EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ALICE MCGOFF

August 7, 2007
Charlestown, Massachusetts

Interviewer
Beatriz Swerdlow

Attending
Lisa McGoff Collins

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TRANSCRIPT

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Swerdlow: I first want to thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for Senator Kennedy's oral history.

McGoff: That's fine, thank you.

Swerdlow: As you saw in the description of the project that we sent, you'll receive a transcript of this interview in several months. Then you'll have a chance to review your words, and if you'd like to add anything or make any changes you're free to do so.

McGoff: What I'd like to ask is, where are the interviews going to be archived? Are they going into the John F. Kennedy Public Library over in Dorchester?

Swerdlow: Well, actually, when everything is released, which won't be until everyone's interviews have been released, they're going to go into the Miller Center archives. They'll be available at the Miller Center Library at the University of Virginia. And they'll also be a repository for Senator Kennedy's oral history—

McGoff: When he has a library?

Swerdlow: Yes, or not necessarily a library but a university or college that he'll designate, where all his records will be kept. One day, they might even be accessible to the general public online, on the Internet, but we're talking about a long, long way down the road. And of course you have been a part of a very important history in Boston. Senator Kennedy was so involved in the integration of the Boston schools, and that was a very controversial time.

McGoff: It certainly was.

Swerdlow: And you played a very big role during that time.

McGoff: One of many. There were a lot of people involved.

Swerdlow: I would love to hear a little bit about your experience and your involvement, and how you saw things at that time.

McGoff: Anything specific?

Swerdlow: Well, I guess the first thing, for those who haven't read *Common Ground*, why don't you talk a little bit about yourself and your background.

McGoff: I was born in Charlestown—well, I was born in Boston, but I grew up in Charlestown. I was one of six children. My father and mother lived on Monument Avenue. I had a very happy, normal life. My father wasn't particularly political, but I liked politics from the beginning. I often tell the story of how my father, who—I put him on the right hand of God. There was a friend of mine running for Representative in Charlestown, and that's all the clout this area had. We didn't have any other. There was a fellow running against him, who today is a big lobbyist in Massachusetts, and he was also a friend of my father's. But my father allowed me, at 16, not old enough to vote even, to put a sign in one window while he had a sign for the opposite candidate in another window, and allowed me to go door to door with Tony Scali, who was the fellow that I wanted. He never gave me a hard time about oh, you have to stand behind Gerry [Gerard] Doherty; he's my candidate. We never heard stuff like that. That was how my family grew up.

At one time, there was an election in Charlestown. I had one candidate and another kid had another candidate and another kid—we were all standing at the corner with different signs in our hands, one family. That's the way we grew up. We grew up with our own opinion, and I try to pass that on to the kids. That's the only thing you own, don't let anyone take it away from you. That's the kind of people we are.

Swerdlow: So you have lived in Charlestown all your life.

McGoff: All my life.

Swerdlow: You went to school here, married, and—

McGoff: My husband lived in South Boston and then Charlestown. When he still lived in South Boston, he hung over here with the Charlestown kids, because he grew up with them.

Swerdlow: So you had seven children.

McGoff: I have seven children, 18 grandchildren.

Swerdlow: In the '60s, what were your feelings when all these rulings were coming down in the rest of the country, starting with 1954, with the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*?

McGoff: At first, in '54, we paid no attention to it.

Swerdlow: Did you have any black people living in your community in Charlestown?

McGoff: There were one or two scattered. Nobody thought yes or no about it. In ’54, I was a junior in high school. The only thing I was interested in is hanging on the corner and looking at boys. So you paid no attention to it. We didn’t anyway.

Swerdlow: Right.

McGoff: It was not a subject that was brought up in Charlestown High. They didn’t bring up political agenda to us. I mean, we were kids. They were lucky to get English across.

Swerdlow: So race issues, it doesn’t sound like it was something—

McGoff: It was never a problem for me. It was *never* a problem for me. It was not. The fact is, part of the reason—I kind of backed out of the whole movement in about ’78/’79 because I didn’t like the way it was going. It was getting racy. I didn’t want to play the race card for anybody, because I always meant it, I always said it, I always believed it. I don’t care what kid goes with what kid. I believed in my own children’s personal rights. Again, it was my opinion. It had nothing to do with kids. But what right did anyone have to tell me that I have to send my child halfway across the city, on a bus, in the middle of traffic, every single day, when I could have—I had all the kids in school at once. If something happened, I had to be able to get to them. I worked all day. I worked in the telephone company at 185 Franklin, downtown Boston. I could get home to Charlestown in 10 or 11 minutes. I had to be able to get to my kids just as fast, if that need be. I had nobody else. My sister was in Melrose, my brother was a teacher in the public schools. And my brother was—

Swerdlow: Right, and your husband?

McGoff: My husband had passed.

Swerdlow: Had passed, right.

McGoff: So they had no one, they had me. They sent those kids to the middle of Dorchester someplace. I’ve never been to the middle of Dorchester. It’s not that I haven’t wanted to, but I just had no occasion to be there.

[BREAK]

McGoff: Here is Lisa. She’s got plenty to say.

Swerdlow: So nice to meet you, Lisa.

Collins: Nice to meet you. Hi.

Swerdlow: I feel like I know you.

McGoff: She just finished reading the book.

[BREAK]

Swerdlow: So we have now Lisa, who has joined us. Lisa is Alice's daughter.

Lisa, you were involved too in all the turmoil that was happening in the early '70s. I suppose you could say you were an active player in all this.

Collins: Yes, I was very active.

Swerdlow: I started out talking to your mom about just a little bit of background. I guess, how old were your children, Alice, for the '74/'75 school year?

McGoff: Danny [McGoff] had graduated in '75.

Collins: He was 17, Billy [McGoff] was 16, I was 15, Kevin [McGoff] was 14, Tommy [McGoff] was 12, and Robin [McGoff] and Bobby [McGoff] were 11.

Swerdlow: So all seven children were school age.

McGoff: Oh, yes. Well, Daniel had graduated Charlestown High, but he went to Berwick Academy in Maine for his 13th year.

Collins: The actual busing part started in '75 with South Boston. Danny was a senior, so it didn't affect him. When it came to Charlestown in '76, that affected Billy, me, and Kevin. Tommy was at a Catholic school.

McGoff: Pope John.

Collins: Robin was at a Catholic school and Bobby was at a Catholic school. So she had three in public, three in Catholic.

Swerdlow: Okay. So when all this came down and the decision came that these schools would be integrated, did that start your involvement?

McGoff: No. Actually, I had gone to—and I'm sorry, I can't give you the year because I can't remember what year it was, but they had a kind of demonstration a couple of years before it came to South Boston in '75, at the State House. We all went in because there was talk of putting the kids on the buses. At that time, when we demonstrated against that, it was a very integrated crew of people. There were blacks, Chinese, there were whites, there was everyone. And we all sat down in the Hall of Flags and protested the idea of putting the kids on the bus.

Swerdlow: Right.

McGoff: But two or three years later when—

Swerdlow: So this was probably around 1972.

Collins: When busing did come in '75, we supported South Boston. We went to a lot of their rallies.

McGoff: Absolutely.

Collins: Because we knew that it was going to happen to us. We just knew it was happening. So it was sort of like, I don't know, my reasoning is—of course, at the time I'm a kid, I'm 15, I'm 14. I'm going to get in the midst of all this. Plus, there's cute boys in Southie [South Boston], let's go over there. We were just preparing ourselves for what was going to be next, what was going to happen to us.

McGoff: It actually was kind of a frightening time.

Collins: Scary, very scary.

McGoff: My kids were frightened. All kids were, not just mine. All kids were frightened.

Collins: It says in the book that I slept with a bat by my bed. I did.

McGoff: That's the truth.

Collins: I slept with a bat by my bed because I used to get phone calls.

McGoff: Oh, they're coming across the bridge and there's carloads of them.

Collins: They're coming to get you, they're going to get you, and I was—and it wasn't like we didn't know black kids. We hung around with black kids, black kids came into our house, but this was a different kind of, you know, they're going to come and get you, they're coming over. That's the sad part. We had black families in our hallway. It had nothing to do with black kids. It was what they said they were going to do to us when they came here.

Swerdlow: So what was feeding the fear, do you think?

Collins: All the trouble in Southie in '75, we knew was going to come to Charlestown in '76 because there was trouble in Southie.

McGoff: It was anticipation. It's our turn next, it's our turn next, and everybody got all riled up.

Collins: When you would go to a meeting and you'd sit with Teddy Kennedy, you're sitting with Ray Flynn, you're sitting with Tip [Thomas] O'Neill and Louise [Day Hicks], and they're telling

you this and they're telling you this and nothing's happening. You're worrying; don't worry about it.

[BREAK]

Swerdlow: OK, we're back on. We were talking about—

Collins: The anticipation.

Swerdlow: The anticipation and the fear.

Collins: And then you also—the fact that Mom and I were so vocal, and I was a kid being vocal. I always say this because it bothered me a real lot when I was a kid. I think about it now and in hindsight, who cares? But back then, even though I was an anti-buser, and I was with the group of the anti-busers, my choice to go to Charlestown High was my choice. My mother said, "You decide. You want to go to Charlestown High, or I'll send you to Catholic school. We'll do whatever we have to do to get you into a school." I said, "I'm going. If I picked to go here, this is my choice."

And then some of the anti-busers were against me, even though I had been an anti-buser all along. What are you going to the school for? You're defeating the purpose. That was what they saw in their eyes, but in my eyes—

McGoff: See, I looked at it a different way too.

Collins: Yes. In my eyes it's, this is where I want to go. Why should I not go here?

McGoff: We had no problem with the kids going to the school. We just wanted the choice to go to that school. And when they said she can go to that school, why am I going to say to her, boycott it now? That's what we're fighting for.

Collins: I mean, they honestly believed—some of those anti-busers honestly believed that if nobody showed up, the school would close. The black kids are coming, whether white kids show up or not. They're not going to close the school down. I know kids who never graduated high school because of the whole thing.

McGoff: A whole generation of kids.

Collins: They all had to get GEDs [General Education Development certificate] because they never went to school. Pixie [Elvira] Palladino, God rest her soul, wherever you are, was the first one to call me, in a meeting, sitting there, "You are a—" and I'm going to use the word—"a nigger lover, that's what you are." I was 16 years old.

McGoff: Oh, I almost went crazy.

Collins: Because I was getting on that bus. Then I was *more* determined because she actually…. I still went to my meetings, I marched in Washington twice. I did all the things everybody else did, but I went to that school. And when I got in that school, I became very active. I did everything that I had to do to keep the school the way—I mean, I wanted to have a prom and the whole thing. Her kids were already—that was her choice. If she wanted her kids not to go to East Boston High, that was her choice. I got the choice to go to the school I wanted to go to. That's what I wanted, to do the whole long—I followed the steps of my brothers and my mother. You know, do what we wanted to do. I wasn't going to change it for her.

Swerdlow: Alice, when was your initiation in terms of the Restore Our Alienated Rights group, ROAR? How did you become involved with ROAR?

McGoff: Well, each section of the city had what they called an information center. In Charlestown it was called "Powder Keg."

Swerdlow: So it was called Powder Keg all along.

Collins: We were Powder Keg, but Restore Our Alienated Rights was out of City Hall. All the communities came together, and ROAR was created in City Hall.

Swerdlow: I see.

Collins: So the Charlestown people from Powder Keg, the Southie people from whatever they—I don't even know what they called—

McGoff: The Information Center.

