and the art class, it would have recycled paper and the art room had no natural light. The whole school was like a prison and that’s what it looks like if you go by Quirk Middle School and he went to Hall and he had an art room that actually had a sky light, had actual light so you could really see the colors and they actually... he said: “They gave me crayons and I could actually take it home, it wasn’t written on one side” and those were just like night and day the way the kids were treated and that immediately told us we made the right decision because Quirk was a disaster and I don’t think any kid should have to go to a school like that at all. [30:06]

KH: I think also one of the things we found out too was that West Hartford was a lot more integrated in terms of their population than we had anticipated which is sort of the irony. A lot of people from Hartford had moved out here, it’s the first ring from the city. There is some more affordable housing here if people need access to more affordable housing so in some ways some of the classes that the kids were in were much more racially balanced that what they – clearly what they had a Quirk and Michael went to middle school and he went to Hall also. [30:51]

AT: I’m going to move on, if you guys have nothing else to say about that. I’m going to move on to questions about the legal process. The first question that I have is: When the Sheff case was moving through the courts, what was your role?

KH: I’ll let Leo, because you did more...

LH: Well, one was to try to get some plaintiffs to show up and we were kind of in the core group of how many people?

KH: Ten.

LH: About ten people among the parents of the plaintiffs who were kind of there almost all the time and so I tried to show up when there was a court appearance and try to call other people to get them to show up if they could and sometimes if it was a significant occasion then we'd have press conferences and things like that but mainly it was just to show up and talk to our lawyers after because it was always sort of interesting and I'm glad that Elizabeth Horton Sheff was always so tough with our lawyers because sometimes they had an idea of what they wanted to do and we had an idea of what we wanted to do. So we had to bring them in because they had a mission of their own. It was sometimes different than ours so we maintained some solidarity with the group and very often there were key points where the lawyers would have to ask us: "Well we're at the crossroads here, so what do you want to do?" So it really helped to be, to have attended and read the opinions and all those kinds of things but part of – I know part of my role and Elizabeth's role was to get as many of the plaintiffs out and to keep them up with the process because when it came to those key points it wasn't always that easy to figure out what to do and sometimes we had one lawyer saying this, and the other one saying "do this" and we were like "We don't know, we haven't done this before" so, but after a while we got to be pretty confident and sometimes we have to reign them in on some of the strategy questions. [33:25]

JD: Can I ask about that just for a second? Can you give an example of what... can you think of an instance where you had to rein somebody in or had differences of opinion of the strategy about that? I haven't heard this before ...

LH: Well in terms of strategy there was always a question since we went to court – first time and we lost with Judge Harry Hammer and then it was appealed to the State Supreme Court and we won there so then there was a – I forgot the legal terminology – but there was a, they said: "Alright, they have to do this..." and of course in the first year nothing got done and there was the question: "Do we yank them back to court? Or do we give them some more time?" So we – those were always the questions and so initially I think the lawyers were inclined to just say "Give them some more chances, give them a little but more rope to hang themselves with..." and then again this was a repeating situation it went on and on. In different times, there were different legal terminologies but that was the basic one. In other times sometimes some of the attorneys would speak out to the press and would sort of go off on a tangent and you know "That's not what we agreed to... You're our lawyer." I don't want to get into any specifics on that but those were the kinds of things and we stayed on them we didn't want to read about anything in the paper saying "Plaintiffs agree to something..." and sometimes things would come up very quickly and the media would say: "What do you think about this?" and if we weren't up to the minute on the details then I would be really annoyed. [35:30]

KH: I also think you're talking about many years of court appearance and court and appearances and meetings. I mean Leo kind of took the lead for our family because both of us working full time and having to raise children we both couldn't be there all the time but there was a lot of work for probably about it seemed like 10 years at least... [35:55]

LH: More than that.

KH: No, no but I mean the really constant and I have Elizabeth did a wonderful job of being on top of things and being accessible and I think Leo and Eugene [Leach] and a couple other people really kept things going quite well. But if you think about a person's lifetime 10 plus years is a significant chunk of time. [36:23]

AT: So, Mrs. Harrington, what were you doing while Mr. Harrington was in the courts dealing with the plaintiffs and the lawyers, like what was your role?

