

Coral Way Elementary School Bilingual Program

**Carol Shore Kirk**, July 10, 2008

22:34 minutes

Interviewed by Bess DeFarber

in Gainesville, Florida

For University of Arizona, Louise Greenfield

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**DeFarber:** So we're here in Gainesville, Florida. My name is Bess DeFarber. I'm with the University of Arizona Libraries. Could you state your name for the interview and the recording purpose?

**Kirk:** Carol Kirk.

**DeFarber:** And Carol, have you agreed to do this interview for the Oral History Project of Coral Way Elementary?

**Kirk:** Yes, I have.

**DeFarber:** Okay. So I just have some questions for you. We are here at Carol Kirk's home in Gainesville, Florida, and today is July 10, 2008, and it's about 2:30. So what language was, or what languages were, spoken in your home?

**Kirk:** Strictly English.

**DeFarber:** Okay. Did this change at all while you were in the program?

**Kirk:** No.

**DeFarber:** Can you just give us some of the names of the teachers that you remember?

**Kirk:** Mrs. Borden [phonetic], Mrs. Davison [phonetic], Mrs. Mendez [phonetic], Mrs. Iglesias. I'd have to look at my report cards to [get] the rest.

**DeFarber:** Okay. What years were you at the school?

**Kirk:** First and second, and half of third grade.

**DeFarber:** Do you remember when you started school, what year?

**Kirk:** Oh, gosh, '63? 1963, I would think, because I went to kindergarten in Europe, in England. So first grade would have been in '63, '62? Okay, '62.

**DeFarber:** I think that was right.

**Kirk:** [unclear] five.

**DeFarber:** Do you remember the names of some of your friends who were in your class or who went to Coral Way?

**Kirk:** Yes, I do. I remember a **lot** of their names. Do you want me to say them?

**DeFarber:** Yes.

**Kirk:** Okay, Lee Ann Leila, Delores Fisher, Jenny Balikas, Laura Springer, David Levinson, Ricky Green, Carol Sullivan, Heidi Anderson [all phonetic spellings]. Do they have to strictly be in **my** class, or....

**DeFarber:** No, just friends of yours.

**Kirk:** Okay. David Kelly, Linda Kelly [phonetic spellings]. Anybody else? Oh! Jackie Henderson [phonetic]. I think that's the main ones I remember.

**DeFarber:** As a student in the program, were you assigned to the Spanish group or the English group?

**Kirk:** The English group.

**DeFarber:** Can you just talk to me about what you remember about being in the English group?

**Kirk:** I think that we had the English classes first. I remember math and English and reading, maybe social studies—I don't even know if we had it that young—were in English. And then it seemed like in the afternoon we would change to Spanish classes

and have the same subjects in Spanish. That's how I remember it. I don't know if that's really how it was, but that's how I remember it. I don't remember alternating at all. I remember all the English classes being first, and then the Spanish being second.

**DeFarber:** And do you remember how you got to the Spanish.... What was the procedure for you to go to Spanish classes?

**Kirk:** I really don't remember. I guess I would be guessing, I would assume that after you were done with all the English classes, your whole class would maybe just walk together to another classroom where you had the Spanish teacher. Is that how it was? Because I'm not sure that's....

**DeFarber:** Well, I'm really not allowed to comment. (laughter)

**Kirk:** That's what I would assume. I don't know if I can actually remember that that's how we did it. I'd be interested to know, if that was right.

**DeFarber:** Okay, well, we can talk when we're done.

**Kirk:** Okay.

**DeFarber:** Do you remember what was the ratio of Spanish and English use in the classroom?

**Kirk:** You mean once we switched over to the Spanish?

**DeFarber:** Uh-huh.

**Kirk:** No, I don't really remember that. It seems like the majority of it would have been in Spanish, but I would think that they would have **had** to have said some stuff in English for us to understand, but I don't really remember.

**DeFarber:** Do you remember, in terms of the other students in your class, what the ratio of the different ethnic groups were, or....