Collins: Yes. South Boston Information Center.

Swerdlow: So ROAR was the umbrella.

McGoff: Yes.

Collins: The umbrella, exactly. Restore Our Alienated Rights.

McGoff: Rita Graul, who worked for the mayor, was allowed to have her meetings because frankly, the mayor was on our side but couldn't say it out loud, because politically he couldn't say it. He was certainly—we knew people who knew him, and they knew that he was kind of on our side. Again, it was a question, the same thing that I'm saying. The neighborhoods would break up and there would be no more neighborhood if this happened. And it virtually—

Collins: Yes, we made a lot of enemies.

McGoff: The only one that hung in was Southie. I think they still have the Information Center.

Collins: Yes, I do too. The thing is too, back then as a kid, I would deal with politicians and talk to politicians and couldn't understand why Dennis Kearney couldn't back us, couldn't understand why Father [William] Joy and Father [Robert] Ward were against us. Those are the things that used to get me crazy. You know, now that I'm a grownup I know why, but back then I used to be like, why can't they just say they don't want it? But it's like anything; they're all protecting their jobs, protecting themselves, and this is the Federal Government, and you cannot fight them no matter what, so you have to go with the flow.

McGoff: I will say that Dennis Kearney got out after one term because he just couldn't go on, because he felt as we did, and he was a Representative. So he didn't run for a second term. He was a wonderful guy.

Collins: And then, like in the community, we had some really good friends who lived in the projects, and their parents sent all their kids on the bus. We didn't talk to them now because they went on the bus. And people left the community and went this way. The tight little community no longer was a tight little community, you know what I mean? It was everybody had their own views.

Swerdlow: Agenda, yes. And it seems that even though all of the different groups that you were involved with were anti-busing, there were different approaches.

McGoff: Oh, there certainly were.

Swerdlow: And so there were splits. But the point is, you were passionate about your kids not having—

McGoff: I was passionate about their rights. They had rights. I mean, the government wasn't supporting them, I was supporting them. I went to work at the telephone company every day to pay for them. Who are they to tell me what to do with them? I paid my federal taxes that I had to pay. Who are they to say no, they can't go there?

Swerdlow: Right. But Lisa, you ended up going to your neighborhood school.

Collins: Billy and Kevin and I, all three of us did.

Swerdlow: So you were not bused.

Collins: No.

Swerdlow: But there were black kids being bused to your school.

Collins: Right. In our house, Tommy, Robin, and Bobby were bused, and that's why they went to Catholic, and then us three went to the high school. Billy was a senior, I was a junior, and my brother Kevin was a sophomore. So Billy's senior year is when busing actually came into Charlestown. Billy and I fought constantly, because he went to school every day. He wouldn't protest, he wouldn't walk out, he wouldn't do all those things. Just like the book said, he would

not do it because he thought like me, but I wasn't there yet. He wanted to make sure that he could play football, play basketball, have his prom, do all those things, and if he walked out or did all that stuff, then he would have gotten suspended.

Swerdlow: Right.

Collins: So I, in turn, am absent 60 days out of my junior year and I still get promoted. It was like, just move her on, get her out of the way. And then I saw Billy's side of it when I was a senior. I don't want to leave her and 20 years from now have people saying to me, did you have a prom? You know, when your kids ask you all those questions. My brother Kevin doesn't have a yearbook. How can you not have a yearbook from your high school? When my brother Bobby and Robin finally got to go to Charlestown High, in their high school days they didn't get bused, just in junior high they got bused. When they became high school age, they got to go to Charlestown High and they opted to go. Tommy still wanted to stay at Catholic school, and Bobby made his own yearbook. He got together about six kids, took the pictures, had it bound. Those are the things that we got cheated out of.

McGoff: I will say that when Kevin got to be a senior, he was elected president. She was president of her senior class, Kevin was elected president of his senior class, and Bobby was elected president of his senior class.

Collins: And they were elected by blacks.

McGoff: And they were elected by black kids.

Collins: Because it was mostly black kids then anyway.

McGoff: So it wasn't a case that they went up there hating the blacks. They just went up there because that's their school and that's where they wanted to go.

Collins: And another thing as a kid, you're 15, you're 16. Do you want to get up two hours earlier to get dressed, get ready, go on the bus, go across town? No. We lived six minutes from school.

McGoff: Again, it's another case of I had to be able to get to the schools. Now, they went to Catholic school, Tommy and the twins. They're right over the bridge, they're in Everett.

Swerdlow: That was close.

McGoff: It's ten minutes away.

Swerdlow: So in the end, busing, certainly you were against it, but you managed to keep your kids close, which was very important to you.

McGoff: That was the most important thing to me—

Collins: That was the whole purpose.

McGoff: —that I could reach my kids if I needed. They had nobody else to reach out to. I was their mother and they had to be able to call me on the phone and say, "Mom, you've got to come home right now," and I've got to be there in ten minutes. Not an hour and a half later across the city.

Swerdlow: So here you are, a working mom of seven children, and this really became a big part of your life, fighting this busing.

McGoff: For their high school years, yes.

Swerdlow: How did you find the time to do this?

McGoff: We went to meetings day and night. We had meetings with everybody you can think of. I remember one incident, I was in work. I was an operator, and of course they're a public utility so they have very strict rules. Nobody leaves that board unless they're covered. We had a girl who had a stroke on the board and they wouldn't let her up until someone else plugged in. That's how strict they are. In the middle of the day one day, I get a tap on the shoulder, "Come on, come on, you're coming with us." I said, "What's wrong, what's wrong?" All I could think of is something happened to my kids. That's the first thought in my mind.

We had been trying to get a meeting with Tip O'Neill, and they had called work and said, "Mr. O'Neill's ready for the meeting." And they pulled me out of that office like—when I went into the office, I thought I would have to kneel down and kiss the ring because it was.... We laughed about it for days afterwards. I never saw anyone jump the way they did to get me out of that office. It was only across the street, because I worked right at Bowdoin Square. You don't know Boston, but it's right across the street from the Federal Building.

Swerdlow: Where Tip O'Neill's office was.

McGoff: Yes.

Swerdlow: So tell me about that meeting with Tip O'Neill.

Collins: Which one?

McGoff: Tip O'Neill's meeting. We had a couple of them with him, and we had one in Washington, which I can't remember at all. It was a miss.

Collins: I remember the rain.

McGoff: Oh yes, it was awful.

Swerdlow: It was raining?

McGoff: Oh, unbelievable. He called us into the office and there he is, and he looked like a huge guy, without his hernia, but there he is, big, big. He really did take up a lot of space, just his presence. Very nice, talking, talking, talking. "Oh, I understand your problem. I walk my granddaughter to school every day." We said, "That's what we're asking for, so we walk our kids to school every day." "Well, you see now," and then he went on and on and on. All I can remember is that line, because that kind of summed it all up. We were just blowing heat; he wasn't listening to us. He could have patted us on the top of the head and thrown us a bone. It was the same thing.

Collins: Yes, none of them really listened.

Swerdlow: Was there anyone at that time that you felt was listening to you and was actively trying to help your cause?

McGoff: At a federal level?

Swerdlow: At any level.

Collins: Definitely Louise and Ray. They always came to everything. A lot of the Representatives, like Dennis Kearney.

McGoff: There were some of them I didn't like.

Collins: Pixie was in the midst of it all because she was in—whatever she was.

McGoff: A political wannabe.

Swerdlow: Pixie was?

McGoff: Yes. But there was really no one that I could say, maybe Ray. There were some councilmen that I didn't like, that were out-and-out racists, and I didn't like them. I'm thinking of [John] Kerrigan, of course.

Collins: That, I think, Mom, was a lot to that when it came to doing—like the Charlestown Defense Fund. I have no bad things to say about them. What they were doing was trying to raise money to help the kids who got arrested. But sometimes they threw fuel on the fire and got these kids all riled up, and that was not the part of what Powder Keg was about. Powder Keg was the mothers and the kids who were really looking for the peacefulness of it. The Defense Fund, they were great guys, but some were racist and some were wild, and there was just another side. They had a different tactic on what they thought would change the whole thing.

McGoff: They were born tossers.

Collins: Yes. You know that's not going to work. Even if the peaceful part didn't work, that definitely wasn't going to work. At least we wouldn't get a bad reputation. We had lots of peaceful marches and that's it.

McGoff: Well, the problem was that once you look at someone as a bigot, you don't hear another word that comes out of their mouth, regardless of what it is. They see the word "bigot" and that's the end of it. You're done for. No conversation with you. They might sit there and say mm hmm, but they're not really listening to you because in their head—but you couldn't get that across to the guys. You couldn't say, "You can't come off like this." You've got to be cooperative up to a certain point.

Collins: But it gave the people who were the peaceful ones—I remember doing many—after the book was done, and doing all these little things with Tony [J. Anthony Lukas], and people actually talking to me as if, that really happened to you? It made me feel like people just didn't see it. They only saw what they read. So when I said to them that it had nothing to do with being with a black person, I have no problem being with a black person, but do you realize that I come from a very small community and we don't really have many blacks, so this is a little different for me. They just kind of look at you like, *Really?*

You have to explain to them, step by step, what went on every single day, for them to understand why you reacted the way you did. When you go to a school and they tell you that you can't do work-study, you can't go out for lunch, you can't have cheerleading practice outside, you can't do this, you can't do that, you can only do this if you have so many black kids, so many Chinese. It was, why? Why can't we do it? To this day—

McGoff: Billy and his class had worked for the junior year, because they were going to be the bicentennial graduating class. They had worked from their junior year—

Collins: From their freshman year.

McGoff: From the freshman year, rather, with car washes and cookie sales and dances, to save money. The whole class was going to England. And now '76 comes and it was canceled. I can't tell you the bitterness the kids felt at that time.

Collins: It was awful, the fact that we used to be able to go out the door, around the corner, go to Ma Ryan's, get a sandwich. No longer. Now you've got to bring your lunch.

Swerdlow: Right.

Collins: So it might mean nothing to some people, but if you were used to it and you could do it before and now you can't because now there are black kids in your school, you know. I can understand why there were people outside yelling names, screaming and yelling, but that was the thing that got you mad. Like, why are you doing this to us?

Swerdlow: You didn't want your life to change.

Collins: It shouldn't have had to change.

Swerdlow: You wanted to keep your way of life.

McGoff: There was a way to do this without impacting the kids the way it did. And I'm not talking just about white kids. It impacted black kids just as bad.

Collins: Some of the kids would get defiant because if something happened in school and they said detention, only the white kids stayed for detention because the black kids had to get on the bus and go. Even though they were involved in it, they had to get on the bus and go. So why don't they get detention? Well, we can't keep them here. It's not safe. Any time something happened, five NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] people would show up at your building. If anything happened with us—

McGoff: They wouldn't let us near the door.

Collins: "I have to go. Can I go call my mother, please?" "No, you can't." You know, those kind of things. Their Rainbow Coalition was at our school every day. I think that Mr.—what was his name? I can't even remember his name—was part of it. He was like a monitor on the bus, but he came every single day, and I think he just watched. He was a plant. That's how I always thought of him, as being a plant there. They always had somebody in that school to protect whatever they did. But if the white kids did something, we were tossed out to whatever. And as a kid, you're 15, you're 16, how else are you going to act? You should act that way.

McGoff: You think in terms beyond yourself.

Collins: And any other way.

McGoff: *This is affecting me,* you know. That's the way kids think. They think me, me, me.