KH: Working. I mean, I would go to some meetings. I certainly cut back on meetings. It's hard to do that. We don't have, the kids were getting older but it's still hard to balance things. I had a full time job so working and doing things within the house and it's a lot of time trying to live life. [37:03]

LH: The kids going to activities and this and that and involved in sports and school and...

KH: I mean basically from the time David was five or six and Michael was two to three to through high school that's a lot of years to balance those kinds of... plus hopefully have a few other interests in your life that you want to be involved in.

AT: So I have a quick question. What was the relationship like? You said that you would have meetings with the core group. What the relationship, plaintiff to plaintiff, and plaintiff to lawyer? What was that dynamic like? I'm interested to know....

LH: Well it was a core group of people who were involved from the very beginning and they're still involved and I'm sort of, haven't been too involved in the last year there hasn't been that much going on and then there were plaintiffs who moved away, got divorced, one – two people died, plaintiffs parents so these things happen and go on. People got divorced, moved out of state. So we sort of lost those, some of the original people and then there were some replacement people who came in also and we tried to foster that as much as possible – it was going on so long and there were a few people who have been pretty active who were not original plaintiffs. Interesting enough that I think of all the original plaintiffs Elizabeth is the only one who lives in Hartford I'm pretty sure. [38:57]

KH: Denise, doesn't she live in..?

LH: Oh you're right.

KH: Denise Best lives in Hartford.

LH: But most of the people moved, there was some Hispanic families moved first and then some of the whites and then some blacks. [39:17]

KH: I think it was a good – I think the group was quite cohesive

LH: Oh yea we were very cohesive. We met on our own without the plaintiffs – without the lawyers quite a bit and then there were some meetings with the lawyers. It was back and forth there was a lot of time... [39:36]

KH: Generally the relationship between the attorneys was good the irony is that there were generations of attorneys. You would get the beginning, you'd get these people would come in they'd maybe come in from New York working for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and then they'd work. People in those kinds of jobs a lot of them don't stay long and then they'd move on. I think this case has probably helped train whole – several generations of legal aid attorneys and when a new attorney would come sometimes there's a little stepping back to, they needed time to get to understand the dynamics of the group. The group needed time to get to know them. So there's from my perception there was a need to step back sometimes and readjust but I think – I've studied group process, it was one of my interests in graduate school. I think the group, I think it was an impressive group of people who were able to come together, work together and be very respectful of each other and I think when there were differences I think there was always the level of respect to each other which having been involved in lots of groups in other causes we didn't have – it wasn't always, could be incredibly contentious at times and I think the goal remained the core and I think people did a good job. [41:09]

LH: Almost, we usually strived to try to have a consensus when we had some crossroads and nearly all the time that happened I only recall one time, I think it was just once. Maybe because I was on the losing side where we – the attorneys wanted to go one way and some of the plaintiffs wanted to go one way and then we really had to take a vote on it and as it turned out whatever the situation was we said fine, okay. Now we're united and we're going forward in that direction. It was one of the appeals and I was really happy with the result but there were never any – I don't think ever any hard feelings of anybody that I ever, you know, there weren't any splits that developed. We always had different sort of pairings that would go on, it was very interesting. If you wanted to hear one point of view – call on her. “We need the educational...” “Call on her” Eugene, you could always count on Elizabeth to be the firebrand. It was kind of an interesting process. I think people genuinely liked each other also in addition to having a common vision and that stuff doesn't happen very happen especially going on that long. [42:50]

AT: Yeah, that's good. So what do you remember most about the court case itself?

LH: You want to go for it?

KH: The court – I mean it just feels like what I remember most is the series of court appearances and court appearances it just going on and on and taking a step forward and maybe a step back. I mean it just, some frustration that things didn't move more quickly. [42:25]

LH: That's the main – this went on, this long drawn out....