**Kirk:** I would say that everybody was white in my class. I don't remember having any African Americans in my class at all. And of course they would have all been American.

**DeFarber:** Were there any Hispanic students in your class, do you remember?

**Kirk:** Not that I know of.

**DeFarber:** And you've talked to me in private about the different religions in the class.

**Kirk:** Yes, I remember I was the only Jewish female in my class, that I know of. I know that I did have some other Jewish males that I was friends with, but at that time I felt like a minority, because I was the only Jewish girl in my particular class.

**DeFarber:** Were some of the subjects always in one language or the other?

**Kirk:** I don't know. I don't know if we had every subject in English, also in Spanish. I don't know if maybe they would have taught us health, or that sort of subject, just in English and not in Spanish. I know the main classes were in English and Spanish, but I'm not sure about the classes that aren't as important, or aren't as major.

**DeFarber:** Okay. Do you remember anything about the curriculum materials?

**Kirk:** I guess the main thing I remember, of course, is the reading. You know, the *Fun with Dick and Jane*, the *Sally* books. I really liked those books. "See Spot run," you know. I do remember that, but I think those were used in the schools. I remember just a little bit of dialogue in Spanish.

**DeFarber:** Like what?

**Kirk:** Like *bon la television, que canal cinco. No quieres [unclear] Miguelito?*

(continues in Spanish) And I don't know if I'm really saying that correctly, but over all these years, I remember that dialogue, and I think I learned it there at Coral Way.

**DeFarber:** That's amazing. So can you share anything that you remember about the day, just a typical day at school?

**Kirk:** Well, like I said, I remember going to the English classes first, and then the Spanish classes. I remember having recess, and at recess playing—I think we played kickball at that school—and doing dances, like the Mexican hat dance. I remember at Christmas singing songs in Spanish, like “*Cascabels*.” I don't know if we sang “*Feliz Navidad*,” or if that's just a song that's so common. But I do remember singing some of the songs in Spanish **and** English. I remember a little skit that I was in, to “The Waltz of the Flowers.” I remember my mother had to make me a little crepe paper outfit, with a paper hat, with little purple crepe paper, and a little skirt made in crepe paper, so I remember that. But that's probably my main memories.

**DeFarber:** So for recess or P.E., was that every day?

**Kirk:** Yeah, I think it was every day.

**DeFarber:** And was that a class where the Spanish-speaking group was also involved? Do you remember when you were with the Spanish-speaking group?

**Kirk:** I don't remember **ever** being with the Spanish-speaking group. I think we were totally segregated from them. I don't remember being with them at all, it just seemed like they just switched classes. When we went to the English classes, they would go to the Spanish. Or, I'm sorry, when we would go to the Spanish classes, they would go to the English teachers, and we would go to the Spanish teachers. But I don't remember ever seeing them, because I don't remember knowing any of their names, so I guess we never really saw them. Maybe we saw them changing classes in the halls, I don't know.

**DeFarber:** Do you remember anything about the cafeteria?

**Kirk:** Oh, the food was horrible! (laughter) No, I really don't remember anything about the cafeteria.

**DeFarber:** Okay. Were your parents involved in the school activities?

**Kirk:** I think my mother walked me to school, but I don't remember her being involved. She may say differently, but I don't remember her being involved.

**DeFarber:** And do you know what **she** felt about the program, or how she felt about the program, or how your father felt?

**Kirk:** Not really. In fact, I asked her, when we talked about doing this, and now I can never remember what she said. I don't really think she knew a whole lot about it. I don't think she really got that involved.

**DeFarber:** Do you think that she had to give her permission for you to be involved in the bilingual program?

**Kirk:** I don't think so. She didn't say that she did.

**DeFarber:** What do you remember, if anything, about the school-community relations, or get-togethers? Do you recall anything about not necessarily during the school day, but open houses or....

**Kirk:** I don't remember anything about going to any open houses at Coral Way or any extracurricular activities at Coral Way. I do remember spending a lot of time at Shenandoah Junior High, maybe going to some art classes offered in the summer, going to that library. I specifically remember some art classes that I attended at Shenandoah Junior High. It was a strange kind of art that we did there, with tracing paper, I think. I really don't remember exactly what it was that we did, or if it was even during the

summer or after school. I don't remember doing anything at Coral Way after school. I just remember walking home and that's it.

