 Dee School Oral History Project

**Date: June 5, 2018**

**Interviewee: Felicia Fernandez**

**Interviewer: Richa Wilson**

**Transcriber: Michael Ballif**

RW: Today is June 5th, 2018. This is Richa Wilson. I am speaking in my home with Felicia Fernandez who was a student at Dee School. Felicia, what years did you attend Dee?

FF: I started in kindergarten all the way to fifth grade. Don’t ask me the years. 1980-ish? 81? I don’t know. Yeah, just all the way through.

RW: Okay. And I understand you are the youngest of six children and five of those children attended Dee. Can you tell us the names of them and about how you were spaced age-wise?

FF: Sure. The first sibling that went to Dee School is Manuel Fernandez, Jr. He’s my oldest brother. It must have been in the early ‘70s, maybe ‘60s, I don’t know. He’s 59 right now, so however old that is. And then the next sibling is Melinda Fernandez. She is almost fifty-two. She started in kindergarten and went all the way through fifth grade. The next is Samuel Fernandez. He was in the early ‘80s I’m assuming. Late ‘70s, I don’t know. And then Phillip Fernandez. He’s closer to my age. We actually attended about the same time. He’s two years older than I am. We all started from kindergarten through fifth grade, shared a lot of the same teachers, and had probably similar experiences.

RW: So speaking of teachers, any particular teachers who stick out in your mind as, perhaps, people who maybe influenced you or who were maybe your favorite teachers?

FF: Yes, I have a few favorites. My kindergarten teacher and second grade/third grade teacher was Janet Errington. She was so nice, and, you know, really cared about me as a person and really helped me to strive to be my best. So fun. I remember in kindergarten, we were reading some story about a gingerbread man, and we needed to find the gingerbread man in the school. So we went to the library, and we went to different classrooms looking for the gingerbread man. And I guess we found him in the library. But we went to the cafeteria and the main office and the principal’s office, and, you know, different classrooms, and we ended up in the library where this huge, giant gingerbread cookie man was waiting for us. The librarian, Marilyn Taylor, read us the book about this gingerbread man, and then we had a little piece of gingerbread cookie for a treat. That was really fun. I do remember that. The second grade/third grade – let me explain that. There was an EQUIP program for more advanced students, which I was a part of. So I didn’t have a traditional second-grade classroom teacher. I was in a third-grade classroom. And then in third grade, I stayed in that classroom. My first-grade teacher, Phyllis Savage, she’s got to be my all-time favorite. I just remember her sweet voice. I don’t think I ever heard her raise her voice. She would just politely and delicately [say], “Now boys and girls, let’s sit down and pay attention, okay? We’re going to do this now.” You know, the transition from one thing to another was so smooth because she just was so nice and calm.

RW: That’s a real skill.

FF: It is a skill. Fourth grade, I had Larry Quest, who was a fabulous, fabulous guy. I think my siblings also had Mr. Quest. Just real genuine, you know. He loved my mom. My mom was a stay-at-home mom and she spent a lot of time at Dee School as a room mom, helping with whatever the teacher asked her to do. Whether it was helping with reading with a student, or cutting things out at home, or any kind of project, she was willing to do. So he really liked her. She’s passed. But they got a long really well. So when I went to his classroom, he was just so excited, so thrilled. And in fifth grade I had Mr. Cortez, Julio Cortez. That was actually my first experience with a Hispanic teacher, which really helped shape me to the person I am now. He taught me a lot of values and things to be proud of with our heritage that I normally wouldn’t have gotten from any other teacher.

RW: Can you give me an example?

FF: Back when I was at Dee School, there wasn’t a large population of Hispanic people in the community of Ogden like you can see today. So, being a little bit darker than everybody else in my classroom, he would just say “Be who you are, and feel proud of your skin color. Because that’s who you are, and you should be proud.” Just things like that.

RW: Validating.

FF: Yes.

RW: And let’s see, that was your fifth grade teacher, did you say?

FF: Yes.

RW: And you were there through fifth grade?

FF: Yes.

RW: Okay. Well, speaking about that cultural heritage, I’ve heard several people mention Alice Glenn’s brotherhood assemblies. What do you remember about those?

FF: I remember slideshows of important historical people in different cultures. We would sing songs about the slave era and things like that. I remember Mrs. Medina. I don’t know her first name but she was also a second-grade teacher. I remember one assembly, during like Cinco de Mayo or something, she taught the school *La Bamba*, the words of *La Bamba*, and how to say the words and what they mean in English. That stood out as something like, wow. How many other people would get that, you know? And I’m not a Spanish speaker, so I was definitely learning Spanish at the same time. It was fun. But just, you know, the community getting together and learning, I feel it’s important then as it is now, learning about different cultures and the representation of the different cultures that were attending the school at the time. It was, like, magical. And eye opening.

RW: And do you remember some of the other students from other cultures that were represented besides Hispanic?