Collins: There was no more—I volunteered over at Mass General [Massachusetts General Hospital] as a candy striper, out of the school. I could do four classes and then take three classes, and then go to the Warren-Prescott [School], which was three streets over, to help, and that stopped. So all those things that helped you, that you thought about your career or maybe I should do this and I'll decide if I want to do this. You could do nothing. We came to school, we went through those metal detectors, we sat in our classrooms. No learning. Doors shut, the bell rang, and you went home. That's basically the whole day.

McGoff: The people didn't believe what was going on inside the school; teachers being thrown down the stairs and fistfights.

Collins: They were just literally—teachers would just shut the door and say, do whatever you guys want, just no fighting. You might have had four teachers that really taught. Mr. [Patrick J.] Greatorex, Mr. [John] Brennan, constantly trying to teach us, trying to teach us. But there were some teachers in there that just sat back and said just don't fight with each other. I don't care what you do. So the learning—my self-esteem, when I got out of high school, was horrible.

McGoff: Was about this big.

Collins: To this day, I still say I don't feel like I'm smart enough to do anything, because I felt like my last two years of school, I learned nothing.

McGoff: I cannot tell you how bright she is, but she doesn't believe.

Collins: No, but I don't feel that way. I honestly, honestly don't feel that way, because I feel like I didn't learn anything. I learned a lot of social things. I learned how to stand up for my rights. I learned a lot of things that—I grew up very fast, but when it comes to schoolwork, I go oh. I'm constantly being told, go back to school. No. I'm petrified because I don't think that I could handle it. I think my vocabulary is horrible, and it's all from school. I never really learned anything. My sophomore year there was really no busing going on, but as soon as my junior year came there was no teaching, and then forget it.

Swerdlow: There are those who say that the quality of the education at your school was really not up to standards to begin with.

McGoff: Oh God, no.

Swerdlow: And so this apparently made the situation worse.

Collins: Right.

Swerdlow: Would you agree with that?

McGoff: Yes. There were some dedicated teachers.

Collins: Oh, definitely.

McGoff: There were some, and a lot of them were local guys who became teachers at Charlestown High. I mean dedicated guys.

Collins: Mr. Brennan. There were teachers in our school—

McGoff: Mr. [Charles] McGonagle.

Collins: —who did so much for the kids. And then, because they went to that school, it's even more the fact that they want everything to run the right way, because it's their school too.

Swerdlow: Right.

Collins: It was very hard to teach.

McGoff: It was just a simple little high school, but there was a lot of pride in the high school, as there was pride in living in Charlestown, regardless then we were not quite the yuppie community that we are now. We were poor, blue collar. Everybody in the town was blue collar,

but we were proud of this town. I mean, it was a case where you lived for the town, whereas now you live in the town.

Collins: And you have to go to Charlestown High. That was part of growing up.

McGoff: If you were going to college, you had to go to the high school so you could get a scholarship up there, and it had to be through sports.

Collins: My girlfriend Carolyn, I was really kind of mad at the time. We did everything together. She followed me through, we did all the committees together, and then she gets a four-year scholarship to BU [Boston University], and I got a $25 gift certificate from something. I thought to myself—

McGoff: Carolyn wasn't quite as vocal as Lisa was.

Collins: But I was working so hard to do the right thing, and I got $25. I was like, you've got to be kidding me. She gets a four-year scholarship to BU, and I got a $25 award.

Swerdlow: And you graduated together?

Collins: We graduated together, yes.

Swerdlow: Why do you think that happened?

McGoff: Because she was too much of a mouth.

Collins: I was too mouthy.

McGoff: Carolyn didn't open her mouth.

Collins: Carolyn just followed me and did what she—she was the social butterfly of it all, but when it came to speaking, it was always me.

Swerdlow: So you think your involvement then with Powder Keg really ended up hurting you?

McGoff: Yes.

Swerdlow: Your future?

Collins: Yes, a little bit.

McGoff: She'll say no perhaps, but I definitely think yes. My son Bobby got a four-year scholarship to BU and my son Kevin, well he was knocked off by the kid.

Collins: He was in the running.

McGoff: He just missed it. He was in the running. But she should have been there too.

Swerdlow: Well, in light of that, would you do it differently?

Collins: No.

McGoff: No, not a thing, not at all. I believe today as I believed then.

Swerdlow: You'd still do it?

Collins: Oh yes, I'd still do it.

McGoff: You can see by what's happening to the public school, that this is what we said 30 years ago would happen. Your schools are going to end up so totally black that you won't be able to integrate them. Now they should know. Now we have a whole housing—we haven't got an awful lot of kids in the town. This section of the city has, as I said, it's gone quite yuppie. It's very expensive. The average house is $600,000. A small condo is $350,000. I mean, there's nothing below that.

Swerdlow: In Charlestown?

McGoff: In Charlestown, yes. Those that are built across—see those built across the street there? They're fairly new, and they were $600,000 each. My son built 14 houses.

Swerdlow: So it's become an affluent community.

Collins: Right.

McGoff: It's an extension of Beacon Hill, and that's how they treat it.

Swerdlow: So do the schools reflect that?

McGoff: No.

Collins: What happened to this community, we have two elementary schools, one junior high school, and one high school. The two elementary schools have come to the point where the Kent, where I work, is a bilingual school. Not only are we bilingual, we have Chinese kindergarten to fifth grade, every level. Also, every new kid who comes in—we don't know why this is happening, maybe you can find out—but every new kid who comes into the community, if they're black, ends up at the Kent. All the yuppies seem to have all their children up at the Warren-Prescott. So the Warren-Prescott is now turning into the yuppie school, and we're turning into the school that has the melting pot, which is fine, because we can handle it.

But what I was thinking about earlier today, when I was watching Dr. [Dominic] Amara, he's the principal of the Warren-Prescott—this has nothing to do with anything, but I was thinking about

this today. When it comes to getting federal money, he's not going to get any because all his kids have to pay for their lunches, because all their parents—

McGoff: That's how they give you—pay no money.

Collins: So eventually it's going to show.

McGoff: It's going to come back and bite them on the behind.

Collins: Yes.

Swerdlow: So, is it your experience that the Boston schools are integrated?

McGoff: That's hard to say, because most of the school is black.

Collins: And in this community it's funny because people don't mind sending their kids to elementary school, they really don't. If they can send them to—even to Kent. Kent's an excellent school.

McGoff: Kent's an excellent school.

Collins: It's a very good school. We have more Chinese, blacks. We have special ed classes there. We also have lab classes there. So we're a big mix in that school. The people tend to want to go to the Warren-Prescott because they added on sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, because our Edwards Middle School is not the school you want to send your children to because it's bonkers. It's getting better, but in the past it's been awful.

McGoff: It is getting better.

Swerdlow: So are there still racial issues?

Collins: I don't know if it's a racial issue.

McGoff: I don't know if it's a racial issue.

Collins: I don't think there's a racial issue in school any more, I honestly don't. I used to say to people all the time, there would have been no real problem with busing if they started at a lower level. When you put two kindergartners, two first graders together, they don't know if you're black, white, or pink. They don't care what color you are because kids will play with kids.

McGoff: They're babies and they'll play together.

Collins: But when you're 15 and 16, that's a whole different ball game.

Swerdlow: So Lisa, with your own children, have they come up in integrated schools?

Collins: Yes, they did.

Swerdlow: And what has that been like?

McGoff: It hasn't made any difference to them one way or the other.

Collins: No, it might— Amy's [Collins] still in public school, seventh grade.

McGoff: She goes to the North End.

Collins: My problem with Amy is that she needs small classes. I wanted her to go to the Eddies [Edwards Middle School] because they're changing the Eddies and they're doing a lot of good things for it, because they're trying to get that age of 12-, 13-, and 14-year-olds. They were trying to help them figure out what they want to do with their life. They had this whole nice program down there. She was extremely intimidated.

McGoff: Yes, it can be an intimidating school.

Collins: So we found a smaller school for her.

Swerdlow: It sounds like your situation, you were forced into the situation when you were about to finish school, but it does seem that your children have benefited from your experience.

Collins: I think so. I think they have.

Swerdlow: And the Boston schools now are integrated, and you have black children and white children learning together and getting an education.

McGoff: Well, that's a stretch. That's really a stretch. They'll have a class of 25 kids and three of them will be white.

Collins: That's the difference.

McGoff: So it's majority black.

Collins: We probably have, out of our 462 kids at the Harvard-Kent School, there's probably 13 white kids from kindergarten up.

Swerdlow: Does that reflect the population?

McGoff: No, not at all.

Collins: No. Now, out of the 350 kids at the Warren-Prescott, 120 of them are white. That's because they have the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and people don't want to send their kids to the Eddies, so they try very hard to get their kids in the Warren, because once you get up to fifth grade—

Swerdlow: And so how do parents assure themselves a spot at the school?

McGoff: Well, there actually is no way to assure themselves.

Collins: There isn't really, no.

McGoff: They can ask for.

Collins: We get a choice of five schools.

Swerdlow: Oh, so you do have a choice?

Collins: We do have a choice now, but they're only in certain areas of the city. So I can't say I want Mary Kate [Collins] to go to so-and-so school over on Broad Street.

Swerdlow: And also, all students have—all parents have a choice in any community in Boston.

Collins: Right. It depends on where you're geocoded. So we are East Boston, Charlestown, the North End, and I think that's all we have.

McGoff: That's it.

Collins: Until you get to the high school level.

McGoff: It used to be Brighton, remember?

Collins: Yes, but there's only two schools over there. So I got a choice to say OK, I want Amy either to go to the Kent, my first choice, the Eliot is my second choice, the Warren-Prescott is my third choice, say the Jackson Mann would be my fourth choice. So if she didn't get the first one, it would go to the next one, the next one, the next one. That just recently happened during the last maybe five years. Before it was just so many schools. Now they give you a list of how many schools that you can go to, but you have to choose the ones on that paper.

McGoff: When it first started, you had no choice whatsoever.

Collins: No. You got the letter saying your child is going here. So now, as my kids have been in the Boston public schools, I've had a choice to pick. When John [Collins] was little, there were only certain schools. Now there seems to be, I want to say there's probably 17 or 18 different elementary schools, but they're in one geocoded area. Remember, at one time it used to be you guys are going just here. When I went, when we got bused, it was all the high school kids, all the kids high school age that lived in the projects were not bused, but the kids who lived over this side of the hill who were high school age did get bused, and the elementary schools in the projects got bused and the elementary schools down this side of town didn't. It was geocoded by streets practically. As the years have come on, it's changed, thank God.

McGoff: Back then, one of the little black family kids in the project, the little kid.

Collins: He got bused.

McGoff: He got bused to Roxbury.

Collins: Irving Lee. Poor Irving, he got bused. One of our only black kids in the whole community, he got bused.

Swerdlow: Oh, he got bused. Oh my goodness.

Collins: Because he lived in the projects. I have a friend who lives over on Brighton Street. Brighton Street is Charlestown. His backyard is in Charlestown. The front of his house is in Somerville, his backyard's in Charlestown. His address is Charlestown, but because the front of his house is in Somerville, he could go to Somerville High, because he got bused to go to the Dearborn, way back when, and his mother used her Somerville side of the house to get him to go to Somerville High. Half of Parker Street is considered Somerville, the other—I don't know; it's all strange, but back then that was it.

