TRANSCRIPT—CAROL SIMPSON MILLER

Interviewee: CAROL SIMPSON MILLER

Interviewer: Dwana Waugh

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START OF CD

DW: This is Dwana Waugh. I'm interviewing Carol Simpson Miller on July 11, 2006 in Charlotte. Good morning. How are you?

CSM: I'm fine, thank you.

DW: Good. I wanted to start the interview by asking you if you could just tell me what you remember about you childhood. Growing up, as I understand, your family moved into Piedmont Courts soon after it opened in 1941.

CSM: That's correct.

DW: What was your childhood like?

CSM: My childhood was absolutely fabulous. You know, I have to start out by repeating a quote or a line I heard on TV. I just loved it. That just about sums up the way I feel about our life. Someone said on the program, "I may have been broke but I never was poor." That's the way I feel about my childhood. I had so much growing up. I had my mother and father in the home. I had good food. I had a roof over my head. I had a playground outside my apartment. I had nice clothes. My parents evidently had good parenting skills because the four of us turned out completely okay. Of course we

had a library in our neighborhood. We had a church which was a good foundation also. I had many friends there. Living in a housing project of probably over three hundred apartments there were quite a few kids there. You always had someone to play with. Of course, you could always find someone to be your best friend. It was a good life.

DW: What are you memories of what Belmont looked like? I'm sorry not Belmont but Piedmont Courts.

CSM: Belmont and Seigle Avenue?

DW: Yes.

CSM: I also have, you know, some knowledge of Belmont in the area in that my grandmother lived in that area. When I was a young girl it was still like the edge of the city because when I was very young she still had three cows back in the field. She grew strawberries. She grew lima beans to pay her taxes. She had a big wrap around porch. So it was like, in a way, going out into the country although there were quite a few houses around. Then, I also went to Villa Heights School, to the grammar school. Even as a young girl it was safe then and I had good knowledge of direction. Little bit later on, I walked home from school because I was about the only child in Piedmont Courts who went to Villa Heights. There might have been a couple of others. The Belmont neighborhood was a nice middle class neighborhood, nice homes. Probably, you know, of course it was the working class people as well as the men in Piedmont Courts. At that time most of the women were still stay at home. You know, moms didn't work outside the home when I was very, very young. Also, my father was born in a house that's probably, it might still there. It was either on Allen Street or Harrill Street down on the end closest to what they called the City Barn then. There was a coal yard near by. He

was born there probably around 1915. The houses were there then or some houses were there that early. It was pretty quiet neighborhood at that time. Also had an uncle who also lived in that area too. My grandmother and grandfather built their house on Parsons Street. Then my uncle built his house further up cross Parkwood Avenue on Parsons Street near Villa Heights School. That's my stomping grounds, my old stomping grounds.

DW: When you say you were the only child to attend Villa Heights was that just because you were the only child in that age group to go?

CSM: Well, course you know, in the next year or so my sister went to Villa Heights and then Billy King went to Villa Heights. We were probably the only--. There was probably only three or four, you know, kids who went. Then of course my other brother and sister went later on. I went to Villa Heights up until the sixth grade. Then they transferred me to 1st Ward. I went to Villa Heights because that was the school my father had attended. That was the school they chose to put me in. Then evidently there came a time when I guess there were boundaries drawn and I was not in my school district. We were not in our school district. We were all transferred to 1st Ward. I was able to go to Villa Heights up until the sixth grade.

DW: Was that an adjustment moving to 1st Ward from Villa Heights?

CSM: It was an easy adjustment because then I was able to go with some of the kids from the Courts, from Piedmont Courts. They were really more of a working class people who had probably worked in the mills around the school there, of course other jobs also. It was probably easier to make friends. I don't know if it was because I was the new girl or what. I had lots of friends at 1st Ward. It was an easy adjustment.

DW: Were both of these schools in the Belmont neighborhood, in the Belmont community?

