

Interview

with

MARY CAROL MICHIE

August 2, 2006

By Sarah Thuesen

The Southern Oral History Program  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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## **TRANSCRIPT— MARY CAROL MICHIE**

Interviewee: Mary Carol Michie

Interviewer: Sarah Thuesen

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Location: Charlotte, North Carolina

Length: 1 disc; approximately 1 hour and 41 minutes

### **START OF TRACK ONE**

ST: Today is the second of August, 2006 and I'm at the home of Mary Carol Michie in Charlotte, North Carolina. Today we're going to be talking about her memories of working in the Piedmont Courts communities. Thanks so much for granting me some time this afternoon.

MM: You're welcome.

ST: I thought we'd start a little bit first talking just about your early growing up years, and I'd be interested to hear a little bit about your experiences before coming to Charlotte. Tell me just a little bit about growing up in, it was Elberton, Georgia, right?

MM: Actually, I was just born there.

ST: Oh, okay.

MM: My family, father was a farmer and we lived out in the country in Georgia in Franklin County, Georgia. My mother was someone who I've always described as being way ahead of her time in terms of race relations; I mean, this is in Georgia in the thirties. And I think that, well, I don't think, I know that really helped to shape who I became as I got older. I mean, I didn't think a whole lot about it, of course, then because segregation was certainly rampant, but mother raised a few eyebrows around the rural community by, one thing she did

was go to one of the black churches and do their Bible study for them, which I mean, how that all happened, I don't know, but they asked her to do it and I never heard her say anything about it or anybody else, but looking back on it now, knowing what the attitude was in the thirties in the rural South, she probably raised a few eyebrows. So I feel like I was fortunate to have that influence in my life even at such an early age.

ST: Where do you think your mother's racial liberalism came from?

MM: The Bible. Her father was a Presbyterian minister and I mean, it's always been quite interesting to me that it's been so hard for southerners to get, particularly southern Christians or especially southern Christians. That's all I can attribute it to with her. I mean, she wasn't in your face about it, but she just went about doing her thing with black people and white people. I was fortunate that I didn't come up with that. Of course, there was prejudice and I have a friend, an African-American friend, who's talked with me a lot about paternalism and all that, and I'm aware that I've engaged in it and other people do and mostly not knowing it, so I'm sure there was some of that too. But still, it began to shape me early on.

ST: Do you ever remember any discussions within your family regarding your mother's work with the African-American community, any concerns about what white neighbors would think?

MM: I don't, I really don't. There may have been some, but I don't remember it ever being an issue.

ST: So your father was in support of her work?

MM: I guess. I mean, he was busy farming and they were both very active in this little Methodist Church. If it was an issue, I didn't ever know about it. I suspect there was some, probably some of my daddy's relatives were wondering, but I don't know that.

ST: Did they all live pretty close?

MM: Yeah, most of them.

ST: And did you grow up in the Presbyterian Church or Methodist?

MM: I did. My mother was, as I said, her dad was a Presbyterian minister and so she married a Methodist and then when I was about ten, she had worked up in the mountains of eastern Kentucky before she got married in a school that Presbyterians ran and they knew that she had married a farmer and they needed someone to come and take over their farm. It was a boarding school for mountain kids who didn't have access to schools in those days. So to all of his relatives, I mean, I never heard this either, but I look back on it and think, "My gosh." They probably thought he had gone crazy, because they packed up, sold the farm, they packed up their stuff, and we moved to eastern Kentucky in the back of a farm truck.

ST: Wow. About what year would that have been?

MM: Well, I think I was ten, so that would have been about in the early 40s, mid-40s, I guess.

ST: What was the town in Kentucky?

MM: It was a post office; it wasn't a town. We started out and stayed there for about ten years at a school in Grant, Kentucky and it was so far back in the hills that the mail came in over the mountain on horseback. We did have a road, but for some reason, the mail came on horseback.

ST: So a pretty rural environment.

MM: Yeah, very much so.

ST: I'm curious, what was the name of the school your mom was working at?

MM: It was Highland.

ST: And did you stay there the rest of your growing up years?

MM: I graduated from high school there, ten people in my graduating class, and then I went to Maryville College, which was another, what's the word, shocker, because my world was very narrow. I'd never been to a football game until I went to college.

ST: Wow.

MM: I've told my children it was the loneliest day in my life. You know how it is in college, everybody just can't wait to get to the first football game and I went, but I remember thinking, "What is this about?" So it was great. I mean, it's been wonderful to have that in my background, but I didn't have a lot of what people had, say who lived in towns or in other places; it just wasn't part of our culture.

ST: Maryville's in Nashville, right?

MM: It's Maryville, Tennessee.

ST: Oh, okay.

MM: It's in a little town, Maryville. It's close to Knoxville.

ST: And what years were you there?

MM: Well, let's see. I told you I'm horrible with dates.

ST: That's okay.

MM: I think I graduated, yeah, in 1956. Does that sound right? Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah, that would be about right.

ST: So you were in college then when the *Brown v. Board* decision came down?

MM: Yes. Again I was fortunate. I was at a Presbyterian school which was supported by the then northern Presbyterian Church; the denomination was split, primarily over the race

issue, I suspect. So this school was supported by the northern branch of the Presbyterian Church and the minute, I mean the minute that happened, the school opened itself to blacks.

ST: Oh really?

MM: And we had, I think, one or two. My memory's foggy on that, but I do remember that it was immediate, that it had been illegal before and then it was legal and so that college became open to African-Americans.

ST: What was the reception like of those students?

MM: It was fine, because—well, I shouldn't say because. A lot of the students, more than not, came from above the Mason-Dixon line because it was supported by that branch of the Presbyterian Church. I just got lucky because someone that had been an adult advisor when I was working, when I was a teenager in a youth group, had gone to college there, he and his wife both, and I liked them very much and so I decided I thought that would be a good school for me to go to. I didn't pick it out, except because of that, that kind of influence.

ST: And what did you study in college? What was your major?

MM: Well, I majored in sociology, the most useless thing you could major in, and I did finally have enough sense to get a teacher's certificate while I was there in social studies, I guess. I used it a little, but not much; I didn't teach much. I basically went pretty much right into church education just untrained.

ST: And was that in Tennessee where you first started working?

MM: I went back to Kentucky at first and was there for a year or two maybe, back to eastern Kentucky in the mountains.

ST: So you were probably working mainly with poor whites in that population?

MM: Mmm hmm.

ST: This was during the really early civil rights years.

MM: Yeah.

ST: What were you thinking as you saw the civil rights movement start to unfold?

MM: You know, I really don't remember much about it until we came to Charlotte. It's strange to me now that it wasn't--. I mean, it's hard to even understand the segre--, to even get your head around the segregated South and how it was. I think if the issue had ever come up, but it didn't, and so I don't have a whole lot of memories about that. As I said, there were a couple of African-American students at Maryville and in Kentucky when I went back to work there in that little part of Kentucky, there were very few if any African-Americans. It was mostly, well, most people were mining coal at that time in that part of eastern Kentucky.