So now we do have a choice and I would not put my kids in a Catholic school until middle school. My kids all went to Catholic school, starting middle school, except for Amy, and then they went to Catholic high schools, because the option they have for Charlestown is Charlestown High, Southie High, and East Boston High. I just didn't feel like that was what—they were used to being in a Catholic school now, because we did have a Catholic school at one time in this town.

McGoff: And it was closed.

Collins: But they closed it because of money problems.

Swerdlow: So you chose to send them to Catholic school because?

Collins: After fifth grade, because I didn't want them to go to the Eddies. They had no other choice but Edwards, Dearborn.

Swerdlow: And why didn't you want them to go there?

Collins: Because Eddie was a zoo, it was an absolute zoo. There was no rhyme or reason to it. They had a really good principal, but he was a tyrant. I wanted my kids to go to school and just enjoy it.

Swerdlow: Sure.

Collins: Not to feel like I felt.

Swerdlow: So, are there still racial issues at these schools?

Collins: No, not at all.

Swerdlow: So it's not that.

Collins: It's not that.

McGoff: It's not the kids. It's just kids.

Swerdlow: So it's kids from everywhere.

McGoff: Dorchester, Roxbury.

Collins: What's happening that I see now, though, is because the Catholic school is condensing. There aren't many left and they're extremely expensive. They start off from $7,000 a year up, to go to a Catholic school.

McGoff: Elementary kids.

Collins: People can't afford that any more, so they have to go to a public school.

Swerdlow: Right.

Collins: I panic because my Amy has a learning disability, and I keep thinking, *Is she ever going to pass those MCASs* [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System]? I was very glad that John and Mary Kate didn't have to take MCAS, because it's a lot of—

McGoff: Well, I don't personally believe in MCAS.

Collins: I don't either. It's a lot of pressure on a kid to pass that MCAS. I teach special needs kids, and we have to do an MCAS test for them. The pressure that they put on you to make sure your school is up here is astronomical. I worry about Amy. I honestly worry, is she going to be able to handle that?

Swerdlow: Sure. Earlier, you were talking about your involvement in meetings with Tip O'Neill, and of course a lot of these rallies and meetings are well documented. I was wondering if you were ever in any meetings or rallies where Senator Kennedy spoke?

Collins: We went to his office.

Swerdlow: Oh, you did go to his office?

Collins: Yes, we were up in his office. There was a whole bunch of us, a lot of kids. He placated us. He talked to us like we were seven years old. I can remember it.

McGoff: He did the same thing to—

Collins: And I walked out of there saying, "This guy doesn't really care about us." I honestly remember that day.

McGoff: When you reflect back, and I have better feelings about Ted Kennedy than I did back then, because back then I had no use for him at all. He wasn't on my side; he wouldn't listen to me. I had no use for him. I reflect now differently. He's been a wonderful Senator for Massachusetts. He has always been favorable for this state, and I have voted for him since busing ended. Then I started looking at him, and I vote for him because there's no one else out there to do the job. A lot of people have a lot of things to say about him, but I always thought that he had the state's best interest at heart.

Collins: And you know one of the things, whenever we'd go in to talk to a politician or somebody in the higher-ups, as kids you'd walk out of there thinking, well, they can afford to send their kids to private schools, so they don't really care about us. It's not their kids so they don't care.

McGoff: Their kids weren't on a bus.

Collins: Even the people in Somerville, the people in Chelsea.

McGoff: My own sister.

Collins: They don't care. They don't have to worry about it; it's not affecting them. They don't care. Until they get their butts here, then they'll see the difference. That'll make the difference. When there's no education, you don't have enough books in the room, and you can't have the things that you normally have in a high school situation because of the situation that's happening around you, then you get angry.

McGoff: To this day, there are classrooms in the Boston public schools without enough books, and yet, I can't tell you off the top of my head what per child it is costing the taxpayers, but I know that, how many millions are going on those buses?

Collins: The way they spend on buses. In Charlestown alone, because we see it, we see maybe 18, 20 buses pull up in front of Charlestown High. You might have eight kids on one bus, six kids on another bus, three kids on one bus. And our MBTA [Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority] is slammed every single day with kids, because they get free passes. High school kids get free passes to take the bus to school. But why do we have the buses rolling into the town and six or seven kids getting off a bus? That happens at our school, at the Kent. We have buses with two kids on it.

McGoff: My brother taught at the Trotter School.

Collins: At the Blackstone they had more buses, though.

McGoff: Was it the Blackstone?

Collins: Blackstone had the most buses in the city.

McGoff: All right. He had 85 buses, and I only know that because he was the vice principal, and he monitored the buses in the morning and got the kids into school. Eighty-five buses. Now, how early did some of those kids have to get up, to wait in line to get into that school, because everything is monitored.

Swerdlow: So you felt betrayed, I'm sure, by—

Collins: Oh, the money they spent is amazing.

Swerdlow: —by the politicians.

McGoff: What they're paying on those buses could easily have gone into the schools, in forms of assistant teachers and computers—not so much computers back then, but now.

Swerdlow: Did you have interactions with any of the people on the other side that were fighting for integration?

McGoff: None whatsoever.

Swerdlow: So you never talked to the other side, to the black leaders or—

McGoff: They never approached us. We never approached them. Lisa and I, and some of the ladies, we went to some meetings. I can't give you dates and things, but I remember there were meetings where black people were there and white people were there.

Collins: And they had the same issues we did. Their kids are getting up to go from Roxbury High to Charlestown High, and what are they getting in exchange? Nothing except harassment across the bridge and vice versa. They're not giving us anything better. That's why when people did Metco [Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity], they were jumping on the Metco. Yes, I'm definitely going to Metco because I'm going to Wayland and I'm going to get a better education. I'm going to get something from it.

McGoff: I'm going to Brookline and Newton.

Collins: We're not getting anything here, nothing.

McGoff: Where the child per capita is twice as much as the City of Boston.

Collins: And the Metco program is still going on to this day, which amazes me. They don't really say too much about it.

McGoff: Well, there was a big article in the paper about it the other day.

Swerdlow: That's the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity.

McGoff: One of my girlfriends, she brought her child to the school committee to apply for Metco. She got in there and she said, "I'd like my child to go to Metco." And they said, "You can't go to Metco."

Collins: Because you're not black.

McGoff: Oh, I can't go because I'm white? Yes, it's for black students only.

Collins: So how do you think it makes people feel?

McGoff: Now, the kids came back with that and they said, "What if we went in and said you can't go to our school because it's for white kids only?" See, that's the way they thought about it back then, and it created so much bitterness.

Swerdlow: So the politicians at that time were not on your side, except for Louise Day Hicks.

McGoff: We went to court one time in front of Judge [W. Arthur] Garrity, over some ruling, and Judge Garrity, I remember saying to him, "What about my kids, what about their education?" He said, "I'm not here about education, I'm here for integration." And I said to myself, *Well, that sums it up. Nobody cares about my kids but me.*

Collins: Nope, not at all. They did not care what was happening to us.

McGoff: I'm the only one who cares about my kids.

Collins: They didn't care.

Swerdlow: Were you a supporter of Senator Kennedy's brothers?

McGoff: I liked John Kennedy. I voted for him; it was a big deal. When he was running, you could walk in—the town was different. The town was very Irish back then. You could walk into any house—not my father's, but anybody else's—and you could see, there was a cross.

Collins: The Pope and John Kennedy.

McGoff: It might have been the Pope, but Kennedy was in the middle of them.

Swerdlow: So there was a lot of pride about—

McGoff: Oh, absolutely.

Swerdlow: —John F. Kennedy.

McGoff: My girlfriend's husband, Dave Powers, was his uncle. So we had seen Kennedy when he was first starting. We were little kids. When he first started with Dave Powers and he'd march in the parades. So he became very much of a hometown boy. Our local K of C [Knights of Columbus] is the JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy]. The local social center is the JFK. There was a lot of pride in the fact that he was connected to Charlestown.

Swerdlow: And prior to the busing controversy, you supported Senator Kennedy, and then you didn't for a while, and then, as you said, over the years, your feelings have changed.

McGoff: I voted for him because he was John's brother. I wasn't paying much attention. Then busing came in and that changed it.

Collins: And it was a big push back then too. We were trying to prove a point, so even if we liked the politician personally, if he wasn't stepping out and voting for us, you couldn't vote for him, because then you were defeating your own purpose. So it was almost like, if that candidate did not come out to you and say that he was against forced busing, then you weren't going to vote for him, no matter what.

McGoff: The funny thing is, we were all Democrats. The whole town was basically Democrats. Then they started changing their party affiliations. Well, I couldn't go that far. I mean, I was born Irish, Catholic, Democrat, in that order, and that's the way it was. You were that the day you were christened. That's what you were. So I couldn't quite switch over, but I became a very conservative Democrat. As the years passed, I'm as I am today, more moderate. I believe in all the social programs, whereas years ago I didn't so much.

Collins: And a lot of times, politicians—we were very political before busing started. We're a political family.

McGoff: I told her about the corners, when we were all—

Collins: Yes, and then as we got to the age of voting, all us kids, we all had three or four different signs. If somebody was running and I'm voting for one, Danny doesn't want him, Billy didn't want that one. My mother would have signs everywhere for different candidates. But during busing, the candidate didn't really want to be part of you because we were the bad people.

McGoff: Oh no, we were the bad people.

Collins: They didn't want to associate with us because we were just this small group of people, and there was so much more for them that they couldn't affiliate themselves with that because then they would get that, "Oh, you're a no-busing, you're a racist," because the minute you were no-busing, you were racist. It had nothing to do with anything else but race. Nobody saw it any other way. Politicians didn't want to connect with no buses. They were afraid to because it would ruin their career.

McGoff: The funny thing is, the people who were involved with busing, for the major part of the people, they were political kind of people; people who would stand at the polls.

Collins: Community activists.

McGoff: And write postcards for a candidate. They were involved in the politics of their community.

Collins: And especially in this town.

McGoff: Oh yes, at that time boy, this was big.

Collins: I mean, we had the big BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] people. Because we were a small community, most of us banded together to fight together all the time, but when busing came it was a whole—people were afraid to get in there.

Swerdlow: Do you think some people also used this issue to advance themselves?

McGoff: Oh, absolutely. God rest his soul, Jimmy Kelly.

Collins: Yes, he is in there for himself. That's why Pixie was. I don't care; she was in there for herself too. She was a rip- roaring racist in my opinion.

McGoff: Absolutely.

Collins: But she got herself into the City Council, didn't she? Didn't she get herself on the School Committee? She certainly did, and the only way she did that is with her big mouth.

McGoff: What about Louise?

Collins: No, I don't think so. I don't know, because I was young so I don't remember, but I always thought that she was true-blue.

McGoff: I'm going to tell you honestly, when Louise was changing, gerrymandering the areas, I was paying no attention. I had all those kids. Busing, I knew there was something about the Lee School in Dorchester, and she had moved it. It was a brand new school, and the way they had moved the area, but I really can't tell you exactly. I have a vague remembrance of it. Supposedly, the school was moved so that the school would become more of a white school and not the black school. Now, that's about as much attention as I paid to it because I didn't have time. What they did in Dorchester, let them do in Dorchester. Now I realize I should have been more informed, but at that time, I wasn't. But I think she—I don't know what to say about Louise. I think she believed in what she believed in, and that was it.

Collins: Well, the thing that I remember as being a kid, she came to every march. She showed up, she was there.

McGoff: Oh, absolutely.

Collins: So in my opinion she was—whether in the back of her head she was doing it for her own political reason or not, I don't know, but she was always there.