CSM: Villa Heights would be. I think they are calling Villa Heights now the Belmont area, but at that time it was just known as the Villa Heights area because Pegram Street which is Belmont and Belmont Avenue and parts of Seigle. Seigle goes all the way up to Villa Heights School and so does Allen and Harrill. They are some of the streets there in the Belmont area. 1st Ward, I guess it was just the 1st Ward district because no one ever referred to it as Belmont or Villa Heights area or even Plaza-Parkwood. It was a little bit different.

DW: I was curious about also your memories of Piedmont Courts and you were talking before about there was a playground and there seemed to be a sense of community spirit. Could you talk a bit about that?

CSM: I have so many memories of Piedmont Courts. I think, trying to remember the earliest memory. We moved there in '41 and of course I can remember some of the war years. And I remember even thought Piedmont Courts was supposed to've been public housing. We also had a war bond drive. Of course we didn't have a famous person coming to sell war bonds there. But, I remember they set up a booth outside the office and sold war bonds. That's my first memory of something happening in the community as far as outside my family unit or friends.

Then the thing that we did as children, if someone passed away in our neighborhood we'd take it upon ourselves and go around and get money to buy flowers for that person. Again, even though money might be scarce or tight for some people, people always put in nickel, dime or quarter. We always had enough money to buy

flowers for the deceased person. That was another thing that we did. Course, we went around, we went up to the office, we got a lawn mower and we cut grass. We cut grass for a nickel. If it was an elderly person we probably wouldn't charge them. Sometimes they'd call us over and we'd go to the store for them and things like that.

Our big thing was playing in the spray pool. The spray pool was outside our house and we played there and we met many of our friends there. We played softball. Every evening we played roller bat. You know roller bat?

DW: No. I've never--.

CSM: The pitcher pitches the ball. Of course if you're the batter or the batter hits the ball and wherever it goes the person tries to catch it on the fly or catch it as it bounces or rolls. Then, if you catch the ball you roll it back to the bat. IF you strike the bat then you get to be the batter.

DW: I was picturing something with roller skates.

CSM: No. Of course we had jump board. Did you ever play jump board?

DW: No.

CSM: A group of us girls we would play jump board. That's where we'd find an old board somewhere, get a big, old concrete block or a stone or whatever we could find. We would place this board on top of this stone and then each end, it was like a seesaw, and if you visualize it. One person would be standing on one end and the other person would jump on the board sending the other person flying into the air. I'm surprised we didn't get killed because sometimes that board would slip and you had to be fast enough to jump off of it. I'm sure many of us got hit on the shin but we became quite the acrobats because once we were up in the air we learned to do the split and turn around.

We improvised a lot. Fortunately, I was one of the first kids to get a bicycle. I got a blue bicycle. Everybody would ride that bicycle. They'd stand in line. So I shared and sometimes I would pull people on the bike. The most treasured gift we would get at Christmas would be a pair of number five Union skates. That would be a request and come Christmas morning, oh gosh, probably twenty-five to fifty kids would be crowded into that space at the office. They had a parking lot down there and there was a slight, there was a hill. We would skate down that hill and in that parking lot. We had our own little private skating rink there. Then we would play Pop the Whip on our skates. So usually you wanted to be at the back of the line because that's the end of the line. You got popped. You were swung around at the end of that line and you were going down that hill pretty fast on those skates. The only way you had to stop yourself was to run up this grassy hill and hit the chain link fence with the palms of your hands. That's the way you stopped. We lived quite dangerously. We all made it too.

DW: The things children do. I guess as an adult it's a little scary.

CSM: Had a lot of fun I tell you. That was quite a bit of fun. Or either being daring enough to take your bicycle and ride down what we called the big hill. It was practically straight down the sidewalk. The first part of the hill went straight down and then there was a little dip. Then another hill that went down. You were pretty brave if you dared go down that hill on your bicycle. Or being pulled behind the bike on your skates, that was a lot of fun too. We had a lot of things to do. We had a lot of playmates and a lot of things to do. Jump board, hopscotch, the playground, the jungle gym, the swings. Another thing we'd do when they would cut the grass at the office down in the courts. We'd gather up a pile of that grass and pile it as high as we could and then we'd

get on the top rung of that jungle gym. We would jump off. Another little game we had, swinging on a rope across the creek was another one.