ST: What were some of the big challenges that you faced working with that population?

MM: Well, in both instances, the Presbyterian Church was trying to build a church. So I think it was again a sort of different kind of--. It's one of the things I did and I helped with Sunday School and we had youth groups and all that, but I also did some visiting in the community and inviting people to a Presbyterian Church was sort of, because it was something most folks really hadn't heard that much about before, so it was a bit unusual, but I don't have any strong memories about that. I loved doing it; I remember that. My strongest memory, I guess, was—this shows how sheltered I was—I didn't know squat about alcoholism and one of the women that came to the church in the little coal mining town I was working in, her husband was an alcoholic and I really didn't even know what that meant at the time, but I learned a lot from her because we were friends and she would talk to me about it and tell me about it. I later, as I got older and could look back in retrospect, I thought, "Gosh, that was my very first encounter with alcohol, period, and certainly the disease of alcoholism." My memories of that



are very good. I mean, people were warm and received me well and it was a great experience.

ST: Were you single at the time?

MM: Yeah.

ST: Living on your own?

MM: Well, for a while, I lived in this little town. They had a, they called it a club house. There were some men working in the mine who lived there. They were single guys and not all young, I remember, and so when the Presbytery, which, does that mean anything to you?

ST: Right, yes.

MM: They sent me, I mean, they were paying my salary. So the first couple of months, they put me up in the club house, which was pretty swanky for me and then after that, they found somebody who was willing to let me have a room in their house, so I stayed with somebody and just had a room after that.

ST: So how did you make it from rural eastern Kentucky to the big city of Charlotte?

MM: Yeah, well, let's see. What happened next? I stayed there for, I think it was just a little over a year, actually, and I felt isolated and I think my mother was kind of worried about me, that I might—I don't know. So she said, "Well, we will figure out a way to get you the money to go back to school and get your masters in Christian education." I didn't really want to do that, so I left there and went to—I'm trying to think if I'm skipping something, but I believe my next stop was doing Christian education in a church in South Carolina and it was maybe two hundred and fifty members, a rural church, another really great experience, and I stayed there four years and that's when I met my husband.

ST: What was the town in South Carolina?

MM: Abbeville.



ST: Okay.

MM: It's a typical little southern town with a square.

ST: What was your husband doing there?

MM: Well, he was also working; he was an educator in a church in Virginia at the time and the Presbyterian Church had these, they called them recreation workshops and you went for, I think it was a week, and learned how to lead games and all this different--. It had some arts and crafts that you learned how to do and all this kind of thing, so you could go back to your church and have a wider opportunity with teenagers and kids. And so he was there from his church and I was there from my church and that's how we met. So we had a long-distance relationship for not long, about four or five months, I think, and then we got married; amazingly, it's lasted.

ST: What year was that, that you got married?

MM: 1960, I think.

ST: It's lasted a long time, then.

MM: Yeah, it has.

ST: So did you move directly from South Carolina to Charlotte then?

MM: Let's see. Where did I move? Well, he was in Virginia at the time working in a church, so I moved to Virginia and then we went to a school in North Carolina where my parents were working, another Presbyterian school, which was started for—it's the Glade Valley School, which is defunct now, but it's in Allegheny County in the mountains of North Carolina and that school was started sort of for the same reason the one in Kentucky was, for mountain kids, but at the time we worked there, there were some kids who were there because maybe their schools weren't that great or whatever, but there were also a fair number of kids

who were having difficulties with school and academically and probably, I don't think we knew it at the time, but in retrospect, there were probably some people there who were running from integration. But I didn't recognize that at the time, but looking back on it, I think there may have been some. It was small, a hundred students, and most of them were there because they needed smaller classes and more individual attention for whatever reason. Some of them just weren't doing what they were supposed to do in school. So we were there for four years and then we came to Charlotte. I don't think I've left anything out.

ST: So what brought you to Charlotte in '68?

MM: George started working for the community college system. He worked at UNCC for a while and then he worked in South Carolina for a while. Well, he actually retired from York Tech in Rock Hill, but we stayed in Charlotte all that time.

ST: Tell me just a little bit about what Charlotte was like then. What were your first impressions of the city?

MM: Gee, I don't even remember. It was big for me and we lived in a little neighborhood, which at the time was pretty much all white, but it became integrated not too long after we started living there. It was probably one of the first neighborhoods in Charlotte that began to be integrated with middle class African-Americans.

ST: What neighborhood was that?

MM: Hidden Valley.

ST: Okay.

MM: And unfortunately, well, it seems unfortunate to me, it's mostly all black now, but it actually did stay integrated for a pretty long period of time. There was a lot of white flight.

ST: How much civil rights activity did you observe in Charlotte when you moved here?

MM: Well, my first thing that I was actually involved in other than being at Seigle Avenue was a protest march when, gosh, Second Ward School, which was a historically African-American school, was going to be—you know, I think they just weren't going to use it; I believe that's what it was. I don't know if it was going to be torn down or if they weren't going to use it. And so there was a protest march and we had some friends, who were crazy activists like us, and they decided that they were going to walk in the march and George was off somewhere with some teenagers from Seigle on some sort of trip, but I went on the march and there were a few whites, but not a whole lot, and it was uneventful, but my friend was so afraid that her mother-in-law would see her on television.

ST: Was there television coverage of it?

MM: Yes, there was.

ST: So was that the first protest or march—

MM: Public thing, yeah.

ST: She had really participated in?

MM: Yeah, I think it was, I think. I can't remember if I was ever in anything in Maryville; I don't think so. I believe that's probably the first one.

ST: What was that experience like for you? Do you remember your feelings about it?

MM: I don't really. I think it just, it was that--. I don't even know how to put it in words. Whatever it was that mother instilled in me and from her, it came from the New Testament, that you put your money where your mouth is and if you believe this, then you stand up for it and I think that was pretty much it; you just do this.

ST: I want to go back chronologically just for a minute and talk about your decision to join Seigle Avenue. Tell me about that, what led to that decision.

MM: That was right after we moved to Charlotte and we were doing what Presbyterians do, which is visit Presbyterian churches sort of, and as I said, we've always lived on this side of town. And we visited, I don't know, two or three Presbyterian churches and it was the Sunday after Martin Luther King was killed that we were in a Presbyterian Church which will go unnamed at Sunday school. Our kids were real little, still preschoolers, so when we visited churches, we were looking for a church, we always went to Sunday school and to church. And George and I were in a adult class, of course, and they began talking about Martin Luther King's death and the big thing that sticks in my mind was one man saying that he was afraid to go downtown because he was afraid he would get shot. And there was a lot of that kind of rhetoric that was going at the Sunday school that morning and then we went to church and this is the other thing that stands out in my mind. We had communion and some of those men, in those days, all the elders were men, who were in the Sunday school class, I remember it like it was yesterday, were down front serving communion and it just hit me; something is wrong with this picture.