McGoff: And we were hungry for supporters.

Collins: She was always there.

Swerdlow: So she was someone that you felt was on your side?

McGoff: This was basically a Catholic town, and half of the people involved in the busing, their kids were in Catholic schools. This was a Catholic town, but our priest didn't back us up, but one of the Protestant ministers did. So we turned—we thought he was the greatest thing since chopped liver.

Swerdlow: You ended up having a prayer meeting with him.

Collins: All the time.

McGoff: We used to have prayer marches, not led by any priest or minister, just by us. We'd go up over to Bunker Hill Street, we'd start down saying the rosary, and then we'd have women with veils on their faces carrying candles, incanting, "Whoooooaaaa." A little dramatic now, but back then it was fun.

Swerdlow: You were upset with your own priest because he wouldn't pray with you.

McGoff: No.

Collins: And then they were making a big deal about kids that did get bused, to get them to go to Catholic schools. They wouldn't let them in them. We couldn't get into the Catholic schools around the community. They were shutting us down.

Swerdlow: The Catholic Church had a policy that they were not going to become—

McGoff: Because they'd lose their federal money.

Swerdlow: Right. The schools were—

McGoff: And they weren't kidding us, and we knew why.

Collins: As kids we went to church all the time. My mother made us go to church. We went to church, and then we stopped going to church. So in this community—it's in the book too—we had Father Ward and Father Joy, and they would take a whole bunch of kids and we would go to each others' houses and have mass there. He would sit and talk to us. He would take us to the movies at night.

McGoff: He's a great guy.

Collins: We became—that was sort of our introduction to CYO, the Catholic Youth Organization.

McGoff: What he did was separate the issue from the church, which the other priests didn't. They lumped it together.

Collins: And that's why Father Joy got moved out of here and that's why Father Ward got moved out of here, because they weren't doing anything—

McGoff: They were separating the church and the state, the way it should have been.

Collins: They were young priests. They were trying to keep us—

McGoff: They were young, they were saying, all right, but let's go to somebody's house and have mass, just us. Nothing about outside, just us.

Collins: Because the kids weren't going to church now.

Swerdlow: So, you're saying he was right?

McGoff: I thought he was right to separate the issues, yes.

Collins: Oh, yes. I still wanted to go to church, but then I was mad because now the church is not letting my brother and sister go over there?

McGoff: I had a big argument with a priest, face to face, in the middle of Hay Square. That's unheard of. You don't argue with priests.

Collins: Growing up Catholic, you only know going to church on a Sunday, you know going to Mass and being in that building, and he made it so that we could still go to Mass. And not that my mother said we couldn't go to church any more, but that was our excuse. "I'm not going to church; they don't support busing," blah blah blah. But he made it so that we could go back to church again in our own way. He never pushed busing on us, never pushed the issues on us.

McGoff: He never talked about it.

Collins: He just made us, you know, it was just fun.

McGoff: There was nobody saying oh, you've got to do this, it's brotherhood, it's God's way. That was not said.

Collins: No, not those two. And they were so good to us.

McGoff: Those kids weren't—they didn't want to hear that.

Collins: When something would happen in the community, he'd come by in his peach wagon, "Let's go, we're going to get ice cream." You know, that kind of a priest.

McGoff: Well, you know what it is. Also, he made them feel like they counted, because frankly, by this point, they didn't feel like they counted for anything.

Collins: The church is against you, the government is against you.

McGoff: Schools are against you.

Collins: All you've got out there is TPF [Tactical Patrol Force] and cops chasing you off the corner.

McGoff: And beating you with sticks. It was horrendous, the things that happened.

Collins: It was sad that my mother had to make good friends with detectives that say—if we're on the corner and doing nothing, because we never really got arrested or anything—"Time to go home. Your mother said get in the car," and they'd be driving us home because she would be worrying about it. Get in the car. There was no freedom. Then at one point, they put a curfew on the town. Like, this is not Nazi Germany. We should be able to stay out and hang out until 10:00.

McGoff: Well, it felt like it.

Collins: Yes, it did. It felt like it.

McGoff: They would march up Bunker Hill Street from Hay Square, right across the street, maybe eight, ten, with those big heavy boots on and their sticks. And they'd be banging their boots with the batons.

Collins: It was an awful noise.

McGoff: People don't believe it, but I'm telling you, to say you could hear a pin drop in the middle of a busy town, they just, whack, whack, whack, whack.

Collins: Like my mother, we hung on a corner. We hung down across from the church.

McGoff: All kids did.

Collins: That's why we were extremely friendly with the priest, because we hung right across from the church. My girlfriends and I would sit on the corner, we'd sing, we'd get pretzels and cheese from the red store, and hang out. And then busing comes, and now we can't hang on the corner, we can't be with each other, we have to be in at a certain time. This has nothing to do with school. Why are you doing this to us at night? It's bad enough in the daytime, but now at nighttime we can't even.... So it took away so many things that we shouldn't have had taken away from us, because of an issue that somebody sent down.

McGoff: And then the end result of that was resentment.

Swerdlow: That sense of community that seems like you've always had, is that still the way today?

Collins: In this town, it's changing. We're getting there, we're coming back. I don't know.

McGoff: At first, after the busing and the—they call them "Toonies."

Collins: The Toonies.

McGoff: Those are the new people. When they moved in they were a little standoffish. As time's gone by now, they're very involved with the community.

Collins: Wait. We can say this too, though. Back about five years ago, we would get Toonies, they would come here. I mean, we'd get people moving in, the young, up-and-coming. They would come in, they would buy a condo, get a house. The minute they got pregnant they were out the door, because our education stinks.

McGoff: Yes, they wouldn't stay with their kids.

Collins: So as the years are coming on, they're staying. I used to say that to people all the time. I don't care who moves here, but stay. Don't leave once your kids come here.

McGoff: We have so few kids in our town now.

Collins: We have hardly any kids, but at the lacrosse banquet this year—I probably know every kid under the age of 18 in this town—I probably didn't know 50 kids in that group, because they were all kids that were born here but they're yuppies, they're not Townies yet. They are Townies actually because they're born here, but they're staying. So now they're eight and nine and ten and they're staying, and that's a good thing. Come here and stay. Don't come here, use us for—and then leave and go out. That used to get me so mad, but now they're staying. They're all going to the Warren-Prescott, but that's OK. Let them do whatever they want to do.

McGoff: You can hear that little resentment there.

Swerdlow: What's your sense of the black community now in Boston? How do you feel about it?

Collins: I can't tell you about Boston itself. Here in Charlestown, I know a lot of the black kids, young kids, because I work in the school, but they're still leery about coming out. They are starting to join baseball, they're starting to join—

Swerdlow: So they're still leery of Charlestown?

Collins: Yes, yes. They stay amongst themselves.

Swerdlow: Are they afraid?

Collins: I don't know if it's afraid.

McGoff: I think they're just standoffish.

Collins: I think economically it's hard too, because if you play lacrosse, it's $100. You play baseball, it's $50. You play softball, it's $50. You play hockey, it's $700.

McGoff: Hockey is $700.

Collins: Plus. So I think economically it's hard for the black kids, but when there's a black event down at—community centers is the place that draws all the black kids, Boston Youth and Family Centers, they draw it. So we have two centers. We have one at the Kent, which is always white kids, and one on Medford Street, which is always black kids. And this is changing. The mayor has come to figure this out in the last year. He's got new people in charge. He's trying to—all the black workers...

McGoff: Mayor [Thomas] Menino is a good politician.

Collins: Yes, he's trying.

Swerdlow: Who is this?

McGoff: Mayor Menino. He's a good politician. He's a good man, period.

Collins: As a community person and working in the community, I always say, where are the black kids? We have a town with black kids in it, a town with Spanish kids in it. Where are they? Where's the Chinese kids? They live here, Where are they? And that's one of the things that bothers me the most in this whole community. We go down there and play baseball, every kid is white. And I said, why aren't they coming out? Why aren't they coming? What it is that we have to do to get them to join?

But then, and my own daughter, they would have a big to-do down at the Kent, which she used to go to every Friday night. The black kids used to call it the "Ku Klux Klan night" because it was a family night, but it was only white kids and their families there. There's no sign that says "No blacks Allowed," but no black families came over to be part of it, and nobody knows why it happened. Then, in the last year, the mayor has put some black employees and some white employees, and switched them from each building, and he's hoping that that's going to change the attitude and then maybe that will get the kids to—because they get along. It's not like they fight.

McGoff: They get along fine. No, they don't fight.

Collins: There's no arguments. It's just, the Kent is ours and the high school is yours, and that's not the way it's supposed to be. It's for everybody. So the black community, one, yes, I think it's economics, it's very expensive, and then there's definitely a poor—I can see it in my own school. There's probably 20 kids in our school who pay for lunch. The rest of them all get it free, so you know they're under that. I mean, she gets no money, no money at all, compared to the Warren, which gets the most money in the whole city, by the way. I heard that the other day. They get the most money in the whole city for lunches.

McGoff: How can they?

Collins: Because they have more white kids that come from families with lots of money. So you have to declare how much money you make before you get charged.

McGoff: I thought you meant the government gave them the money.

Collins: Oh no, for their lunch program. I had to pay for Amy, Mary Kate, and John all through elementary. I had to pay $2 for lunch. If you fall under a certain poverty line, you pay nothing. So the Kent is—if she has 15 people paying, that's it. But that, I think, is the biggest problem, is that economically.... So what I see some of the organizations do now—

McGoff: They do have the black kids involved in Pop Warner and cheerleading, but they have scholarships for them.

Collins: And there's some white kids too in the same situation.

McGoff: Of course, there's tons of poor white kids.

Collins: The town is doing more to get the black kids involved, and here's what I hear through the grapevine through the kids. It's not a black/white issue any more, it's a Spanish/black issue. Spanish kids don't like black kids. Dominican kids don't like kids from—

McGoff: Cape Verde or something.

Collins: That's an issue that, to us, why are you—because I would always say, you're Spanish. "No I'm not, I'm from the Dominican." Oh, sorry. I don't know the difference because I'm not in that—but blacks and Spanish fight a lot down there. And one of the major problems down in that project is drugs. And it's not drugs with just—it's drugs with everybody down there. That's one of their biggest problems down there, but it's not really a black/white issue in this community any more.

McGoff: The white kids are not fighting the black kids at all.

Collins: It's the black kids and the Spanish kids that don't connect. One of the things that I see in this community is, even though this has nothing to do with busing, that there are a lot of white kids—not a lot, but there are a certain amount of white kids who are doing drugs, who are spending a lot of time in that project. You know what I mean? And that's—you can't blame the

black kids or the Spanish kids for the drug problem. Kids are going to find their drugs wherever they want, but the majority of it stems from down there. I'm not saying it's not out here, but a lot of it stems from down there. So I never really hear of a racial issue.

McGoff: No, I haven't heard it.

Collins: You don't hear of black and white kids fighting in this town. It's always the—well, I have my police radio and I listen to it a lot. It's a lot of black and Spanish fighting.

Swerdlow: Do you ever run into some of the kids that you graduated with?

Collins: I did a while back. I used to bump into Joe Strickland. He's a bus driver for the T [MBTA].

Swerdlow: How about reunions?

Collins: No. I did my fifth, and we only had probably eight black kids, and I had their addresses. I did my fifth reunion, I did my tenth reunion.

Swerdlow: You only had eight kids that showed up.