FF: African-American. Those were the two I remember. I’m sure there were others, but I don’t remember. But just a sense of pride, you know, that everybody had, from that culture. That they had a day, you know, or some recognition for them. It was awesome.

RW: Anything else on how Mr. Cortez either influenced you or that you really find memorable about him?

FF: He was kind of strict. I remember, we used to have these point cards. So if you turned in an assignment on time, you would get one point, or something like that. But, if you did something negative, you know, gum was not something that you chewed in school, so if he caught you chewing gum, for example, he would take points away. And at the end of the, you know, whatever timeframe it was – whether it was a couple of months or whatever – you could buy things from the store with your points. So I remember he kind of caught me a lot chewing gum, or candy, or something, and I got some points taken away. So he’s a little strict, but just nice, and I can’t remember anything else. It’s kind of funny – I saw him a few years ago with my sister, who also knows Mr. Cortez, in public, and it was so . . . kind of awkward to see him as an adult. I’m an adult and I called him Mr. Cortez, and he said “Oh, we’re past that stage. You can call me Julio.” And I said okay. But it’s still so awkward to call a teacher by their first name. It was kind of fun.

RW: Do you remember any other kinds of special events or occurrences that happened while you were attending Dee that stick out in your mind?

FF: For the longest time, I thought –when I would watch a movie in a classroom with a door – I thought that was so weird and odd and not normal because Dee School didn’t have any traditional classrooms with a door. So when I would see that, I thought that’s weird, you know? I think the uniqueness of the school building itself, I loved. I loved that it was open. I didn’t love that we had to be quiet all the time because our neighbor classroom was taking a test or we were being too loud so we had to be quiet. But I loved the fact that a couple of teachers could use this common area between the two classrooms for group activities and things like that. In the ceiling, there were these huge circles where the light fixtures would go and there was this little ledge. I remember, probably in third grade, we were doing something on fishing. So our assignment was to draw a self-portrait of our face and our hands. We cut out our hands and we had something that represented a fishing pole that we were going to hang on the light fixture circle. My mom, she was very petite so she needed a huge ladder to get up there and put our faces and hands up. And I don’t know if she kicked the ladder or something. The ladder fell and she was hanging on the ledge, just kicking her feet and yelling at the top of her lungs “Help me! Help me!” It was the funniest thing that I can remember. She didn’t think it was so funny because she was so scared. So somebody ran over and put the ladder up and she got down. She was just so scared. She didn’t finish her project up there, but it was funny.

RW: That’s quite an adventure.

FF: Yeah, I do remember that quite well. During Halloween, we used to have these Halloween parades where you would come to school dressed up in your costume and then each class would, single-file, go through and do a little line through all the classrooms so that everybody in the school could see each other. So, for example, my class would be first, and so we would go through the whole school, and since it was a circle, it was way easy. And then the next class got to do it, and so on and so forth. So that was really fun.

RW: So speaking about the school itself, you mentioned some of the interior. At that time, were they still using the pod concept and were they referring to the pods by the names of planets?

FF: Yes. The library was the sun and each classroom or class area had a different planet name.

RW: Alright. What do you remember about the outside? The grounds or playground or anything?

FF: So, underneath the second level there was an awning all around.

RW: Like a cantilever?

FF: Yeah. So they would have through the whole – not by the front doors, necessarily, but kind of halfway on both sides to the back – they had hopscotch painted, or tic-tac-toe, little squares, things like that. That was fun. So we had something to do if it was raining or it was too hot, then we could have that shade and still be outside the play. You know, there was a playground and a field where we would do activities. Even in class, at the end of the year, we would do like an obstacle course type thing for ribbons, you know? If you got first place in the fifty-yard dash or things like that, that was so fun, and such a great opportunity to get outside and be active. I remember doing Jump Rope For Life, where you would go to your neighbors or your family members and ask for sponsors and get a cash donation. So if you jumped rope for thirty-minutes, you would get x amount of money. And the money raised went somewhere. I don’t know where the money went, but it was one of those “get a sponsor, get some money,” and it was a donation somehow. So that was fun. I remember doing that for a couple of years.

RW: Do you remember who your principal was?

FF: My very first principal was Mr. Marchant and then he retired. I think he was there for maybe one or two years and then Mr. Felt was my principal until I left, I believe. Steven Felt. And Bruce Marchant.

RW: I’m trying to think of anything else to ask you. Is there anything else you want to tell us about Dee School, things that you think should go on the record, that people should know about that school?

FF: It didn’t feel like a school, it felt like a family, if that makes any sense. There were several teacher aids that were just so much a part of us and who we were. “Us” meaning our family. We got to know a lot of them more than just a teacher aid relationship. It was more of a personal thing. I would have to say that I was a little bit favored.

RW: And why is that?