And we talked about it, George and I talked about it, and we said, "You know, there must be some way to do something different." So I had a friend in Charlotte, a Presbyterian minister friend from, well, I had worked with him down in South Carolina, and he was here then. I called him and I said, "Is there any such thing as a biracial church, a Presbyterian Church in Charlotte?" He said, "Yeah, there's one," and he told me Seigle Avenue, so I got on the phone and called and the rest is history.

ST: How integrated was Seigle Avenue at that time?

MM: Not a whole lot. There was a lot of stuff going on during the weekday for the neighborhood, but it was very difficult for—I mean, I think. I can't put myself totally in their

shoes, but even though the church was open and the church wanted neighborhood folk to come and there were still some white people living in the neighborhood too and some of those folks were coming, but by the time we got there, I had dwindled down to, I think there were sixty members and on a good Sunday, there were about thirty there; so it was very small. I remember two or three older African-American women who came to church most of the time and then we immediately started working with the youth, I think, it seems like almost immediately, and sometimes some of them would come to church and that's of course how Annie Cox got involved; it was through this youth group. Tell me, you've talked to her, right, Annie?

ST: I personally haven't, but one of my colleagues did, yes.

MM: I think maybe she was the first African-American—no, I don't know if she was the first or not, but I remember when and she may not have remembered this, but she joined the church the same Sunday a teenage boy joined the church and I remember Bill Stewart, who was the preacher at the time and a very courageous, extremely courageous person, oh my gosh, I remember him saying when he welcomed them into the church and they were both standing up front that, "At the foot of the cross, the ground is level."

ST: The teenage boy was white?

MM: Yeah.

ST: That must have been a moving—

MM: It was.

ST: —moment for everyone.

MM: It was very moving for me particularly, obviously since I remember that statement. Then of course, Annie, well, actually the young man too grew up in that church until he went away to college. His parents were some of the few white people who stayed. They

actually stayed until our current preacher came and they're older than I am; in fact, he's dead since then and they just said, "It's just too far for us to keep driving up here." Edith, the woman, it turned out, was right, was concerned about what happened when if one of them died or when they couldn't drive that distance anymore. So they moved to another church and it turned out that that was a good thing, because he did die much earlier. She's still very much alive and he had some disease which took him, but they were another couple that stayed through it all.

ST: They had been members before integration and stayed throughout?

MM: Mmm hmm. She was, I believe, yeah, her dad was the first clerk of session at the church.

ST: What's their last name?

MM: She is Edith Gardner and her dad's name is, was—I'll probably think of it in a minute.

ST: Do you remember the first service you attended at Seigle Avenue?

MM: I sort of do, yeah. I don't remember a whole lot about it. I remember there weren't that many people there and a scattering of blacks, mostly maybe kids, a couple of older women, maybe, I don't know, twenty-five people there probably, thirty. Sundays were scarce. With me and I'm not one that goes around talking about how God talks to me, I mean, I think God does, but it's not something that I, and I didn't hear a voice, but I definitely felt that Sunday, "This is where we ought to be." I hope, I think that we had some sense that this was a good place for our children to be raised, which it's turned out was true and they would all say that it's impacted them in different ways, in good ways, all of them different. My daughter is a minister. My son is a teacher in Chicago and he has spent most of his life working with either African-



Americans or now he's working in a Latino neighborhood teaching, and he's just been an activist all along. Then my other son lives here in Charlotte with his family. I feel certain they would all say that it really impacted who they became, but I don't think that was our reason for going there; it was just the right thing to do.

ST: At what point did you start actually working for Seigle Avenue?

MM: I think it was in the late 70s. They had had another woman who was doing after school and some youth stuff and various things and she, I believe, went somewhere else and I don't quite remember even how it happened, but it was just like made to order for me.

ST: You became the Christian education director?

MM: That was the title, if you had to put a title on it, but in actuality, I did more community ministry. We had after school for little kids and then we had some youth programs at night. We had a basketball team which George helped with some and we had clubs, we called them, for the teenagers that met once a week and we went on trips and all that kind of thing.

ST: I imagine you'd been volunteering before you officially started working for the church. Is that right?

MM: Yeah, we were doing some work with the teenagers. I think I started working at the church after we'd been in Spartanburg for that year and then came back and they were looking for somebody then, I believe; so it just sort of evolved.

ST: Were you involved in the mothers' clubs?

MM: I wasn't, not really. I mean, I knew those women, but I never was, I didn't really get involved with them.



ST: You were working more directly with the children?

MM: The children and the teens. And I actually visited a fair amount in Piedmont Courts, more than a fair amount, which that was a great experience too, so hospitable. I mean, I can't remember a bad experience I ever had there, which would have been easy because here's this white woman strolling around in our neighborhood.

ST: Tell me a little bit more about your observations of the Piedmont Courts community when you started working closely with them in the 70s. What sort of concerns did the residents you worked most closely with have?

MM: Probably my closest thing with the residents was through their children. There was that mothers' club that was going on at the time. Later on, I remember we were able to get the parents involved. Well, Anne Bradley, Anne Fiadjigbe, who's somebody that's interviewed, she was probably the first parent that we really got involved well and I think she was just like eighteen or nineteen and her son, she'd had this child early and he was five and we didn't have a program for five year-olds. And another mother brought Anne over to the church one day and said her child really needs to be in this program and I said, "Well, you know, we don't have a place for five year-olds. We're just not set up for that and we're full and da da da."

Anne was shy then, or at least you didn't meet her, but she ain't shy now, and the other mother said, "Oh, well, she'll help you; she'll help you." So always the pushover, I said, "Okay, alright, we'll take him," and he was a handful, but true enough, Anne did help. Another woman, a volunteer in the church, and I were going to one of the schools. This was in the early days of busing, so Piedmont Courts of course got the long bus rides and I was going to the school one day a week, sometimes a couple of days a week, to work with some of the kids and also sort of to let the teachers know that something was going over there at the church and that

we had a connection with the kids, and Anne started going with me. She was probably eighteen or nineteen.

ST: So you would make visits to other residents together?

MM: Well, no, she started going with me to the school where our kids were going.

ST: I see.

MM: I guess she was probably going to school herself also at that time and she's been a volunteer and then of course, she worked there for a long time also. We have done a lot of visiting together actually over the years, Anne and I, yeah. She's one of the great things that's happened to me in my life. We're just very close friends. It all started right there.

ST: How critical do you think her partnership with you was in terms of forging relationships with other mothers in the community?

MM: You know, it probably was, only I wasn't aware of it at the time. As I said, I was always just amazed at how welcoming everybody was. I think part of it may have been because I had preschoolers then and sometimes when I would go down there to maybe see somebody or something, often I had my two youngest children with me. Plus in the summer when we had summer program, my kids participated in the summer program too and I guess they were probably the only white kids, but I don't think they even noticed.