Collins: That were black, yes, in our classroom. We didn't have that many. Then Kevin got a little more and then Robert and Bobby got more of it. So we didn't have a lot. Billy only had four black kids in his class.

McGoff: They were in the electrical course.

Collins: Not really, no.

Swerdlow: So they were really—the black kids were really outnumbered.

Collins: They were outnumbered in the beginning, for the 12th grade, for the 11th grade. I don't know what it was like in the middle schools, it was probably equal or more, but at the high school level we did not have a lot of black kids. So I did have a fifth-year reunion and Joe Strickland did come to it, and so did Cassandra Ann [Twymon], she came.

Swerdlow: How did you feel, because I don't know, it just struck me that there were so few of them and so many white kids. How did you feel at the time, when some of the kids were really mean and yelling ugly things at them? Did you feel sorry for them?

McGoff: They were yelling back.

Swerdlow: They were?

McGoff: Yes, of course they were yelling back.

Collins: We didn't have a lot of problems. The Class of '76 had some problems, in reality they did. The blacks in class had some problems because it was the first year, it was different. We were giving each other dirty looks and blah blah blah. As the years went on, the noise was outside, it wasn't inside.

Swerdlow: I see.

Collins: We had problems inside but they weren't....

McGoff: There were too many people watching every move you made.

Collins: So we weren't like Hyde Park High. We're small, we're a small school. They had two black ladies. Mrs. [Ginger] Brown. Oh, she was a wonderful lady. Her daughter came to our school. She sat in the lavatory. That's where she sat, inside the bathroom for five hours a day, to make sure that nothing went on. That was her job. And then, you would have two people standing at this step, two people at the next step, and then somebody at every single door. You couldn't burp without somebody hearing you, and a lot of times it was Charlestown guys. They took a whole bunch of Charlestown men that played Charlestown Townies football, guys that we respected because they were like our Patriots, because they were in our town. Hired them as, what did they call them? I don't know. There was a name for them. So there was Chet and there were all these guys, Frankie Coleman, that would sit around, outside, and just watch and talk. So you couldn't get into trouble, and you had to plan to get into a fight, in all reality, unless it just broke out in a scuffle kind of thing, with Larry Matthews being thrown down the stairs. And Mr. Greatorex. Those kinds of fights would start—

Swerdlow: Larry Matthews was a teacher.

Collins: He was an English teacher, yes.

Swerdlow: Wasn't he the only black teacher in the school?

Collins: No, he was a white teacher. The only black teacher at the time was Steve Grace, who was a real cool guy. He was our psych [psychology] teacher.

Swerdlow: So this white teacher that got thrown down the steps, what happened?

Collins: It was just a scuffle. He was trying to break it up and he ends up falling down the stairs. I don't think it was directed towards him. He was breaking up a fight and he fell down the stairs. But you really had to plan it; we're going to meet you at this time under the stairwell kind of thing. A scuffle broke out when a scuffle broke out. It was the way you were looking at her, don't you look at her like that. It was stupid, stupid fights. It was dumb fights.

Swerdlow: Well, it sounds like a lot of the—as you described earlier with Pixie Palladino, it sounds like you were in a way being egged on to— You were not being told, "Everything's going to be OK." Your fears were being fed.

Collins: Yes, fed. They were letting us feel that. You know what's going to happen.

Swerdlow: Exactly.

Collins: You know especially, I think the school stuff more or less was—I wasn't afraid in school. I was not afraid. I was afraid out on the streets, that's when I was afraid, because it was turning into a real black-and-white issue.

McGoff: The first day they went back to school, there were guys on the roof with machine guns.

Collins: And it's exactly how the book puts it. Exactly.

McGoff: There were helicopters. To this date, this is 30 years later, and when I hear helicopters, I look out the window immediately.

Swerdlow: It sounds sort of like a war zone.

McGoff: Absolutely, perfect description.

Collins: I always tell this story. I can remember the clothes I had on. Jeanie [Smith] and Joanie [Smith], and I were buying—we bought T-shirts and dungaree overalls and sneakers. That's how we were going to school. I had this big afro. I always had an afro.

Swerdlow: You did?

Collins: Yes, I always had an afro. I had my little pick in my pocket because I always had—

Swerdlow: Can you stop? I'm just going to plug this in because the recorder is telling me something. So let me just stop and restart.

[BREAK]

Swerdlow: We're back on. We were talking about how you felt unsafe when you were out on the streets. You actually didn't feel fear in school.

Collins: No, I wasn't afraid.

Swerdlow: And do you think the black kids felt the same way?

Collins: Yes, I honestly do, because they would scurry off that bus and get into that building as quick as possible. They knew, going into that building, you're going through a metal detector. Well, that's how I was going to start it. We all got little papers and you had to take this paper to school with you. I think it's in the book actually; take this paper to school. So we're walking out of the projects, we go into the red store. There's a man standing at the red store, he's got—the

colors might be off, but maybe a blue dot on his lapel. Are you going to Charlestown High? Yes. OK. So here I am in my afro, with my pick in my back pocket, my dungaree overalls, me and my two girlfriends, because I always wore overalls and I always had curly hair.

So off we go and so he's reading the assignment. "OK, go ahead, go ahead, go ahead." So now nobody could just walk up the street. There were barriers and two guys at each corner, and they had to look at your papers. You walked up the street; there were two more guys at the top of the street. I mean, how else—they have different color lapels. These are all federal agents. The money they spent must have been astronomical. So now you've got to show them, and this is the truth. We would walk past the monument, and there are guys standing all around the monument, and then there are men up in your high school with guns in their hands, guns.

McGoff: Just like it was a war.

Collins: Guns. And I'd look up and go, what in the world? And there's so many news people. This is my first day of my sophomore year of high school, and I'm thinking, what is this? So we're walking down the street, now this is like one, two, three, there on that corner. I haven't gone far, another lapel, different color, let me see it. Then you crossed the street, and so while you're crossing the street, you have I don't know how many people screaming at you, "Nigger lover." Your own people in your community screaming at you because you're going in that building and you're not boycotting.

So now, I'm 15 and this is what's happening. I look around and I go, what are we doing here? So we get in the building, they stop us. They open our bags, they pull everything out, they hand up and down, we go through a metal detector. We get to the stairs and then they'd look at our paper one more time. I'm like, I didn't go far. And then they direct you to a room, they sit you in, they shut the door, there's one person inside and one person outside. This is how we started every single day.

After about three months, the federal agents are gone, but there's reporters everywhere. And people were always, always outside that school, whether they were Charlestown people, Southie people, whoever they were, there was always people. We'd be in the class and you could hear people yelling things.

Swerdlow: You said that it was when you were outside of the school that you felt unsafe.

Collins: They scared you, yes.

Swerdlow: I read that you witnessed the attack on Ted Landsmark. And according to the book, you were really terrified.

Collins: Gigi, Mrs. Cochran, and I were just hiding. I couldn't believe the—I'm like, he ruined it. I was so angry.

Swerdlow: He was really walking down the street, wasn't he? Those three kids attacked him.

Collins: He was doing nothing, and those kids made it into something, because it was definitely—I always wanted a peaceful march. Let's not make idiots of ourselves. We want to get something. We need to show that we're serious. We're not going there to fistfight. So to get all these kids to listen to me—

McGoff: You can't get across to them if they perceive you as a racist bigot.

Collins: They're not going to listen.

McGoff: You're not going to get anywhere. They're not going to listen to you.

Collins: So it would take me a lot to say, come on guys, let's have a walkout, let's have a boycott. Now this is only in my junior year. I was very different in my senior year. We've got to do this right, we've got to get over that bridge, we've got to do it quietly. And knowing that we're going to meet Southie kids there, we're going to meet Dorchester kids there, and we're all going to go up to City Hall and talk to that mayor.

Swerdlow: Right. You were there to meet the mayor. What time of day was it?

Collins: We walked out of school at about 11:00 in the morning. We walked out of school.

Swerdlow: And it was actually some of your peers, some of the high school kids?

Collins: Yes, Eddie Irvin. Poor Eddie.

Swerdlow: Was it just him?

Collins: No. It was him and two kids from Southie. I don't know who they were.

Swerdlow: So two kids from another school.

Collins: Yes.

Swerdlow: And they just decided to attack—

Collins: And you know what I honestly believe, that Eddie—

Swerdlow: —this black male walking down the street.

Collins: I honestly believe that Eddie just got caught up in the whole thing, because if you knew Eddie Irvin as a person and as a kid, he was the class clown.

McGoff: It was mob thinking.

Collins: Yes, exactly.

McGoff: It was mob thinking.

Collins: He's 16, he's wild. This is nuts.

McGoff: This kid was a kid who was a class clown. He was an attention-getter to start off with.

Collins: Absolutely. I mean, to this day he has kids, he's married, he works for the T. He's a supervisor for the T. He probably has more black friends than white friends, do you know what I mean? So back then in the day, he got caught up in it, and it was wrong and he probably knew to this day it was wrong, but it was the scariest thing I ever saw. I was so angry because it was a good march until we got to that point, and then they ruined it. And in my head I'm thinking, *No one's going to listen to us, they think we're animals.*

Swerdlow: Did you think, at the time when you were watching this violence, that they might kill him?

Collins: All I can remember is crying and just hiding, and saying, "I can't believe this is happening." I was hiding behind a wall.

Swerdlow: Did anyone jump in and intervene?

Collins: I can't even remember. I honestly couldn't tell you.

McGoff: I obviously wasn't there, I was in work.

Collins: I honestly couldn't tell you. I'm assuming but I don't even know.

Swerdlow: Someone took a photograph, which became very famous.

Collins: And to this day it still affects Eddie's life. He doesn't really talk about it any more. I'm friends with his sister-in-law. We're very good friends. He got married and moved right out of the city.

Swerdlow: Did he go to jail?

Collins: No, they didn't go to jail. None of them went to jail.

McGoff: It was the same time where, over in the Roxbury area, they were pulling truck drivers out of trucks and beating them to death.

Collins: Beating them up, throwing lighter fluid on people, and lighting them on fire.

McGoff: Yes, and burning them.

Collins: That's why I was scared.

Swerdlow: So who was doing—

McGoff: The community, not necessarily the students.

Collins: The blacks were attacking the whites. Not the school, it was the people in the community. If something happened to a black person in a white area, you knew that night something was going to happen to a white person in a black area.

Swerdlow: It was a war.

McGoff: Yes, absolutely.

Collins: Yes, it was.

McGoff: I always said that we were at war. Especially when the federal people took over. I said, "Oh, my God, we're at war."

Swerdlow: It's so unfortunate because so many innocent people, like this man, this very accomplished black man, got caught in the middle of this and was attacked for no reason.

McGoff: Well, I felt really bad; everybody felt bad. This guy was just walking down the street, minding his own business.

Collins: And a lot of people said back then, well, he shouldn't have been there, he was black.

McGoff: He had every right to be there.

Collins: I know, but that's what people said back then. Didn't he realize a whole bunch of white kids, he shouldn't have been around there. But that's how—

Swerdlow: You know, this man was married to a white woman. Did you know that?

Collins: I don't really know much about Teddy.

McGoff: I don't know anything about him.

Swerdlow: He was married to a white woman.

McGoff: The bottom line is, and I don't know if the kids thought about it as much as the parents did, that we had nobody on our side. There was nobody in the government, including Ted Kennedy or any of them. None of them.

Swerdlow: Or Ed Brooke or Tip O'Neill.

McGoff: Tip O'Neill or any of them.