KH: I think feeling, always feeling a pull for me. I think Leo had more ability to be there. That tension of wanting to be there, and be supportive, and a part of it having to do my life also. There's – that's hard. [43:44]

LH: Things could go on and get caught up in the most minute little details with the lawyers on both sides. I remember that there were also some very different personalities that would come out with the other side, which is always the State of Connecticut and the Education Commissioners where as sometimes the Commissioner was really on our side. He really agreed with us and even though we were suing him and then the different administration they were horrible. There were really like doing anything to just kill the case and drag it on and on and on and on it was just those kind of maneuvers. So it was just a lot of time that was spent and there's no way anybody would stay there for the whole thing. [44:45]

KH: No and lawyers, their life is – many of them their life is the courtroom and being there. Its [gestures to herself and Leo] social workers, it's not necessarily where our life is focused so it's a very different environment to be in, a little intimidating at times. [45:03]

LH: Well also there was also for me: Lawyers like to win cases and I just want to see some changes made and sometimes it's like: "Let's just get something to happen. I don't care about the strategy. I don't care if we lose this motion or something." Very often they were looking at how to make sure that we win. Whereas I'm thinking: "Let's try to get some changes made." And I think we learned a lot about that process as we came down to the different generations of the Sheff case we were eventually trying to – the biggest thing that came out of it was a whole lot of magnet schools being funded and built that weren't there so that there was at least many more choices for parents for their kids to go, even though it took a long, long time. That's the most significant thing that I was very impatient in just getting – trying to get something to happen other than just things like you won. Big deal. [46:21]

KH: I think the most, probably the most painful memory I have is that after we sold our house and we were living here many years I think our kids were in college. The person who bought our house contacted Leo and said, "Well, thanks to you guys..." he had no children when he moved, "...my daughter is now going to a magnet school in Hartford. As she enters the high school..." and it was a little painful. Because it wasn't – it didn't happen for our kids, [46:55]

LH: It took that long.

KH: But it happened for his.

AT: Okay so, how did your friends and family feel about your involvement in the case?

KH: I think our friends were "Go, good for you." Yeah, a lot of our friends, some of our friends moved... we still have a lot of friends in Hartford. Many of them sent their kids to private school. They were supportive; I think they know who we are as people and that if we try to live our lives and if we feel strongly for something that you work for that. So my family and my mother's centered in New York. She thinks New York is the center of the world so she's not all that knowledgeable about Hartford but clearly some of the values of how I lived my life were from my family. She was very active her whole life so... I mean that was a natural... [48:01]

LH: She liked it when it was in the New York Times. [48:06]

KH: I think Leo's picture was in there.

LH: Any news items – “Oh, that's my daughter.”

KH: I don't think it was any...

LH: Most people were very suspicious about it.

KH: No friends?

LH: No most people around

KH: Yea, not friends.

LH: I have five brothers and three sisters and I think everybody thought we were crazy.

KH: But Leo comes from a much more conservative....

LH: They all lived around the area and it was sort of like – the feeling was like “Are my kids gonna get bused to Hartford?” Most people had a very, not much of an understanding about what the lawsuit was or even what the results are they were very, it was just on the surface. They understand why we were doing it but didn't understand that we weren't – we never asked to have mandatory busing as part of it. We from the very beginning asked that it be a voluntary program for parent but that it would be mandatory for the schools so people never understood what that was and still don't. [49:31]

AT: Okay so, you mentioned a little bit earlier that there were people on the opposing side who would do everything in their power to drag out the case and do things to deter you from reaching goals that you wanted to achieve so what was the opposition like? Who were some of the people that were fighting against you?

KH: .... To think of names?

AT: Did you encounter opposition? Like what was it like?

LH: Well going back we went through democratic and republican administrations at the state and when we got, when we first sued it was Sheff v O'Neill so Governor O'Neill who was a Democrat and I don't think he ever really quite understood why we were suing. He tried to when he retired from office he tried to get his name taken out of the case and the education commission they were pretty hostile. Later on I think the – we had [Governor John] Rowland.

KH: Sergi ?? [50:48]

LH: Yeah, we had [Ted] Sergi, who was the Education Commissioner, he went through a Republican administration and he was really in our corner which was interesting, He was trying

accomplish some of the same things with being in that role and some of the other commissioners...