Lynn, my middle child, was at a—we tried to give the kids in the summer an opportunity to do things that maybe they wouldn't do otherwise and that was when government money was a little bit handier than it is right now and we were able to get some, I don't remember what the program was even called, but some money to do, what was their term, enrichment, I guess. So the classes that the church, with the help of Presbytery, actually paid teachers to come and teach the classes in the summertime and I was just running the show. We

were very fortunate that we were able to get some wonderful African-American teachers. I don't know if I ever hired everybody that was white. Through another program, we had some high school students who were sort of like assistants.

But anyway, this woman was teaching the class that Lynn was in and through this other government money, they went one day to the put-put to play and Lynn told me about it later, that some kid came up to her and said, "What are you doing here with all these black people?" And Lynn said, "It's my church." I was really proud of her for that, because I felt sure I would have launched into some sort of something if it had been me and it wasn't any big deal to her. That was the answer: "It's my church." It wasn't anything special she was doing. I've often said that we got more blessings out of being there than we gave. I think it was really, I know it's really impacted the kids and me too. I mean, I learned a whole lot and still have a lot to learn, still struggle with the whole paternalistic thing and am sure I've engaged in it some when I didn't mean to, probably still do some.

ST: Were there any particular moments where you later worried that your actions had been paternalistic?

MM: I don't worry a whole lot about it. This sounds really simplistic, but I guess I just do trust God. I'm sure some of them were, but it's not something I dwell on a whole lot. I'm conscious of it now and try to think through things and examine myself more. I went to hear the guy, Tim Tyson, speak about *Blood Done Sign My Name*.

ST: Here in Charlotte?

MM: Yeah, and he had Tony McCoy with him, the guy that—

ST: From the book.

MM: Yeah, from the book, and he was very good too. It was sort of a, both of them spoke and they talked some about that.

ST: That resonated with your own feelings a little bit?

MM: Yeah, it did. I mean, I think we just need to keep asking ourselves questions, the right questions, and I didn't make that up. That came from our minister that was at Seigle when we first joined. I remember he used to say, "You just have to keep asking yourself the right questions."

ST: And what questions do you think are most important to keep asking?

MM: Well, why am I doing this and am I doing anything which is going to make me look better and that person not so good? Am I not valuing them as individuals? Am I valuing what they value in their values and their lifestyle, etcetera, etcetera? It's an ongoing thing, for sure.

ST: Getting back to the Piedmont Courts community a little bit, did you observe activism within the community?

MM: Later on, there was and there may have been some that I wasn't even aware of at the time. The mothers' club did some things. At the moment, I really can't think of a time.

ST: I noticed in the church history that you let me borrow mention of a funeral for a Charles Black. Do you remember him?

MM: Oh yeah. Oh my gosh, yes.

ST: I'm wondering if he is the person who helped lead a sanitation workers' strike or is that a different Charles Black? That name has come up.

MM: He was a sanitation worker; it probably was.

ST: Okay, tell me about your memories of him.

MM: I didn't know him well. He didn't come to church, but his children were involved in our youth program. In fact, I still keep up with one of his children from time to time.

ST: Is that right?

MM: She lives in spitting distance of the church.

ST: Oh really? What's her name?

MM: Her name is Dorothy Black. I might even have a phone number from her.

ST: I might get that from you later if you think she might want to talk to us.

MM: I knew who Charles was, but I didn't know him personally, but I do remember the funeral and yeah, I'm pretty sure Bill Stewart did the funeral.

ST: Was he quite a leader in the community?

MM: Bill?

ST: Charles Black.

MM: Yeah, he was, I think. I can't give you any "for instances," because I either don't remember or I didn't know, but I think he was perceived, he had a good job, he was living—well, in those days, there were quite a few men living with their family, I mean, not everybody, there was a lot of single parents too, but I think there were more early on. But I think Charles was perceived as a leader. They had several children, quite a few children, and I definitely think he was looked up to. It was one of those really sad things. I think that the guy thought he was somebody else or something; they weren't after him.

ST: Yeah. So he was killed in the Piedmont Courts parking lot, right?

MM: Yeah, some guy came up in a car and I think motioned for somebody to come over to the car, or Charles, I guess, and I think Charles and another guy were standing there and as I recall, they just shot him. And it seems like I remember them saying that they thought he

was someone else, because I don't think there was ever any thinking that Charles dealt drugs or any of that; I don't think so. But it was very sad because he was a very strong male figure in that neighborhood and people looked at him in that way.

ST: Yeah. Among some of the other parents you knew at this time, what were some of their common concerns and challenges that you often talked with them about?

MM: You know, to be honest, I'm not sure I ever--. I think I was so focused on the kids and the teenagers, I'm not sure I even got on that level much or if I did, I don't remember. As I said, the mothers' club did a few things. We mostly talked about the schools and how the kids were doing in school and what we could do to help and did, I'm not going to say often, from time to time, I was able to get one of the mothers to go to the school and have a conference with the teacher, because they didn't have any transportation and later on, the schools changed things and made a way that the teachers would come over to the church, I think, and the parents would come there for the conferences, but I did some of that. And I visited a lot in a neighborhood, but it was mostly just sitting down and talking. I don't think I had much of an agenda, except building a relationship with them and I wanted them to feel good about where their kids were and feel that they could come and worship with us and some did.

ST: How did school integration affect a lot of the kids you were working with?

MM: I'm sure it affected our teenagers some, but I don't think I can be articulate about that at all. I don't remember any specific thing.

ST: You mentioned that they were getting bused quite a—

MM: I remember that they got bused long ways and actually, at one point, this was not my doing, somebody else initiated it, it was a another church initiated it, some of the children were having to leave, I think, at five o'clock in the morning and we had a breakfast program



over at church that some women from another Presbyterian Church came and provided so the kids could come over and get something nourishing to eat before they got on the bus so early. I imagine Annie probably told whoever interviewed her some of these things, I hope.

ST: Probably.

MM: Annie Cox.

ST: Right.

MM: Because she was living there during all that time.

ST: Can you recall any particular moments that really stand out for you as moments where you felt like you were really making a difference?

MM: Well, I'm pretty sure I wondered about that a lot. I think most of it came later. It's been five or six years ago, this fellow came back, came by the church. We were having a funeral there and I was still outside and he came up to me and he said, "Miss Michie, I came today because I was hoping you would be here," and he didn't say "you." I remember distinctly he looked up at the church, up at the steeple and the cross, and he looked up there and he said, "This place has meant so much to me and I was hoping you would be here so I could tell you that," and I honestly don't think he was saying "you." I mean, yeah, I helped, but the place, he never ever came to church. I can't ever remember him coming into a worship service, but he came to clubs, he came to after school, his little brother came, his older sister came to the youth stuff, and a lot of interaction with his mom, just mostly when I was going down and visiting; we were just sort of talking. I probably should have, but I don't think, I don't remember it being beyond that.