Swerdlow: Kevin White.

McGoff: People were kind of divided on Kevin. Publicly, I think people knew he couldn't say a word, because if they booted him out as mayor, we didn't even have that. But everyone always felt that the mayor—well, the people that I knew always felt that the mayor would do as much for us as he could, if he could. But if he didn't, we'd end up losing him and then we'd have nothing.

Swerdlow: Really, when you look back on this, when there was a federal court order that mandated this, what could the mayor really do?

McGoff: The mayor couldn't do much about that.

Swerdlow: And what could Senator Kennedy do? And what could Tip O'Neill do?

Collins: Remember I used to say, "It's the federal government. They can do whatever they want and nobody can say anything about it."

McGoff: That why when they first—we went to that march because they opened the galleys to the public for the first time, and we thought we were going to get in there and be able to say something. They're opening it to the public. Little did we know that the public was going to sit there with tape over their mouths.

Swerdlow: And was that the incident where you were actually escorted out?

Collins: You and Pat Russell? You and Pat, you were kicked out of a lot of places, God rest her soul. [*laughter*] It's sad because a lot of moms know busing people have gone on to better places, and when I think back of all the wild things they did—

McGoff: Pat and I used to go to some places that they wouldn't even let us near the door.

Swerdlow: This was Pat?

McGoff: Pat Russell. She's passed a long time now. A lot of them have passed. I'm hanging on by my teeth.

Collins: I had a great thought and I lost it.

Swerdlow: You're right; a lot of people have passed, because it is a long time ago.

McGoff: Did you find Rita Graul?

Swerdlow: If my memory serves me, I think that she is still living, but she's not doing well.

McGoff: She must be old now too.

Swerdlow: And I think Pixie Palladino has passed.

McGoff: Oh, she did.

Collins: Yes, Pixie passed.

McGoff: And her sister Trixie [Nastri], who was a bigger mouth.

Collins: Trixie and Pixie. Didn't even go to those wakes.

Swerdlow: No?

McGoff: No, I didn't either.

Collins: I was not very happy with them. They were rude to me.

McGoff: They started picking on her.

Swerdlow: Well, there was a formal split.

Collins: Oh definitely, yes.

McGoff: But they would start picking on her, and that was the end of it.

Collins: We'd be in a TV station and they'd have cameras on us, and we'd all be talking. I'm 16. They're grown women, they're my mother's age, and they would harass me, even though I was part of the anti-busers. They would out-and-out harass me because, "Well, she's not with us, she goes to school." And then I'd have to get on my soapbox and say, "But that's what I want to do. I want to go to my school. That's defeating the purpose, if we boycott and nobody shows up. The black kids are going to come, so they're not going to shut the school down, so why am I going to stay home?" I used to argue with Pixie, just because you keep your kid out of school doesn't mean I have to stay home from school.

McGoff: And East Boston wasn't even that integrated at the time because they were afraid to put the kids through the tunnel, because that was the way to East Boston. They were afraid because there were some heavy guys.

Collins: They were going to blow up that tunnel.

Swerdlow: But you were asking about Rita Graul and whether she was still living. That reminds me, apparently you were not there, but there was one meeting with Senator Kennedy, and Pixie Palladino and Rita Graul were there and others from ROAR. It was an event that lasted seven hours.

McGoff: No, I was certainly not there.

Swerdlow: And you were not there. Can you imagine? It was one person speaking after another, and just nonstop, seven hours.

McGoff: I can't remember that.

Collins: I can't remember that. That's amazing.

Swerdlow: That is true commitment, isn't it?

McGoff: Yes.

Swerdlow: It must have just been unbelievably grueling.

McGoff: We realize now, at this point, what could any of them have done? It was a federal law. It was a constitutional thing. But at the time it was nothing but frustration for us.

Collins: Because we knew there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

McGoff: Down deep, we all knew we were going to lose.

Swerdlow: Right. You knew.

McGoff: Yes, we knew.

Collins: In this town, and it's something my mother has instilled in all of us as kids, you fight for what you believe in and don't give up. Fight to the end, don't give up. That's all, you just don't give up. Then someone can never, ever say to you, you didn't try.

McGoff: Well, that's why if they don't vote I get mad, because if you don't vote, you have no right to give me an opinion, because you haven't voted.

Swerdlow: That's true. You know, you're very fortunate. You've had a chance to speak to history and future generations. You have.

Collins: Yes, I believe that.

Swerdlow: You have. And you're having that opportunity again here, in this oral history. Looking back on all of these incredible events and your role, what do you want people in the future to come away with as far as—

Collins: We were not bigots. That's my biggest thing. I hate the thought that people thought that I hated.

McGoff: Even beyond that, and this is going to sound a little dramatic, but it's how I feel. This is the United States of America. As long as I pay my taxes and do my duties as a citizen, no one

should be able to tell me what to do. If I do something wrong, they have the right to correct me, but if I'm only fending for my own children, no one should be able to stop me.

Collins: And you know what? When you bring that up, it just reminds me that back then we used to say, "Why does it happen just in Boston? Why isn't it happening in Newton? Why isn't it happening in Somerville? Why doesn't it happen in Revere or Chelsea? Why just us? There are no black people in those other areas?" That used to get me so mad because as I'm getting like 17 and 18, and I'm going out to clubs or whatever. You start talking about school and I'd think to myself, *You only lived in Revere*. *You didn't know what was going on.* They had no idea what was going on at our school. They thought of us, kids in Revere, kids in Chelsea, What are you people doing over there? What do you mean what are we doing over there? We're just—

McGoff: My sister—

Collins: So even though these people lived—I can walk to Somerville. That person who lived next to Parker Street, one street over, doesn't get his rights taken away. He lives one street over from me.

McGoff: Right now the walk to Somerville would take her seven minutes.

Collins: But those people weren't touched. The people in the North—well, yes, the North End was touched, but the people in Chelsea, right over the bridge. That used to get me mad. They all had something to say about us, but if it happened to you, what would you have done? What would you have done? And I used to say that to the people who interviewed me. You're from Wellesley, you're from Newton, you're from Holliston. What if it happened in your community? Would you sit back and take it?

McGoff: My sister lived in Melrose.

Collins: [*laughing*] Oh, my mother used to fight with her all the time.

McGoff: She could not understand me for one single minute.

Collins: They fought all the time.

McGoff: She just passed and I miss her dearly, but we fought.

Swerdlow: What were her feelings?

McGoff: Oh, don't argue with them, do what they want. I said, "What do you mean don't argue with them? You live in the whitest city in the entire state. Why isn't somebody integrating your city?"

Collins: That's what kids nowadays would see, why just us, why just Boston? Do it to those rich people in Wellesley.

McGoff: They had better school systems, that's for sure.

Collins: And if I was going to be bused, bus me to Wellesley, bus me to Abington or—

McGoff: If they told me she had to go to Newton, I'd send her there in a half a breath.

Collins: I'll go to school in Andover, I'll get up a half hour earlier, because I know I'm going to get more from you. But I really wouldn't, because I wanted to come to my own school.

Swerdlow: And why Boston? Well, Boston has this history of being the city in the country that stands for liberty, and there is so much history here. And here it was, whether it was by design or by accident, it wasn't integrated, was it?

Collins: No, it wasn't. We had our own little sections.

McGoff: Well, that's it. The funny thing is, when it first started, way, way back, I used to say, "What are they talking about? Charlestown's all Irish. The North End is all Italian." I mean, we didn't think that way.

Collins: Yes, the West Enders, they were all Italian. We thought of the ethnicity more than black and white.

McGoff: More than skin color.

Collins: Chinatown was all Chinese.

Swerdlow: What about everything that was going on in the south of the country, and Martin Luther King?

McGoff: We thought those people were awful.

Swerdlow: Oh, you thought they were awful?

McGoff: Oh, I used to say to her, "I'd be the first one in that march." They wouldn't put me in the back of the bus.

Swerdlow: OK.

McGoff: I could understand that, but why are they picking on me because I live in an Irish community?

Collins: It's not right. Southie was Polish and Irish. If you moved here, you moved to where you—that's where your ethnic background was, that's where you're going, that's where you're supposed to go. That's the way it was supposed to be.

McGoff: You went with one of your own. You know, one of your own.

Swerdlow: Well, it sounds like you were so—

McGoff: Polarized.

Swerdlow: So entrenched in your culture.

McGoff: Yes.

Collins: Oh, definitely.

Swerdlow: And you liked it that way.

McGoff: Yes, we did, absolutely did.

Swerdlow: And you didn't want anything or anyone to come in and change that.

McGoff: No. Everybody knew everyone else. Everyone watched out for everybody else.

Swerdlow: It must have been very comforting to live in a place where—

McGoff: Unless you were a kid and some woman says—

Collins: I know your mother.

McGoff: —I see, I know what you're doing.

Collins: I'm telling your mother.

McGoff: I know what you're doing. But that's what happened.

Collins: You know what, I do it now. It's so funny, I do it now, and Amy gets so mad at me, because if she knows that I know somebody—speaking of her. Hi, honey.

Amy: Hi.

Swerdlow: She's very friendly, she's 12.

Collins: But she's that way now because I always say to my mother—and she'll say, "How does everybody know?" I let them know. I want everybody to know. Now I'll say, "I'm going to tell their mother." Don't tell, don't tell.

McGoff: See. But even as much as the town has changed, she's hanging with the same kids that she hung with.

Swerdlow: And you're referring to Amy, Lisa. Your 12-year-old.

McGoff: And I'm friends with the grandparents.

Collins: And my 16-year-old hangs around with a girl that I've been friends with for 40 years. You know what I mean? And then my mother and her aunt were best friends growing up. One of my good friends is my mother's maid of honor. That's the kind of—

McGoff: That's the way the whole town was. I mean, it was a town where if I came down with tuberculosis or something, the woman next door would say come on, come in.

Collins: Took the kids in, yes.

McGoff: There were no state programs that you went through where they got money. You just adopted that kid.

Collins: And when you talk to elderly people in this town they'll say, "Oh, her mom got really sick, so we raised their family and the four of them lived with us." You look back and realize that's just the way they were.

McGoff: And that's not a specific person. Many people in the town have done that.

Collins: It's so funny, we only moved up here 13—this will be our 14th year in this house.

McGoff: We used to call this the—

Collins: The people next door have been there—how long have they been there, 17 years or something?

McGoff: Yes.

Collins: But when we were kids, we lived in the same block as the Considines. So we grew up with them as kids, and then the parents moved up over the hill, and then when I get married, here I am moving up over the hill into this house. This house was my niece Nicki's best friend's grandparents' house. There's history all through this whole town. Everybody's connected somehow.

McGoff: Yes, everybody's connected. During busing we used to call this the South of Ireland—

Collins: Because in all honesty—

McGoff: —because all the trouble was down the other end.

Collins: —from Polk Street up, you wouldn't know.

McGoff: You wouldn't even know anything was going on.

Collins: You would not know there was anything going on. All the trouble was down that end of the town, in the project. When we were a white project, you know what I mean? All the trouble was down there. When we moved up over this hill, and I used to always say, oh yes, you live over the hill. You're not from the projects, you're from the hill.

McGoff: You're the South of Ireland.

Collins: We used to say all kinds of stuff about kids over the hill. When we moved here, Amy was two months old, when we moved up over this hill. I used to say, the people down the other end of the hill. And my mother would go, "Ah, excuse me. We lived down the other end of the hill." But it's so obvious that we don't know anything that goes on down there.

