

Methodist University Community Oral History Project
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Penelope Griffin- Cashwell

Interview Conducted by
Maiya Vieux
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Descriptive Table of Contents:

The below transcribed interview with Penelope Griffin- Cashwell includes a timeline of her life growing up in Clinton, North Carolina and her journey of becoming a middle school English.

Cashwell-Griffin grew up in a two parent household and discusses how she integrates the values she was taught as a child into her classroom.

0:12- Born and raised in Clinton, North Carolina in 1923.

-living in a small country town

3:57- Role in family life.

-discussion of being a caretaker throughout life.

7:15- Decision to teach.

-discussion of her mother regretting tell her not to teach.

15:20- Incorporating old values into modern day classrooms.

-discussion of paddling into the classroom.

21:14- Lasting impression in the teaching world.

-discussion of helping students that do not have much.

27:07- Discussion of separation of genders in the classroom.

-discussion of classes that were only taken by men or women.

37:11- Discussion of lasting segregation in Clinton, North Carolina.

-experiences with racism in a small town.

45:00- School shootings.

-discussions of school shootings not being an issue in small towns.

53:51 Discussion of attitudes towards teenage pregnancy in the 80's.

-discussion of teenage pregnancy not being accepted.

Interview of

PENELOPE GRIFFIN- CASHWELL

Interviewed by

MAIYA VIEUX

9:37

VIEUX: So you're an Education major, obviously, and you're planning on teaching which subjects?

9:44

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: My areas of concentration are History and English. I'll have my certification to teach sixth through eighth, both of those, and I will also get my licensure to teach secondary. So I'll be certified to teach six through twelve, English.

10:04

VIEUX: So why did you choose Social Studies and English and not Science, since you were majoring in Marine Biology before?

10:12

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: When I came back to school, my first semester, I took— Actually, when I came back, I was in Elementary Education, because I thought I wanted to do, like, fourth and fifth grade, and the first History class I took was with Dr. [Patrick] O'Neil and I loved it, so I knew that that was an interest and the same thing with English, it was, I mean I really got into it, more so than I did in high school.

10:48

VIEUX: You choosing to be a teacher, there's obviously a lot of things you have to deal with in the classroom, do you think that the issues have anything to do with being a woman or race or, why do you think that teachers deal with these issues the most?

11:17

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: I think teachers are treated the way that they're treated because, for the most part, it is women that are teachers throughout history, it has been, and I feel like that they're not valued and they don't see a threat of teachers standing up and speaking out about the lack of pay or the mistreatment. I think a major problem now in the classroom is lack of children being raised and taught values in the home. There's no family structure, so they're not sitting down and having dinner and learning how to get along with people because they don't have parents, a lot of times, at home to teach them those things. So not only are we required to teach math, science, history and language arts, we're now taking on the role of the parental figure.

12:32

VIEUX: When you were younger and a student, obviously, do you see problems in today's classroom that you had back then or is it a completely different viewpoint now?

12:46

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: It is completely different, completely different. I think being from a small town, we did not have a lot of transitioning students—we didn't have students moving in and out.

It was very rare for us to get new people in the school, and our parents were very involved in the school. The lack of respect that is shown towards teachers and authority was not present when I was in school and it would not have been tolerated because it was legal to paddle at that point.

13:36

VIEUX: So was your mother—did she paddle in her classroom?

13:38

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: She did.

13:39

VIEUX: Did she ever tell you stories about that or things that went on in her classroom?

13:43

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: Yes, and I had my mother in eighth grade--

13:47

VIEUX: Really?

13:48

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: Yes.

13:49

VIEUX: I did not know that.

13:50

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: Yes, eighth grade. She taught academically gifted math for years but some of I guess the last four years that she taught, she taught two science classes. So I had her eighth grade, first period science. And my mother was a very structured, stern teacher and people were terrified of her, but she— Everybody that knows her and that had her as a teacher, will tell you that she prepared them for high school and made them successful in college because of the structure that she taught and the discipline.

14:35

VIEUX: So, do you carry a lot of the values that she incorporated into her classroom into your classroom or have you picked up a totally different type of teaching style?

14:47

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: I have a lot of the same values, but I think that I have a different teaching style. I have the structure but I think that I am more of like a hands-on teacher as far as lessons, being interactive, and the way that I present the information to the students.

15:20

VIEUX: In this time, do you think that we will ever be able to incorporate the things that were done while your mother was a teacher into today's classrooms? Do you think that would work, if they were still paddling students or, you know, trying to find some type of discipline to tame what's going on?

15:42

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: I don't think that that's gonna happen, but I think it would make a huge difference. I think if the parents were held responsible, if their child is causing disruption at school and they have to leave work and come get that child and the child cannot return to the classroom until the parent comes and has a conference, I think that the parents would have a more active role. I don't think that we necessarily need to go back to paddling. I don't have a problem and I think that it was effective. I think sometimes that it can go too far, but I think that the classroom was less chaotic and the learning environment was more conducive when there was discipline, that type of discipline in the classroom.

16:42

VIEUX: So, do you think that women have tougher times in the classroom than men do?

16:54

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: I think there are different issues for men and women in the classroom and I think today—I'm going to speak of today—men have to be very careful and aware of their behavior and how it's perceived because of incidents that have taken place and the perception by students. I think that it has opened, like, a whole new window, so they're dealing with a lot of issues that they didn't have to deal with in the past, which— I think that men are respected more in the classroom than women. I think that women don't deal with, with that, having to be careful as much as men.

18:02

VIEUX: So how do you feel about education in general? Do you think that the interest in it is dwindling? Do you think that people respect it like they should, like--

18:15

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: I don't think people respect it the way that they should. I don't think that people respect educators, and I feel like people take it for granted because everyone is entitled to an education, whereas children in other countries are so grateful for it. The children don't want to be in the classroom, they don't want to do the work, and they all have drive, but it may be to come to your class and disrupt, so it just depends on what they're motivated to do and so many of our students aren't motivated to learn because they take it for granted.

19:03

VIEUX: Where do you think that shift came from, from the time that your mother was a teacher and the attitude of education was totally different than it is now, where do you those problems come from?

19:19

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: I think after the 80's with No Child Left Behind, the passing of that and Common Core and testing, I think that we are a society that is-- We know that we're just going to be passed on, so it's not important to work, to make it happen and I think that we've gotten far enough now that we're in— The generation that's having children that are in the classroom now came from that generation of No Child Left Behind so they got pushed through without having to

work for it, so they have no respect for education and what you have to do and what education does for you.

20:18

VIEUX: So with the, the generation that's having children now, do you think that they're having children too young, or do you think that's becoming an issue in the classroom and it's just too much for them to handle?

20:30

GRIFFIN- CASHWELL: Yes. Children are having children and they have not been raised and they have no idea how to raise their children.