ST: Had he lived at Piedmont Courts?



MM: Oh yeah, he grew up there. He was still living there when he graduated from high school and not too long after that, I ran into his brother, who was much more of a character than Andre and actually had served some prison time. I ran into his brother at a funeral. I go to a lot of funerals because I know so many people and unfortunately, we've had a lot of young people who've died for various reasons. Of course, I've been there so long, they're not young anymore, but since I've been there almost forty years, if somebody was in, say, a youth group, they could be fifty now. And so I was at a funeral like that just recently where one of the guys who'd been in the youth group and his whole family and when I was coming out, this Andrei's brother was coming in and he grabbed me and hugged me like I was just the best person in the whole wide world and it was the same thing; he said, "I'm just so glad I got to see you today because I think about the church all the time and what we used to do." And he is a barber now and is doing really well, both of them are, but he did, he got into probably drugs and was in prison for a number of years. That's one thing that being there has sparked and that was Anne Fiadjigbe and I started it together, the prison mission group, and we're still doing that.

ST: Oh really?

MM: Yeah. We've been doing it. We don't know, we think it's been ten or eleven years, and that started, at that time, Anne was working at the church and I was probably at the Presbytery and one of the guys who grew up in Piedmont Courts wrote a letter to the church and Anne was there, so she happened to open it and in the letter, he said, "I lived in Piedmont Courts all those years and I used to sit across the street and watch what you all were doing at the church." And his, he'd call them his stepchildren, his girlfriend's children came to our programs. "I watched all the time and I knew what you were all were doing, but I never came across the street." And about that time when Anne got that or the church got that letter, a guy

that I had just loved, in fact, who'd lived with us for about nine months when his mother died and he didn't have anywhere to go, so he stayed with us for about nine months, and he ended up in prison too; so Anne and I started this about that time. We got to talking about how many people we knew from the neighborhood who were in prison and at that time, there were probably nine or ten that between us, Anne and I knew and there were probably others that we didn't know. So our pastor helped us look at—do you know the name Gordon Cosby?

ST: No.

MM: I guess you'd call him a pastor in Washington, DC. He has this very unusual ministry, but anyway, basically he says that we can't help people, help our minister unless there's inward growth as well as outward and so his idea is that anytime you have a committee really, even a committee, that you always spend part of the time in prayer and meditation and bible study. So it just so happened that our preacher helped us get started with the mission group using that model and we're still doing it. We've still got, oh, I'm writing three or four guys who were raised in Piedmont Courts. One of them was in all the programs we did and he got, oh, twenty-five years, I think, for selling drugs. He was—well, that's just another whole issue I can go off on about the crazy way our prison system does, but he was not a big time drug dealer. I'm positive of that because I used to see him down in the neighborhood all the time and he looked like a slum kid. I mean, he didn't dress nice, he didn't have the earrings and all that stuff. I know what all that is and I just am certain he was selling enough to make a living. But anyway, he got twenty-five years, I think, in federal prison and once you get in federal prison, it's pretty hard to get it reduced.

So there was him and then the guy that had written the church and we've almost always had ten at least, sometimes more. Some of them have gotten out since then and have done well.

The guy that stayed with us, lived with us for a while, he got out years ago and he's doing great; I'm just so proud of him. But that's just a whole thing that got started, bubbled up out of relationships with the neighborhood.

ST: Was that partly in reaction to the war on drugs in the 80s?

MM: Oh, everybody going to prison, yeah.

ST: Tell me a little bit more about the toll that took on the Piedmont Courts community.

MM: Well, there are probably a whole bunch of guys who are in prison over that, that I don't even know, because I mean I sure didn't know everybody and every now and then, somebody will say, "Oh, you know so-and-so been's locked up for umpteen years," and I probably didn't even know it; so can't really say. I know it took a big toll and some of them probably were big dealers, but I am pretty certain that a lot of them weren't big dealers, but it didn't matter. If they got caught with a certain amount on them at that time, it was federal prison. I don't believe that either of those guys have gotten any reduction in their sentences so far. They are both hoping they might still.

ST: When you were working with some of these folks as young people, what were some of the strategies that you used to try to empower them?

MM: Oh, me, probably not as much as I should have. I think I mentioned some of the kids helped with after school and with summer program, which I think was a great way for—I loved it when that could happen, because then the children in the neighborhood could see these kids, these people that are my teachers this year at summer program, grew up where I did. So I think that is maybe a subconscious message, but it's there. We tried to give them at various times opportunities to know about vocational stuff, have somebody come in and talk about what they do and how much schooling they had to have and then as I was there longer, by then

I would know people who grew up, who were in our program when they were coming up, so they could come back and talk about--. Yeah, one guy came and said, "Yeah, I used to sit right here in this room." So I think that does hopefully; I mean, you never know. That's the thing about this. Somebody said, I wish I remembered who said this, "Trust God and sin on bravely." You do have to in this work or most everything you do, I think you have to realize that there's other forces at work.

ST: When you were engaging in this work, were there other groups and organizations in this city that were particularly helpful?

MM: Well, a lot of them were there, like there was the Charlotte Area Fund. Did I already mention that?

ST: Oh yeah.

MM: They were housed in our buildings.

ST: Oh, I didn't know that.

MM: Part of them anyway, the people who were working in the neighborhood. I can't even think of all the different agencies that have used part of our buildings, because there's a lot of space down there, but that was one. I'm trying to think of other things. Having people come was, I think, a good thing to do, particularly those that grew there to come back and talk about it. We had a guy who went to dental school and became a dentist. He and his three brothers and sisters lived there until they got out of high school. Both the guys went to college and I see one of them every now and then in a church that I visit occasionally. It never fails. The thing that just amazes me is that anytime I run into one of these grown people, it just never fails if they talk about what the church meant to them. I know there were times when we

wondered, but I can't be really, really specific about that. I do think that unconditional love goes a long way and if people experience that, any of us, it can impact our lives.

ST: You mentioned a minute ago the Charlotte Area Fund. How successful did you think some of their early programs were?

MM: I really don't feel like I can comment on it, because I wasn't that—I was doing after school and teens stuff, I think, at the time and I had my hands full. I'm not sure. I think there still is a bit of a Charlotte Area Fund somewhere else.

ST: Yes, it's still around.

MM: Yeah.

ST: I think it's changed quite a bit from its early days.