KH: I don't remember.

LH: I've forgotten who...

KH: Rowland was...

LH: They were very, they were hostile so... there were things in the press and sometimes we would get a lot of hostility from people especially in the suburbs around here. Like: "Leave us alone, we're not in Hartford, so this is Hartford's problem it's not our problem." So there was a whole lot of that stuff. We did speaking engagements all over the place. Initially we got involved with, like basically church groups who would kinda give us a voice out in different suburban communities and sometimes you'd get some real hostility with some people who were, especially they were surprised when they'd see a white guy usually with every one of the plaintiffs we'd have someone who's black or Hispanic to try to so some pairing like that. Like "Why are you doing this?" They just had no understanding, they thought it this was something only that blacks or Hispanics should be in favor of. So I'm not sure they ever really understood it because they were so crystallized they were opposed to government telling them to do something and so I don't know if I answered your question but... [52:26]

AT: Yeah, that was good. Do you have a different take on that? Or...

KH: No I can't remember names.

AT: Alright so when was the last follow-up or hearing that you attended? Do you still attend hearings?

KH: The last thing we attended was at Trinity.

AT: Okay.

KH: What was it? The get-together... I don't know. I don't think you've been to anything.

LH: Not since then no.

AT: And when was that?

KH: Its was more than a year ago.

LH: Yea like a year and a half ago.

KH: It was more of...



LH: It's been quiet; we're sort of in between cycles now. Probably preparing to go back to court again to have – to review the progress. So we're coming around on that. So there hasn't been much... I just missed like one meeting out of... [unclear] [53:27]

AT: So I'm going to shift on to the next section. Looking back what lessons have you learned from the Sheff case?

KH: Change takes time.

LH: Slow.

KH: Slow.

LH: No matter what you try you get sidetracked with a million different ways and the people who we thought we were allies very often end up being the biggest obstacles. Like initially one of the biggest obstacles were the teachers in Hartford. We were always trying to get them on board because it affected them greatly and board of education and then after, and I worked for the city of Hartford and we had Eddie Perez as the mayor and we had millions and millions of dollars going into school construction and building magnet schools primarily in Hartford so as a politician he looked at it only as money to spend and he didn't care about the results about... and in fact even the State Department of Education was giving out millions of dollars . We saw them doing that and they didn't care about the education they just looked at it as a construction program and so you count on one person and all of a sudden Mayor Perez had been very much in our corner. Elizabeth [Horton Sheff] on the city council but then as soon as she got off the council or she was no longer in power all they wanted to do was grab the money and run. Your allies were always temporary and fleeting. You couldn't count on anybody for any long period of time to really support you. [55:38]

KH: I think we said it earlier, I think for us personally we had to come to a realization that our beliefs and our values and how we want to live we want to instill that in our kids but if things are not working for them we have to make a change and that was a huge learning curve for us. It took a long time. [56:04]

LH: Well yeah it took some, by taking off some of the blinders because we wanted our kids to have a quality and integrated education. Simple as that. Well, we couldn't get either in Hartford. The quality just after elementary school just disappeared it was horrible and there was no integration, it was [an] entirely minority system. Like 99% ... so we weren't getting any of that so we had to move to suburbs to get quality integrated education. Which was just sort a – there were shifts that were going on in the population anyway. So you had to kind of look at this kind of shifting situation as a parent and also as one of the plaintiffs as – that things were changing even while they weren't getting better in Hartford. There were some changes going around in the region that were beginning to see some positive changes. [57:12]

KH: I guess also we learned that we had to stir a little out of Hartford parents and different neighborhoods who were really scared about the idea of their kids going to school in another neighborhood and you had to be respectful of that. A lot of parents want to do what's best, what

they think is best for their kids, that was sort of tension at times and I don't think we as a group were aware that that would be part of that so that was a real... [57:45]