FF: I was a good girl and everybody liked me, and they liked my family. I don’t want to say that I got special treatment sometimes, but sometimes I would get picked first for a project or things that we were supposed to do ourselves. I remember Penny Smith, she was a teacher aid, she had an idea to make these Christmas cards. She was kind of an artist, so she would use this chalk. She had postcards and she let every student pick a postcard and try to draw a postcard themselves. Well, she kind of did mine for me and it was really pretty.

RW: Do you still have it?

FF: I’m sure I do somewhere because it was so pretty. Even though I was supposed to do it myself, she helped me do it, by doing most all of it herself. And she did calligraphy, and it made everything look so pretty.

RW: So where did you go after you left Dee?

FF: I went to Central Middle School.

RW: And then high school?

FF: High school, I went to Ben Lomond.

RW: Ben Lomond. And what did you do after you graduated from school?

FF: I went to college at Weber State, got a B.A. degree in social work, and then I went to Michigan State University to pursue a master’s degree in social work.

RW: And you came back to Ogden?

FF: I did come back. All my family’s here and Michigan is so far away that I missed out on a lot of stuff while I was gone. I didn’t want to miss out anymore.

RW: Understandable.

FF: I was just trying to think, I have a lot of cousins who went to Dee School. My aunt Dora Meza was a teacher aid to Phyllis Savage for several years. She is no longer with us, but that was always fun for me to have my aunt there. I would just always, you know, try to say hi every day or every morning. Even if I wasn’t on that side of the building, I would somehow find my way to her desk, just to say hi. So that was really special to have family there, too. I remember, I think I was in fourth or fifth grade and she was a teacher aid for first grade. We had movie day and we were supposed to bring snacks. I totally forgot and didn’t bring any snacks so I went to my aunt’s desk and she pulled out a box of Girl Scout cookies, Thin Mints, and she gave me one of the things of cookies. And I was – everybody wanted to be my friend and sit by me because I had Thin Mints.

RW: And who could resist a Thin Mint?

FF: So that was awesome. I do remember that. She was always there with a smile and she would do whatever she could to help us. It was fun.

RW: Did you have the sing-ins that Phyllis led?

FF: There were quite a few assemblies with singing. I do remember, in about first or second grade, we would do this big, like a Christmas program. Each grade would be assigned different songs to sing, so that was really fun. Of course, the school song, I still know it by heart, and we still sing it, my siblings and I, sometimes. We’ll just still sing it sometimes. There were opportunities where I went back to Dee Elementary for different assemblies that they had that I went and danced in, or things like that. So that was really fun to go back and see how the school changed or didn’t change, and what teachers were still there and who had left and things like that. I was in this group that did Mexican folk dancing, so we performed there a couple of times. I was on the Bonnie Lassie drill team at Ben Lomond, so we went and did a few dances there, too. So, any opportunity that I could go back, I went back.

RW: And speaking of that, were you there for that last visit before the building was demolished?

FF: I was, the last assembly that they had. They had all of the principals, from Mr. Marchant, I think even before that, to present, who gave a little speech. Of course Mrs. Savage was playing the piano, and they sang songs, and had stuff on the walls throughout the years. Just different things. It was awesome. And then I guess, after that, they had a parent night where parents could go for one last time and I went. I wasn’t a parent, but I went, and explained, you know, that I really wanted to go upstairs and take pictures, and go through the school and take pictures of what I felt I wanted to remember. And so I did. I do have some pictures of things that I do remember, “Oh yeah, I need to take a picture of that.” Or a wall, or the teachers’ little common room with the copy machine and things like that, that I remember about the school. It was fun.

RW: That’s great that you got photos. Anything else you want to tell us about Dee?

FF: No, I just think it’s fascinating how, you know, a lot of people probably don’t keep in touch with their teachers or people that they went to school with, but my family somehow did. We kept in touch with Mrs. Glenn, Mrs. Savage, Mr. Quest, Mrs. Errington sometimes. She left the school shortly after I left, I believe, to teach at a different school, and through the years she would call my mom’s house to check in and see how she was doing and see how I was doing. So she always made that connection, whether it was five years or two years, she always called. And, yeah, now we’re friends on Facebook, so we do keep in touch a little bit. So it’s an honor to still keep in touch with the people that influenced my life.

RW: That seems to be a common theme with other interviewees, is that it wasn’t just a school, that it was about the relationships between students and teachers also.

FF: I loved it. So sad when it was torn down. I think I even have a picture of them tearing it down.

RW: Well we’re hoping this is one way to at least preserve the memories. So thank you very much for being available.

FF: Thank you, I appreciate you taking the time to interview me and [hear] my stories.

RW: And I hope that we can, as we expand this project, I hope we can interview your siblings, too. It would be interesting to get a full range of the Fernandez siblings’ memories.

FF: Yeah, I’m sure they have similar and maybe possibly different memories too, so that would be fun.

RW: Well thanks again, Felicia. I appreciate it.

FF: Thank you.