MM: I would think so, yeah. I can't remember right this minute, but there were other people who used our building for service organizations, I guess you call them, but right this minute I can't think of what they were. That was always a nice thing that we had that extra space that could be used for other community services. It bugged me a little bit, because the Charlotte Area Fund, it wasn't their fault, but they would call it, it was called the East Side Center and they were using not the church building and not the Snyder building, but the little side building there. So a lot of people would come over and use their services and they would all call it the center. This was just something that bothered me and the kids would pick it up and the teenagers and they would say, "Oh, Miss Michie, are we supposed to come to the center today?" I would always say, "Yeah, you're supposed to come to the church today. This is a church, not a center." That just one of my pet peeves, I guess. I just wanted them to know that it was a church and that's a little bit different from a community center. Whether that made any difference, who knows?

ST: How helpful were city agencies with your work, for example the Housing Authority or Social Services?

MM: Because the Area Fund was there and part of the time, I believe, there was a social worker type who worked out of the rent office, I really didn't do a lot of that, because A, we didn't have the ability to give monetary help or a lot of times, other kind either. So I think we really did try to set our limits and say, "Well, this is not something we're able to do, but you might check with the Area Fund or you might go to whatever agency." I think we did a fair amount of referral for those kind of things that we knew we weren't equipped to do and help with. And at various times, we had people in the—we didn't call them secretaries, we never have a secretary, but we had somebody in the office in the front of the church in the Snyder building that would greet people as they came in and most of the time, those people knew, I mean part of what their job was to know about these various agencies that they could tell people about.

ST: I asked you about moments where you felt like you were making a difference. Were there any particular moments you remember where you felt particularly frustrated?

MM: Oh mercy, how long do you have? (laughs) Oh yeah, there were a lot, but--. I guess seeing kids drop out of school was always hard. At one time, we had a youth worker there. He was there about eight years, I guess, and he would sometimes, if he saw somebody down on the street or down in the neighborhood, he would pick them up and take them to school. So that was definitely a hard thing and you know, seeing a lot of people that grew up in the neighborhood and/or in our program getting in trouble and going to prison, but you always have to balance that out. But there were plenty of times I was discouraged. I don't want to



sound like a Pollyanna, because I know there were times when I thought, "Mercy gracious, what are we doing here?"

ST: At moments like that, were there things that you felt like you needed that you didn't have access to in terms of resources?

MM: There probably were, but it's weird, I don't remember focusing on that a lot. One of my gifts was being able to do a lot with a little and I think that I pretty much accepted that this is what we have and this is what we're going to work with. I may be glamorizing that, but I kind of think that's the way it was.

ST: By the late 80s, how much change had you seen in the Piedmont Courts community after working there for a decade or so?

MM: Let's see, 80s, and I wasn't working there in the 80s.

ST: Oh, okay.

MM: Well, there were four years I wasn't going to church there, because I took a job, I burned out, and at the time, that was long before and I've always regretted this, it was long before anybody ever heard of sabbaticals, but what I needed was a sabbatical. I still loved what I was doing and I thought it was important and I felt called to it, but I just was flat given out. And I had an opportunity to go to another church to be a Christian education director and I did for four years. That was the only time I wasn't there as a member.

ST: That was in the mid-80s then?

MM: I believe it was, yeah. I am so horrible with dates.

ST: Oh, that's okay, I am too.

MM: Perfectly awful. But I think, well, I've already said this. In your better moments, there have been enough good and just one of the things that I'm going to miss now, I do already



miss since Piedmont Courts is gone, that we don't have that relationship anymore with all those people. I mean, a few of them I've sort of kept up with and can keep up with and some people are still coming to church that used to live down there, but a lot of folks, they just moved and maybe I taught them.

Oh, we started having, here's something else we did that was kind of innovative, I think. We were frustrated—if I've told you this, stop me—because we didn't get very many people coming to Sunday school, so I think a friend and I came up with the idea that we didn't really have to have Sunday school on Sunday, we could have it some other day. So we started what we called "Wonderful Wednesday" and I think that we just celebrated twenty years of that. The church is still doing it even though there's no Piedmont Courts there. What we did was when we started out, the after school was still at the church, so they would go home after after school. And when we came up with this idea, I went down in the neighborhood and there were two sisters there who grew up in our programs who had children in the after school and yeah, they were pretty much after school, maybe teenagers. I went down and told them we had this idea about having something on Wednesday night and doing a little bible study and we thought we'd like to have a light supper for the children and would they be willing to do the cooking and they said, "Sure."

So we called it "Wonderful Wednesday" and we started it pretty soon after that. We had one person that went to buy groceries and these two ladies from the neighborhood came in and did the cooking. There were parents of children, people in the church, were teachers, and we had kindergarten through high school for as long—well, as I said, they're still doing it, but they're drawing their kids from different places. It turned out to be, it was crazy sometimes because they'd been in school all day, but they went home and had a little break before they

came back. So they had supper and we had volunteers come in and help wash the dishes and clean up and volunteers do the teaching and classes all over everywhere, down in the basement and up in the sanctuary. We did various things with it and we did try to do occasionally some service projects, give the kids an opportunity to reach out and do something for somebody else. Sometimes the older kids would go and—Scooter, were you invited?—go down in the neighborhood and maybe make a get well card for somebody or just all kinds of things.

ST: Were the majority of those kids from Piedmont Courts?

MM: They were, but let me think. Now my kids were grown by then. We did have a few people from the church who didn't live in the neighborhood who came and then we worked really hard at trying to get some neighborhood teachers too. That was difficult, but sometimes we had some that were neighborhood teachers and we realized there was that black-white thing: most of the kids who came were African-Americans and most of the teachers were white. But I guess, I mean, it's something else the kids still talk about: "We used to come to Wonderful Wednesday and we did and we did this."

ST: And that was in the mid- to late 80s, you were getting that off the ground, right?

MM: I think, well, let's see. It's been going twenty years now so yeah, it would have been in the 80s. It was our answer for nobody coming to Sunday school.

ST: My sense is and tell me if you think this is correct, that in the mid- to late 80s there was somewhat of an interest among Piedmont Courts residents in reviving the tenants' association. Clarence Westbrooks is a name that's come up. Did you know him?

MM: Oh yeah, he was an elder in our church. He was one of the neighborhood people who joined our church, great guy. He did so much and the neighborhood association, I guess, was working pretty good when he was alive. I think this is in the book, he used to round up the

children and give them little jobs to do in the neighborhood, pick up paper and stuff, and pay them a little bit, I think out of his pocket. I'm trying to think what he did before he retired. It seems like maybe he worked for the railroad, but that doesn't sound right; I don't know, I don't remember. But he was definitely, rose as a neighborhood leader.

ST: Do you remember whether there were particular issues at that time that was driving the interest in sort of reviving the tenants' association?

MM: I don't remember. I'm sure there were, but I don't remember.

ST: Just a minute ago, you touched on the closing of Piedmont Courts and what that means for Seigle Avenue. What did you think when you heard that they were going to shut down Piedmont Courts? What did you feel when you learned that news?