LH: We had to bite the bullet on that one because when we were looking at a lot of the schools in Hartford which had a poor and minority population and building magnet schools and a number of students not really increasing that much overall in that area so if you build some more schools that means you put some schools out of business and as far as the plaintiffs are concerned if the school was a disaster its gotta just close up and change or whatever and what we saw is very often parents in some of the worst schools didn't want that school to close and so there was some real opposition very often to some of the changes and I don't think we really anticipated that as much and there was a whole lot of fear I think particularly with Hispanic parents because there was a language barrier and their kids are going to have to go to a different school where Spanish is not the dominant language. They were very fearful of that because they were more secure in their own environment. So there were some scary things for a lot of people and sometimes we weren't the most popular people because we were pushing for changes that meant changes had to happen for everybody. [59:11]

KH: The other thing, I mean Connecticut is very border defined and I think that the case highlighted the huge barriers that presents for impacting – for trying to get some change going. We're so 169 towns and it's very hard to work together with your neighbors on issues. We did it in a small group. It's harder to do it larger. [59:45]

AT: Okay, in hindsight, would you have done anything differently?

LH: I don't...

KH: I don't think so.

LH: I don't think so. Yeah, I think I would have moved out of Hartford more quickly. That's... about two years earlier. But that's knowing how long the thing's gonna take and like it wasn't going to have an impact for our kids. Early on we thought... well maybe this might make some changes that our kids might see but that happened long – the first changes happened long after our kids were gone really out of college by the time we saw any real impact. So that's the only thing I would do. As far as being part of the lawsuit I wouldn't change that. [1:00:47]

KH: No I wouldn't change that.

AT: What is your opinion on the changes that have come about as a result of the Sheff case?

LH: Well it's kind of mixed. I think what happened as far as results is that a whole lot of different schools were built where there's an opportunity for – to have a quality integrated education. That's not going to happen in every case and it hasn't. Magnet schools are, some of them are good and some of them are not so good. I haven't kept up with all of them at all but that's been the biggest change. There hasn't been much else that really happened. That's really significant and we're spending probably billions of dollars for it. But I think what the state has not done has been to monitor and control them so that their – so that racial integration has

become the key part of them. They just built the schools and they sort of let it happen. So the opportunity is still there and I have some of the structures that are there, but things could be, you could use those a whole lot better than its being done right now. So – and it's going to continue to take money but it's a mixed bag because potential is there but it hasn't been realized at all. I think better than it was; better than it could have been. [1:02:39]

KH: I think I agree with that.

AT: Are you still... Oh, sorry wrong one. Do you still keep in touch with other plaintiffs and lawyers? If so who?

LH: A little bit.

KH: Very little. I mean... very little. I mean it wasn't like we were getting together socially. I think after over a decade of meetings that's not, people go on with their lives. I mean clearly there's an intersection when you bump into somebody or you have a conversation. It's nice because they knew your kids when they were small so that there's always that. "How are the kids doing? What's doing? How are you guys?" But no we don't. I mean when we got together we got together the last time as a group it was very wonderful. It was warm very nice time. [1:03:36]

LH: I've called up some of the people from time to time probably more than Karen has but I couldn't say it's with any real regularity. In the back of my mind I'm always saying "Oh there's going to be another meeting sometime soon. I'll see [th]em that's for sure. [1:03:56]

AT: Okay so I'm just going to wrap it up and ask you some background questions just so I can get a sense of the dates and stuff like that. So where were you born, and how long have you lived in the Hartford area?

LH: I was born in Hartford. I grew up in East Windsor and I've lived in Connecticut my whole life.

JD: ... and what year were you born?

LH: 1949 [1:04:26]

KH: I was born in Brooklyn, NY and I grew up in New York City and I came here to go to college in 1967 and I've been here since and I was born in 1949. [1:04:40]

AT: You already answered that... What type of work do you do? What are your occupations?

LH: We both...

KH: ... Trained as social workers.

LH: I retired and now I'm just running a little business doing home improvements. So I work when I want to and take off when I want to. [1:05:08]

KH: I'm on the faculty of the School of Medicine and I teach communications and history-taking and interviewing. [1:05:16]

AT: School of Medicine...

KH: Medicine, and the University of Connecticut and I run part of the curriculum. [1:05:23]

AT: Okay and how do you identify your race or ethnicity?