DW: Was this creek in Piedmont Courts?

CSM: The creek went right around the Courts. The creek evidently is where the Louise Mill probably dumped their dye and chlorine into it. If the creek was a maroon color, burgundy maroon, real dark purplish brown you didn't go wading in it. You didn't go around the creek then. It was probably the dye. It was probably a good thing you didn't go into now as you look back on it. Sometimes it smelled like chlorine and it was clear. A lot of times you probably would sneak in and wade into the creek when it was clear. That's what we had surrounding the Courts, the creek. When it rained you'd better not get near that creek because it flooded and you could be swept away. Again the kids there in Piedmont Courts were very fortunate or lucky because we had sense enough not to get into it.

DW: Could you tell me a bit about the, you've talked about it a bit, but about the physical layout of Piedmont Courts and how it looked as you remember it when you were growing up?

CSM: Of course there was the office and the office is where they had the library. That's where you paid your rent. Also at the office, that's where everybody sat back behind the, I think it was brass. I think they had some of those like brass bars or something and you slipped your rent up under that. Then down below because of the way the building and that hill there, there was a area where the maintenance men could keep the lawn mowers, the paint, etc., etc. things like that, tools. There were no riding lawn mowers then. They were the push mowers. Then you had one, two, three, four

buildings that came off Seigle Avenue and then about two more that made an L shape. That was what we call the front part of the Courts. Then you had your back of the Courts. That was on the creek or apartments on the creek as they were sometimes called. You had probably two of those. Then there were, oh gosh, one, two, three, four, about ten, maybe fifteen buildings in the middle. Then, of course, there was another playground. That playground was meant to play ball in. It wasn't used quite as much as where the equipment was, the playground equipment. Then there were probably one, two, maybe another ten or fifteen buildings out there. Of course you know I'm not really sure about these figures but there were quite a bit of buildings to have 365 apartments. Each of those apartments had, if you averaged it out, maybe about three children, two to three children each. Then there was like the smaller apartments and elderly people lived in those downstairs. We had what we called upstairs and downstairs apartments. My maternal grandmother and grandfather and an aunt lived in Piedmont Courts also. They lived down on the other playground near the creek. I had them to run and visit. That was fun. Later on, when I got to be a teenager we got a drug store out there which was a lot of fun. We hung out a little bit there, bought cherry Cokes or cherry smashes out there. It was like a little community within there. We had the Chicken Box. Oh my God--.

DW: Sounds funny already.

CSM: Oh my God, the Chicken Box. Let me tell you, Friday night, shrimp, chicken. Oh my God it was so good. I can't tell you how good it was. [Laughter] We had that. Then we had, up the street, Turners Café. I think the men that worked at the City Barn there on Seigle Avenue across from the Courts, they went to Turners, got a hamburger or something. Now, we could go to Turners during the day but we weren't

allowed to go to Turners at night. Because at that time they had a juke box and people would drink beer so we couldn't go there at night. We used to go up there, a group of us. They had a jukebox up there. It was before the drug store opened. We would go up there. They had the frosted glasses. We'd get our Pepsi in frosted glasses in the summertime. We walked up that hot sidewalk barefooted. We'd get there and we'd buy the Pepsis and maybe a bag of potato chips. Somebody would have enough money to play the jukebox. We had a friend by the name of Maude. I don't know where she is today, but her favorite song, I'll never forget this, was a song that went something that went like "Honey let me be your salty dog or I won't be your match." [Laughter] She was a kid. She played that every time she went up there. I don't know what that was about. I associate that song with her. That was another treat. Of course they had a candy counter and you could get a paper bag full of candy for a nickel. I mean, anything you could get was like two and three for a penny. You could just get a bag full of candy which of course we would do. That was a lot of fun too. I remember hearing maybe one of the first songs that was probably going to be in the rock and roll era, Santa Catalina, something like that. Love to listen to the jukebox. We had a supermarket out there too across from, on Tenth Street, across from the Courts.