MM: I was really sad, because I think I thought a lot about, "Yeah, there's a lot of bad stuff that goes on down there, but there's also a lot of good stuff," and it has always made me sad that the larger community, it was hard to translate to the larger community the positives of being in that neighborhood and it was more difficult as the years, I mean, it was getting, I guess toward the last couple of years really, once drugs got introduced, that can mess any neighborhood up in a hurry. I hope I'm not over-glamorizing it, but I do think that people who came up there in general look back and see it as a community. In fact, we were talking about that the other day with one of the—there's one family that I still kind of keep in touch with, that I've known, let's see, the fourth generation is now, well, we had this Wednesday night thing, this Wonderful Wednesday, and the fourth generation are still coming to church and coming to Wonderful Wednesday and stuff and the third generation, the woman is an elder, and their grandmother was definitely a community leader.

It would be a really interesting thing to be able to track down as many people as possible to just kind of see what they're doing now and kind of--. A lot of the guys and girls who were in our Boys and Girls Club, we do sort of still keep up. There's my gold finch. He just left again, excuse me. We've had a couple of reunions with that group.

ST: Oh really?

MM: Yeah, and Annie Cox was in that group. It's been probably, maybe eight years since we've had a reunion, but we still keep up with a lot of them and some of them didn't do so well, but a lot of them did.

ST: What do you think the strengths of the Piedmont Courts community were?

MM: From the outside looking in, and I could again be over-glamorizing it, I did sort of feel like people took care of each other more. It was more of a community than the neighborhood I lived in, and you know, I could do something about that, I could do better than I'm doing. I know one woman who used to, she just cooked all the time and there were people who knew that there were certain places they could go and the person who lived there would give them a sandwich or whatever. That's not going to happen in this neighborhood, I don't think: "You want what? You're hungry? Well, go to the soup kitchen." So in a sense, I think it was, in spite of all the hardships and bad things that happened, there was also a sense of neighborhood and community that the outside world didn't understand and I suspect that Annie probably said that too; I imagine she did. When they get together, they talk about it too, about sort of looking after each other. I don't know. This is probably wrong. My experience is that in general, poor people are more generous than those of us that have more than we need.

ST: What do you wish the city had done with Piedmont Courts?

MM: Rather than tear it down?

ST: Right.

MM: Well, my original, I knew that something needed to happen, that it needed to be different, because it was deteriorating and a lot of the strong families were moving out. I think I felt like and I don't know that I know all—I don't know all the details—I sort of felt like that people weren't getting all the help they needed to know how to move from being in public housing where they paid almost nothing for their electricity and their heat and rent, not much either, unless they were working, you know, it was graduated, but there still were people who were welfare parents. One of my concerns was how are they going to manage, that maybe they hadn't been given enough training or equipment to know, because even if they were in Section 8, as I understand it, they have to pay their regular light bill and their heat bill and I don't know what it was, but people down in that neighborhood turned their heat up; whew, it was hot in those houses. And I think it was a flat fee and they maybe had to pay if they went over it; I'm not sure. Either of the Annies would know that since both of them lived there.

But I just was fearful that it sounded good, you know, "I'm going to get my own place," but that maybe some of them, particularly the younger women with families weren't adequately prepared for that and I admit, part of what I'm saying sounds very paternalistic and I hope I'm wrong. I mean, I hope that they did get what they needed to help them to have a living. There's a little house right around the corner over here that's a Section 8 house and I've wondered about it, because somebody moved in pretty quickly after it became Section 8 and I also noticed they didn't stay very long and I also noticed that it's been empty ever since then. So that kind of thing I just wonder about. We still haven't quite figured out how to empower people who live in poverty. We're trying, everybody is, but I don't think we've quite totally figured it out.

ST: I'm curious, thinking back on all your years of work with that community, did you see yourself during those years as a civil rights activist?

MM: I was a believer, I wouldn't say I was much of a activist except that one little march I did. I maybe write a letter every now and then to somebody, stuff like that, but I wasn't out in the forefront at all, I wouldn't say.

ST: What do you think the closing of Piedmont Courts is going to mean for Seigle Avenue Church?

MM: I have no idea. Without going into details because it's irrelevant, I guess, to the current conversation, but Seigle has been going through a pretty rough transition anyway for the last three years and it's lost more than half of its members.

ST: Wow.

MM: And actually, I'm not going there anymore. My membership is still there and it's the saddest and hardest thing that I've ever done in my life to think I don't think I can do this anymore. In a nutshell, I guess I sort of feel like the church lost its vision and its purpose, or vision is a better word. And they have a new vision, which is I think the church will continue, will be a church, but it's a different kind of church already and will be.

ST: What's your sense of their new mission or vision?

MM: I'm not even sure. I wouldn't want to speculate even. Well, this has been going on for probably ten years. We started to get a lot of gays and lesbians, which has been great because at our height, we were pretty well mixed between black and white, not at our height, but when we were about a hundred members, we were almost half and half. Then I don't know, somehow the word got out that this was a great church and people started flocking in and I don't know, but I think that probably some gays and lesbians came and visited and thought,



“Well, gosh, if this church can get along with all these different kinds of people, maybe it’ll be okay for me to come,” and the word spread quickly. My sense again is that most of those, the gays and lesbians, they wanted to be in a church that was mixed with all kinds of people because there are two very strong gay and lesbian churches in Charlotte, but they were eager to be in a church where it wasn’t just gays and lesbians, is my sense. Now just from looking on a Sunday morning and this is a ballpark figure and it’s not to be written down, I’m guessing it probably is half or more gay and lesbian, and maybe that is their new ministry.

They’re talking about—the church is talking about what they’re going to be doing and they’re trying to do some things with youth. I think if I understand, they’ve had some success with it. I’m not sure where these young people are coming from, but there’s plenty of young people out there that need help, that’s for sure. So I’m really not sure. There are still a few people. I think somebody tried to interview Miss Taylor and they couldn’t, right, I mean, she just didn’t quite know what you all were doing.

ST: Right. My colleague tracked her down, was able to connect with her, but I think she was a little hesitant to give a formal interview.

MM: I guess so, but she’s a very interesting lady. Her youngest children were both in the program when I was working there and well, they both were just totally strung out on drugs and one of them’s been in and out of prison goodness knows how many times, and the mom herself, I think, was an alcoholic when I knew her, because I’d been to her house and visited her home, because her boy was, whew, he was very challenging, the cutest kid you ever saw in your life, but he was so challenging. I have a great story about him. When he was five years old, I think, I was reading him a book one day in the summer program and he looked up at me and he said, “Miss Michie, how come you’re reading me all these God books?” I said, “Well,



Willie, I wanted you to know that God loves you.” He said, “Hmph, he don’t love me.” That says a lot, doesn’t it?

ST: Yeah.

MM: It really, it stuck with me because I realized that there are a lot of people, not just in Piedmont Courts, but a lot of people everywhere who just can’t fathom that—

ST: Someone loves them.