**DeFarber:** Did you walk home with a group of friends that were in your neighborhood, or just by yourself?

**Kirk:** I don't know. I really don't know.

**DeFarber:** Okay. What do you remember, if anything, about the interactions among the administrators, the teachers, the students, the parents?

**Kirk:** I don't remember anything. I remember my teachers were nice. I don't remember having any problems with them. I remember liking them, but I don't remember any of the interactions with them.

**DeFarber:** Do you recall any of the technology that was used: filmstrips, movies, other types of media that were used in the classroom at all?

**Kirk:** No, I don't remember any of that stuff. Maybe they didn't use it in first and second grade, I don't know. But maybe you'll tell me! (laughs)

**DeFarber:** So this has to do with impressions and your attitudes toward the bilingual program that you were in. How did you feel about your participation in the program **then** when you were **in** the school? What were your impressions?

**Kirk:** I did not like going to Spanish three hours a day. I know I didn't like it. I loved going to school for the English program, but not for the Spanish. You know, we didn't speak Spanish in my home, and I didn't feel like I really understood it, and I know I didn't do well in it. I don't think it was good for my self-esteem to start school, receiving "D's" and "F's" on my report card in a language that I was not brought up to speak.

**DeFarber:** So do you remember getting any help with the Spanish? Do you remember the teachers, any interactions with the teachers about Spanish?

**Kirk:** I don't remember getting any individualized help at all in Spanish.

**DeFarber:** Could you feel a difference between your ability and the other Americans in the class?

**Kirk:** No.

**DeFarber:** Did you feel left out?

**Kirk:** No, I don't think I felt left out, I don't think I felt inferior. I don't really know how they were doing, I guess. I don't think we really talked about it at that age. I was too young. Maybe if I'd been older, we would have spoken about it, but six and seven years old, we were more interested in recess and playing. I don't think we were really asking each other, "How are you doing in Spanish?" (laughs)

**DeFarber:** That's a good point! So how do you feel **now**, looking back on that experience that you had at Coral Way?

**Kirk:** It's interesting. I think now I'm glad that I participated. It was something different to look back on and say I did. I wish I had learned more, but I am glad we didn't stay there, I'm glad we moved away.

**DeFarber:** Can you talk a little bit about the fact that you moved, and what were the results of your move?

**Kirk:** Well, we moved to Miami Beach in the middle of my third-grade year, and I remember the school curriculum was all English all day long. All the subjects were in English, except for about ten minutes on TV, there was a little bit of Spanish, where I think all we were learning was how to count—maybe some songs were sung. I know I

was really happy to be in a school where all the subjects were in English. My grades were a lot better. So yeah, at the time, I was really happy. And looking back, I am happy that we moved. We moved to a place where I felt the people were more like myself, and I was more in the majority than the minority, which is how I felt when I was at Coral Way—due to my religion.

**DeFarber:** What was the name of the school that you went to?

**Kirk:** Miami Beach High. Well, the elementary school was Biscayne Elementary, and then I went to Nautilus Junior High, and then Miami Beach High School.

**DeFarber:** Do you think that your grades at Coral Way influenced your parents moving at all?

**Kirk:** No. No, we moved because my dad had grown up on Miami Beach, and he had gone to Miami Beach High and that's where I think he really wanted us to grow up, but maybe when he was first starting out he couldn't afford to live over there. But that's a guess.

**DeFarber:** Okay. The next question is did the Coral Way program help you in your development as a student, or as a person, do you think?

**Kirk:** No.

**DeFarber:** Do you want to comment on that at all?

**Kirk:** No, because I really don't know what to say. Like I said, it's kind of fun to look back on. Because I was so young, I can say, "Oh, it was only a couple years of my life," so it was a fun experience looking back on it, but it wasn't at the time. My life could have been really different, I guess, if I had stayed at that school the whole time.