LH: Well I'm white, she's white. [1:05:32]

AT: Okay. I think that's it.

JD: Could I ask just two other very key questions? Your sons, what years were they born?

KH: David was born 19...

LH: 79.

KH: December 4th, and Michael was October 15th, 1982. [1:05:54]

JD: ... and do you recall what year it was when you did move?

KH: 19... was it 1994, '95? Between '94 and '95.

JD: Okay so the grades of your sons you said was...

KH: Michael was entering 7th grade and David was entering Hall. Actually 9th grade so that must have been '98 then? David graduated in 2002 from High School? No, no. Okay it must have been... David graduated in '98 from Hall so '94 we moved in '94. [1:06:40]

JD: That's fine we'll piece it together if we have any questions we'll call.

KH: He'll be interviewed you can ask him then.

AT: Thank-you for agreeing to have this interview.

KH: Is that okay? Did we...

AT: Yea that was great.

KH: ... Talk too much? [1:06:55]

JD: That was very helpful and you began with Boyd Hinds and your activism there, which was nice. So we have all of the documents of the housing testers who worked with Ya Basta.  
[1:07:11]

KH: Oh, you're kidding.

JD: And we interviewed Benjamin Dixon, and we interviewed Julia Ramos Grenier.

AT: Not me, another...

JD: One of last year's students, and I'm scheduled to see Boyd's daughter Lisa and they're closing out the house in is it Col...? [1:07:30]

KH: Colrain [Massachusetts]?

JD: So it's a big hunk of history on the housing side that ties into the schooling side I think.  
[1:07:39]

KH: Yeah, yeah.

AT: It was really interesting when you mentioned Boyd Hinds because I transcribed the Ben Dixon interview so I got to learn about Education/Instruccion and what he was doing with that so it was cool. [1:07:52]

KH: Yeah it is amazing.

LH: There's still people around who were involved with that too.

KH: I mean that was very early we got married in '71 and we started working with Boyd in probably '72. [1:08:07]

LH: Or three.

JD: Do you remember... we have, did you ever write up a – if you were doing housing testing you wrote up housing testing reports. [1:08:19]

KH: Yeah.

JD: So if I look through my files and search the reports I'd probably find Harrington. Would you like to see a copy of... [unclear] ?

KH: Sure, sure, and you have to understand we were children of the '60s and then these FBI people came to our apartment and it was like.... [1:08:33]

LH: Wearing their raincoats and black shoes.

KH: ... It was like “Oh my God.”

JD: This was for the lawsuit against the Barrows case?

KH: No this was the RC White Company?

LH: Yea, Robert C. White. They sued him for housing – for discriminating against blacks in rental housing. It was just sort of coincidental that we were doing this testing and they were like: “Who’s your landlord?” “Oh, Robert C. White.” You know who worked for Boyd Hinds at Education/Instruccion was... [1:09:11]

KH: Jerry Maine [spelling?]

LH: No but also Donna Martinez who’s a judge now. [1:09:19]

JD: Oh really?

LH: Yeah, she was Donna Fatsi. [1:09:21]

KH: Donna Fatsi Martinez.

LH: Martinez was much, much later so Donna Fatsi, yeah.

JD: Interesting. I think I’ve seen the name...

KH: Oh, it’s fun to know that tie-in was there. It’s a long time ago but it was very... [1:09:33]

LH: Yeah, I forget about that.

KH: But it was very, he was very, he was so instrumental in our development.

JD: What else, just one last thing if you don’t mind. What else do you know about him? Since obviously we can’t interview him or his spouse any longer.

KH: Just obviously incredibly engaging and...

LH: Very intense.

KH: Intense and energetic and passionate. I mean a passion about what he believed in and as 22 year olds to me an adult who wasn’t a whole lot older than us but a little older it was very, he was just very charismatic in a good way. [1:10:21]

LH: That was his life.

KH: And then it really supported our interests and our life and our commitment, which I don't know if we needed a lot of convincing – I don't think we needed convincing at all. [1:10:34]

LH: Well we found him very quickly.

KH: We found him very quickly.

LH: Or he found us, I don't know. [1:10:40]