McGoff: No, we know nothing.

Collins: Still to this day. Only because of my police radio I can tell you what goes on down there. It's a little wild.

McGoff: It doesn't touch this half of the town.

Collins: So no matter whether it was white or black down there, it's still the same issue. The people up here don't know anything that's going on down there. Two years ago we had an issue up at the Bunker Hill Park. Some black kid was riding around with a gun in his car, pulled into the park, up at the Bunker Hill Park. What an uproar from this end of town. Uproar. Meeting with big—there were cops, but if anything happens down there, the people down this end don't get involved. But if something happens up here with kids from down that end, oh my God, it's really kind of definitely southern/northern Ireland. It really is.

McGoff: It's the North and South.

Collins: This little stinker that just came in the door, she's the biggest snob going because she'll say, "I never lived in a project," because I lived in a project with my two little ones.

McGoff: Oh yes, she's awful.

Collins: When they were little, we lived down in the projects still.

Swerdlow: Did you?

Collins: And then we moved to Auburn Street and then we bought this house. So she was the only one, so she'll always tell people, "I never lived in the projects." And I look at her and I go, hello? I was raised there. But it's automatic. When she went to the Eddies—she hangs around nine girls. All nine of them go to either a Catholic school, go to Latin or Latin Academy. None of them ever went to a public school. They're going to Catholic schools. The only public is Latin Academy. She went to the Edwards for five days. They would call her like she was in prison: "Are you OK? What was it like in there?" I mean that's—the poor kid. I said, she's only going to school guys, she's fine.

It's kind of like taboo to go to the Eddies, because when I was a kid the Eddies had a reputation. So the reputation hasn't changed. She's so funny because she's the real snob of my family, and I hate to say that about her. And she'll tell you too. But that's the way this community runs, anything after Polk Street. Well, it's getting up higher, now it's Mystic Street.

Swerdlow: And do your children know about your involvement with ROAR and Powder Keg?

Collins: Mary Kate started reading a little bit about it. John just hears about it.

McGoff: Some of my other kids had to take it in school.

Collins: Yes, because they went to Noble and Greenough, which is a private school, and they had to take *Common Ground* as a class.

Swerdlow: Really?

Collins: Yes, the poor kids.

McGoff: Megan had it again at the University of New Hampshire.

Collins: Yes, Megan had it at UNH. It's funny, a lot of the kids in the community who have to do reports on it will call us and say, "Will you guys talk to us?" Yes, come on down and we'll help you. I don't know how many reports we wrote for the Deroeve brothers. They just—yes, come on we'll help you.

Swerdlow: Do you ever tire of the subject?

Collins: You know, it's funny, because when my mother told me you were coming, I'm like, "You've got to be kidding me. I can't remember anything any more." But once I get going....

McGoff: Well, I was a little apprehensive because I said to you on the phone, I really didn't have much to do with Senator Kennedy. I know how I felt at the time and I know how I feel now, but I really never interacted with him at all.

Collins: Wasn't there a time we were at a rally and he got hit with a tomato at City Hall?

Swerdlow: He did get hit with a tomato, yes.

Collins: He got whacked with a tomato, I remember that.

Swerdlow: Were you there?

Collins: I was there. I remember him getting whacked with a tomato.

McGoff: And I probably was there.

Collins: You might have been at work, I don't know, but I remember he got whacked with a tomato.

McGoff: If it was daytime, I was working.

Collins: He got whacked with a tomato. He was up on the podium.

Swerdlow: What did you think?

Collins: I couldn't tell you, but I remember him standing there and somebody throwing a tomato at him.

McGoff: That was bad.

Collins: Yes.

McGoff: See, I didn't like any of that kind of stuff.

Collins: I guess right now I would think, *Oh my God, that was horrible, they should never have done that.* Back then I probably was going, "Yyyesss, yyesss, hit him again." Because I thought he was so arrogant to us. He was extremely arrogant to us as kids. As adults, I don't know, but as kids, he talked down to us, he placated us, any time we spoke to him.

McGoff: Tip O'Neill did that to us and we were all adults. He could have patted us on the hand like this.

Swerdlow: Well, there's no question that you disagreed on this issue. No question.

McGoff: That's fine, and I love people—I love an argument, I always have. I love a debate.

Collins: She does.

McGoff: It's got to be the Irish in us. I love to fight, you know what I mean? That's part of me.

Swerdlow: Yes.

McGoff: But I don't want to fight with people that before you start, they disregard anything you're going to say.

Collins: Right, they don't respect you anyway.

McGoff: They're condescending. I don't need that. You know, face me, I don't—

Collins: Oh, I know what I was going to say. I lost my whole train of thought back then. We were talking about—you said that nobody was there for us and we always had to be on our own.

And it was so true. I think I had said it earlier in our conversation, but the blacks always had the NAACP.

McGoff: Always.

Collins: They always had the Rainbow Coalition. They always had somebody to fight their fight, and we didn't, and that was the same way it was in school. We always felt like the underdog. The big issue in school was the black kids wouldn't stand up to salute the flag. It used to tick us off.

McGoff: Because that was unheard of.

Collins: Just stand up, we did. Just do it. Then teachers wouldn't push it. And then they had to bring somebody in to come in and explain to the kids that these kids had a right not to salute the American flag. But if we did something wrong, we automatically got branded a trouble-maker. I don't think this was me thinking as a kid. This is what I saw. As an adult, I say to myself, that really was wrong. They should never have done it that way. Everybody should have been treated equally, and we weren't treated equally.

McGoff: No, you weren't.

Collins: And it was so obvious. If a white kid got in trouble, we had to go pay for a lawyer. If a black kid got in trouble, NAACP sent them a lawyer. That's not right. We had to have a meeting, we'd have to go through Mr. you know, go through Mr. [Lewis] Powell, go through this one, that one. If the black kids wanted to have a meeting, all they had to do was call somebody. Mr. Givens, that was his name. I knew it would come to me. He was the black guy that they sent to the school to get the kids off the buses. He was like their principal, their own principal. But anything happened, all you had to do was tell him and [*snaps fingers*] things started rolling. We had to call our mothers and call our fathers, and kids could see that. Kids could see the fact that they got treated differently than we did, and that was just when you were saying there was no one backing us up. Along with adults, it was the same way with the kids. There was nobody helping us.

Thank God we had the teachers that we had. We had some really good teachers that would direct us in the right way. If it wasn't for Mr. Greatorex in my senior year, I probably—I don't know what would have happened to me. He directed me the right way. He's a Charlestown High graduate, he lives in the town, he's a Townie football player. "Lisa, this is what we've got to do. To get through, this is what we have to do." He made it easy for me. He showed me the right way to go, because I don't know what I would have done if I still acted like a madman.

Swerdlow: And you ended your senior year well.

Collins: Yes, we had fun.

Swerdlow: And you gave the final, was it the speech?

Collins: The speech, yes. We were just talking about this. We sang "Reach Out and Touch Somebody's Hand," by Diana Ross. That was our senior class song. I don't know where we were, but were just discussing this the other day. I've got these tears in my eyes and I can't believe this is making me sad, but it was really…. Here we are in the John Hancock, and we're all singing and holding hands, and I thought, well, you know.

McGoff: We got through it.

Collins: We survived it.

Swerdlow: And this was black and white?

Collins: Yes, parents and all. You had to. I wanted to be able to say to Mary Kate, your senior year is your best year, don't blow it. I wanted her to know that these are the things that you've got to do in your senior year. My kids are so different than I am. They don't get involved, they keep their mouths shut. They're always telling me, "Mom, mind your business. Mom, don't join this, Mom don't join that." Mary Kate, I'm on the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] at her old school, and they would ask Mary Kate to do stuff and she would say, "I'm not my mother." No, I'm not my mother, don't bother me. So now the new school she's going to, she said please don't join their PTA, just stay away.

John's first year of college, I joined the Curry PTA. He's like, you've got to be kidding me. I'm 18, you're not coming down to Curry. I'm not going to wave to you in the—but that's—my mother was that kind of a mom. She was always involved with us, so we're the same way. I've just got to be here.

McGoff: They don't want that, though. I know my Billy was playing basketball, and he used to beg me, ma please. I used to try to get out of work so I could go watch him. "Ma please, stay in work, just stay in work. You need the money, just stay in work. Every time you come I get nervous."

Collins: But it was, you know, when your kids are in—to this day I do it to my—I mean, I went to work at the Kent School so I could keep an eye on my kids. If they had gone to a different school, I probably would have gone to that school. I need to know, because they don't tell you a lot of things. So you need to know for yourself what's going on. That's just the way I am. I have to keep an eye on them. It's a little scary out there and I get very—

McGoff: It's a lot scarier today than it was years ago. Even though we had the busing and everything else, the everyday public school today is scary. There's—who am I to say anything, but there are kids in there, crack babies, that see nothing at home but violence. And mothers with four or five husbands at different times, being beat up. That's a terrible thing, and I'm not saying just black kids, it's all kids. All society.

Collins: Chinese kids.

McGoff: Society has changed. There was a time when a Chinese kid would not open their mouth, never. They were so respectful and quiet. They'd go home and they'd go to Chinese school right after regular school.

Collins: Yes, and then on Saturday.

McGoff: Chinese kids are changing.

Collins: It's funny. In this community we have Newtowne housing project. Basically, John was there to live. We lived there for a little while and then when I got married, we moved there and John and Mary Kate were there. So that whole area at one time was all white; the Charlestown projects was majority black. Now if you go down there, all the Chinese people move into New Town. So Newtowne is majority Chinese.

McGoff: Quiet.

Collins: Which is funny. They don't really live in the projects. It's still Spanish and black in the projects, with Chinese in Newtowne. Mishawum is starting to blend because the government is not giving them any money because it was all white at one time. So we had two white projects and a black project, and now it's really starting to mingle. But all the Chinese, they still go to Chinese school, but I see that, because we're a bilingual Chinese school, most of our Chinese kids come from Chinatown. Even though they have a K through 12 in the middle of Chinatown, we have busloads of kids coming to the Kent because it's a bilingual school.

McGoff: And they have to have special bilingual teachers in the Kent school for these kids that they bused out of their Chinese community, where there are Chinese-speaking teachers. Now you tell me the sense of that.

Collins: It's so funny. And white kids would love to go to the school in Chinatown.

McGoff: Oh, they have some nice schools in Chinatown.

Collins: It's just one school, it's one school. It goes K to 12 now, and it's next to an all-Chinese housing. The majority of those kids in Chinatown come to our schools, but a lot of our kids want to go to that school because the education is really good at that school and it goes K through 12. We're a bilingual school because your school gets more money when you're bilingual. Right now we're this type of school that you're not supposed to speak Chinese, but when they come in as kindergarteners, most of them are Chinese-speaking, and eventually, as they get to fifth grade, they're supposed to be—but that doesn't work sometimes.

Swerdlow: Well, I want to thank you so much.

McGoff: Oh, no problem. We talked your ear off.

Swerdlow: Thank you. It's been a really interesting afternoon.

McGoff: I hope we were of some help to you.

Swerdlow: You've been tremendously helpful and we really appreciate you taking time out of your day to do this.

Collins: Well, sometimes, even if we don't answer the questions that you come for, you get a lot of—

McGoff: Because we talk too much.

Swerdlow: No. We're here to hear your story, and thank you for giving it to us.

Collins: Well, it sounds like people ask us the same questions, and I say to my mother, I hope we don't change our story as years go on. They'll think we're lying.

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