**DeFarber:** In what way, do you think?

**Kirk:** Well, I probably could speak Spanish a lot better, be more fluent in Spanish. I did take Spanish again in high school—Spanish I and Spanish II. And I did very well in Spanish I because I had already learned the basics. Did not do well in Spanish II. So I don't know what grade that would have been equivalent to at Coral Way—Spanish II. Maybe third grade? I don't know. I mean, I live in Gainesville now, and I don't think I would have used the Spanish a whole lot. If I were in Miami, I know that that program would have been really beneficial.

**DeFarber:** From your view, how do you feel about how effective the program was in educating **all** students?

**Kirk:** Well, I think it was **really** important for the Spanish-speaking students to learn how to speak English—especially back in that time. I mean, it's different now. Now there's so many Spanish-speaking people there, that they have their own little community, and I'm sure a lot of them cannot speak English. But back then, I think it was very important for them to learn how to speak English. And for the people that stayed down there, who learned how to speak Spanish, I'm sure they're **very** happy they were in that program.

**DeFarber:** Okay. How do you feel about a model that uses two languages to teach children in school, especially in an elementary school?

**Kirk:** I think it depends on where they live. In Miami, that probably was a really good program, because it helped how Miami is now. But if you're living somewhere where there's only one main language, like English, I don't really see the point of having your child being so confused at such an early age. I know it's easier to learn another language when you're younger, but when you've been brought up in a home with one language for

six years, and then you go to school and have to learn a **new** language, and your grades are based on it, I don't think that's right to do to a child. It lowers their self-esteem. Now, maybe they could do this program and not have letter grades, and do it in a different way. (someone enters, recording paused) I don't know if it's because I'm nervous that I'm hot, or.... (laughs) Oh, do you have this back on?

**DeFarber:** So the next question is, can you read and/or write in your second language now—Spanish?

**Kirk:** I can read a little bit. I guess I could probably write a little bit too, but it would just be very basic.

**DeFarber:** Okay. And we already talked about your after-school activities.

**Kirk:** I mean, I think I could probably get by in a Spanish-speaking.... I could say, “Where’s the bathroom? Where’s the kitchen?” I can count to a hundred. I know the colors. I can say some basic things, but.... (Spanish) (laughs)

**DeFarber:** What language did you speak with your friends?

**Kirk:** Definitely English.

**DeFarber:** Okay. Can you share what you enjoyed most about going to Coral Way?

**Kirk:** My friends, hanging out with my friends. That’s something I’ve always enjoyed with any school I’ve been at. I was always more social. So hanging out with my friends was always number one over my education—even though I did go to college, which sometimes it’s hard to believe that I graduated, because I always liked the social part of anything better. I guess I was never very career oriented.

**DeFarber:** And what do you think was your least favorite experience at Coral Way?

**Kirk:** When two girls picked on me. Well, I think I only remember them picking on me once in the bathroom. I wore cat-eye glasses, and maybe that made me stand out. There was another girl named Carol Ann Jackson—she wasn't a friend of mine, but she also wore cat-eye glasses. She probably got picked on too. I didn't feel like I got picked on by my friends, but these two girls, I think they were just bullies. Maybe I stood out because I wore glasses. I remember being in the bathroom one day, and them pulling down my pants, and saying something about on my butt that I had a little number, like the Barbie dolls. They had these little numbers of the back of their butts, like "6" or "7" engraved in plastic. And it was kind of like, "Well, it says on your butt that you're six years old." And I don't know why that memory stands out, because nothing ever like that happened to me. Maybe that's **why** it stands out, but these two girls I thought were bullies. And that's the only time I remember being picked on there. So that memory stands out a lot. Other than that, I don't really remember any bad experiences.

**DeFarber:** Okay. Is there anything else you wanted to share about your memories or the situation that was going on with you at Coral Way?

**Kirk:** No, nothing else that I can think of at this time.

**DeFarber:** Okay, well thank you for the interview. We really appreciate it.

**Kirk:** You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]