The library, I lived at the library. I loved the library. I always thought I'd be a librarian after I spent so much time there. We had every kind of book that you can imagine in that library. We were so fortunate to have that library there because we had encyclopedias. We could do our homework and everything. I think for a public housing project that was just tops to have library right there. Who thought of that to put a library there?

DW: It sounds like, I recall a picture that was in the *Charlotte Observer* in June. It was a picture of you and your sister on a horse. You were talking about mowing the grass for five cents. Was there a sense that people had their own little plot of land at Piedmont Courts?

CSM: Oh yeah, we did. My daddy, in our yard, planted some rose bushes. A lot of the little elderly ladies, their front porch would be filled with little, different kinds of flowers and plants like snake plants and a plant that was red and tall and called Red Hot Poker. Beside the porch they planted little flowers that would open up at 4:00, those little four o'clocks. I love those things. I always thought I'm going to get me some of those four o'clock seeds and when I get a house I'm going to plant four o'clocks. We had our own little porch. It wasn't like it was really a territorial thing like mine, mine, mine. You just knew that was your little area that you could do with it. If you wanted a tomato plant you could have you a tomato plant or your four o'clocks or your whatever. Now my grandfather built, at his apartment, he built a nice bench like you would see in one of these fancier places, on the porch. It had a eye back then back behind that he built a trellis and had some kind of vine, some kind of plant growing on the trellis, really nice. You could do things like that. They had paint. You could paint your own apartment. Of course you had a choice. It was like Henry Ford's automobile, you know he had black. In the Courts, you could have all the paint you want but you could only get green. Green was the color.

My daddy was a floor sander. He was starting his own business. First he had worked for his brother and then he had worked for other floor sanders. He was starting his own business and getting little jobs here and there. When daddy would go out, like to

Myers Park or some of these ritzier areas, he got ideas about what they were doing. We bought our own paint. We painted in color. Our apartment was a little bit different. That was nice too.

DW: Yea. Did you ever get the feel--? Let me rephrase this.

CSM: That we were treated differently.

DW: No, I was going to ask if there was ever a **perception** that people didn't take care of their apartments or the land or the property that they had?

CSM: Most of the people that I associated with did take care of their things. I think at that time that--we just say office--the office was probably a lot stricter. You did not have junk. You kept your place clean. Oh, that was another thing they also, you could have spray for roaches. Anytime you have apartments and people living closely together that will happen. You could also get spray. You could not let your place be filthy. You had a sense of that. You knew that. See, I don't think the majority of people had to be told because they, like I said, a lot of times these people had maybe had another life and circumstances placed them there, the war for one thing after '41. A lot of people got married as they started off to war and maybe a lot of young marrieds lived down there. Then I knew some women who were widows who lived down there after the war. Then I knew a couple of older people who had had money and were there. Honestly, as I remember, I can not remember anybody being real, real poor. I'm sure we didn't have money. We didn't have money like other people. People in the Courts didn't. The whole time that I lived there I only saw one person set out. That was probably because they didn't pay their rent. I thought at that time that was the saddest sight I had ever seen because things that they had probably treasured or owned, once it was set out it looked

like a pile of junk. It was sad. I only saw that one time when I lived in the Courts. They were, the office was very strict. You had to keep your place neat. It was neat. I guess you probably too young to--. Monday was wash day. Come Monday women's wash was hanging on that line. I could come home from school. I rode the bus home from school in the afternoon. I got to ride the bus home. You could see all those sheets flapping in the breeze. Those lines, just like lines and lines of sails. If it would be in March they would be whipping through that breeze. I can remember that sound of sheets flapping. I like that. I like to see those clean clothes.

That's another thing I remember is that flag that hung there at the office. Even though we lived three buildings down I could hear that clink, clink. I don't know what that piece of metal is that the flag is attached to but you could hear that. That's something else I've never forgotten is the sound of that. The flag was always raised everyday that was another thing too. I noticed when we went back down there to see the Courts; before they were tearing it down, that quite obviously they did not hang the flag anymore. The flagpole was rusty and the tree limbs had grown all around it. It wasn't being used anymore. The majority of people did keep their place clean. They really had nice furniture.