MM: There is a God who could really love them, as bad as they see themselves. Anyway, that’s, Miss Taylor eventually got her act together and she and her husband live in a little Habitat house and she’s raising her grandchild, the child of the daughter who is totally gone on drugs, and is doing a great job. She’s a good friend. I go by and visit her from time to time. But she probably just didn’t quite—I mean, I’m sorry, I should have realized that I probably could have helped break the ice there and explain it to her.

ST: Oh, that’s okay. I think she actually had a fairly long conversation with my colleague. She was just, I think, maybe intimidated about the idea of an interview, thought it needed to be more formal than it really did.

MM: Probably, yeah.

ST: So has she remained a member of Seigle Avenue throughout this whole transition?

MM: She is. She wasn’t a member. She started coming after she got her act cleaned up and after they moved into the Habitat house. It’s about, you know, sometimes she walks up there; most of the time, she gets a ride. She just showed up one day and again, I think it was that remembering that this place has been here a long time and it tried to help my children, it was there, and so I decided to live a different kind of life and I want to start going to church

there. She's there every Sunday. She's just been in the hospital too. She was in the hospital for about two weeks, so that may have affected kind of how she was thinking too.

ST: Sure, yeah. Well, we may still be able to reconnect with her. How do you see the Belmont Neighborhood changing over the next few years? What would you predict?

MM: I just, I don't even have a picture of what it's going to be, because there are so many balls in the air and apparently, the church is thinking about selling the sanctuary and the Snyder building where Jacob's Ladder—do you know what Jacob's Ladder is?

ST: Yeah, the job center.

MM: Where Jacob's Ladder is. I understand that Jacob's Ladder is looking for somewhere to move, but I don't know that any of that's been finalized; I mean, I don't think it has. They'd have to have a meeting about it and I don't believe that's happened, so I don't know. And then I keep hearing about this Kroc Center and there seems to be different opinions about where it's going to be located. I guess it'll have all the social services available to humankind is what it sounds like.

ST: As part of the new Hope VI development?

MM: I think so, yeah, and whether it's going to be right there or whether it's going to be on up the street. I also heard and I think they're still saying this, that I think sixty units of homes for elderly will still be in Piedmont Courts. Have you heard that?

ST: I haven't, but that could well be.

MM: One of the ladies that I still visit is living up in the First Ward now up in town in a nice little apartment, but when I went to see her, she said, "I don't like it up here. I want to go back." So I said, "Well, they say they're going to build these Section 8s. Are you planning to move in?" I mean, she's in one. She said, "Yeah, if they'll let me, I am." So there was this

really strong feeling about the community. So I guess I have hope about the Section 8 part and I don't know enough about what's going to happen. I'm not sure anybody knows what's going to happen.

ST: Just by way of kind of wrapping up, what's most surprised you about how Charlotte has changed over the past thirtysome years you've been here?

ST: I can't get from one place to another. I have my little routes and if I get off of them, I'm lost. I don't even know that I have a sense of that, you know. I know the business people think it's wonderful, but all of that is so out of my realm of understanding or who I am or where my knowledge is, I can't even grab a hold of it. I mean, I never go downtown, never. I have everything right out here I need, a little grocery store and a Family Dollar. So I just, I don't know. I hope that it'll continue, that it will be a city with a heart.

ST: Were there changes in the realm of civil rights and race relations that you would have anticipated seeing by now that you haven't?

MM: I think it's really hard to tell, because there are cosmetic changes. People can live, I mean, this neighborhood is very integrated. Now we have Mexicans and African-Americans and white people. I mean, I guess there's been some white flight, but it appears, just I walk in the neighborhood and from walking and kind of figuring out who lives where sort of, it seems to me that it's still, I know there's still a lot of white people here and there are some African-Americans, a fair number, and probably a smattering of Latinos, but there are three Latinos on this little cul-de-sac and I think that's a good sign. What I would wish for the whole city is that this mix could continue in other places and that we not get resegregated into not only color-wise, but the haves and the have-nots, and I feel like Charlotte uptown is becoming a place for the haves.

ST: Do you think that's what Belmont's fate is?

MM: Well, I don't know. As I said, I keep hearing different things and I just, I haven't been, my mind doesn't work that way, for one thing. I went to a couple of meetings early on and I realized I am just a blob sitting here. I don't have anything to contribute and part of the time, I'm not real sure where they're going and so I quit going to the meetings because I didn't feel like I had a reason to be there. I really didn't feel like I had anything to contribute. So I haven't been in on that and that was my choice. So I just, I don't really know. It will be interesting to see. I mean, they were talking big about continuing to have a mixed neighborhood down there and I hope that happens and if there's sixty Section 8 for elderly, that will help some, but whether there will be other places, I mean, I don't think there are that many in the first ward.

ST: Right.

MM: I mean, I know one or two people who moved from Piedmont Courts into the first ward. Those folks are all working or either retired, elderly. I guess the people I worry about the most are the people who, for lots of different reasons, aren't working, and are they going to get the services that can help them to get into the job market. I mean, I know a lot of stuff's available, but I also know it's more than just putting up a sign and saying, "Come over here and we'll help you find a job." And Jacob's Ladder's done a great job of that; I'm not talking about them, but again, I don't know how much they got from that immediate neighborhood. I mean, I don't have the answers; I don't know how you do that.

ST: What would you most like your children and grandchildren to remember about your work with Piedmont Courts?

MM: I think I would like them to remember what I believe they're remembering and that is that it was a great time in their life, that they are different people because they grew up there, and that they will be—this is George. [Michie's husband enters] If you want to check any of your dates, he's the man that can do it. He can tell you not only the year, but the day.

ST: Oh, well, you're a historian's friend then.

G: Well, it just means my mind hasn't started to go yet.

MM: And mine has. The end of that sentence is that mine has started to go.

ST: Oh, I don't think so.

MM: Could you call Scooter, George?

ST: Nice to meet you. You were talking about, I had asked you what you would most like your children or grandchildren to remember about it.

MM: I think that's it and I think they will have a positive recollection of that time. I feel pretty sure they will and I think it's playing out already in some of the things they're doing. The son that works for Wachovia does some, in fact, just today, I think he's doing diversity training up in Chicago.

ST: Oh really?

MM: Well, that's not his—he's a human resources person. I don't know what that means, but when he started out, he did a lot of diversity training and I felt that probably he did a much better job of that because he had experienced diversity growing up and not only growing up in school, but in his church, which not a lot of people his age experienced. So I do think it will impact them always and hopefully, it'll filter down to their children too.

ST: Well, was there anything you had wanted to bring up that I haven't asked you about?

MM: Oh my gosh, I don't think so.

ST: Okay. Well, thanks so much for taking some time to share your memories.

MM: Oh, it's been great to talk with you.

ST: I appreciate it.

MM: I'm glad you all are doing this.

ST: Well, thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**