We got one of the first televisions in the '50s. My brother happened to get ill so we got a television. One other family, the Prices, had gotten the first television. It became the community television. [Laughter] At four or four-thirty, something like that, a test pattern would come on in the afternoon. Believe it or not there was no programming during the day. Unlike TV now. We would wait, us kids, and we would go up to the Prices and sit in the floor and wait and look at test pattern for ten or fifteen

minutes until Howdy Doody came on. That's the first program I remember seeing was Howdy Doody. By the time we got our TV there was WBT. It was the news and the weather and things like that, more programming on there other than test pattern and Howdy Doody. Believe it or not, TV went off about eleven or twelve o'clock at night and there was test pattern again. All you insomniacs you'd have to find something else to do back then.

DW: Oh I can't imagine. [Laughter]

CSM: We did. We got this big, blonde television. We still--. Nancy has the cabinet somewhere. Yeah my sister still has that cabinet from our TV from the '50s. Can you believe that?

DW: Have to hold on to that.

CSM: We don't part with anything. That's another thing with daddy starting his business, starting the floor sanding business. They went out. They bought this blonde furniture which was popular in the '50s, if you've ever seen any '50s furniture. We had the coffee table, the corner table, the end table, the swan furniture and the matching television. These were people that lived in housing project now. We had a beautiful sofa that was like a rose color with some metallic threads running through it. Oh my God, I tell you what, our apartment looked like it should have been in *Better Homes and Gardens*. That is really nice for public housing. It looked real nice. Of course, I always cleaned. My mama was very fastidious, a very clean person, everything in its places and a great cook, oh my God, a great cook.

DW: I think I remember seeing that in your life history form she's the best southern cook and mother.

CSM: Yes. She was. Those biscuits, I wrote about the biscuits. It was called buttermilk biscuits. My mama's biscuits would be about that high and that big around. Oh my God. I know. See where I've learned to enjoy good food.

DW: Well you know what they say, it's a southern tradition.

CSM: Oh yeah. Biscuits. Gravy. My mother would fix these big, old log rolling breakfasts. It was anything to have Canadian bacon, liver mush, eggs, biscuits. She got up every morning and made biscuits. Can you imaging people getting up now, someone getting up tomorrow morning and making a big can of biscuits.

DW: No, not unless it's in a can.

CSM: Unless they run to McDonald's or some where. She would do this before we went to school, before Daddy went to work. We were always full when--. That was another thing we were always full, well fed. That was why ( ). One of my favorite things, food.

DW: I wanted to ask you. I don't know how much you remember, at least as a child living in Piedmont Courts, of the selection process for people to move into Piedmont Courts. When you moved in, did you have a sense that people who you grew up around kind of stayed there for longer periods of time? You saw families grow up there.

CSM: Come and go. Yeah. Honestly, I think we were one of the families that probably stayed a long time believe it or not. I think my mom and dad did not move out until probably the '60s. They would go out and look at property or look at houses. It was my daddy. My daddy was comfortable. He liked it there. He didn't want to move. That's why we didn't move. Each year, in fact I found a--. I was going through some

papers the other day. I found a letter from the office and they were going up on the rent, still it was pretty low. I can't remember now how much it was but it wasn't very much. It said, "we are increasing your rent." I thought that wasn't a whole lot. They based in on your income and probably the people in the family, how many people were living in the family. I think over the years things did change because when I was younger there was one family, only one family who lived there and they had two apartments. They had so many children. They had one of the apartments that was upstairs and downstairs for part of the family. Then they had one of the smaller apartments like the elderly people lived in for the rest of the family. There were about three girls and three boys and the mom and dad. There were about eight people in the family. Evidently they accommodated them but that's the only family that I ever knew. They didn't live there too, too long, maybe four or five years, something like that and had those two apartments. I don't remember anything else unusual about selection, how that worked because when we moved in I was only three. Then I was sixteen when I got married and my husband was eighteen. We got an apartment there.

DW: How did that come about? Was that an easy transition to move to Piedmont Courts as a married couple?

CSM: Yeah it was. I'd been in Piedmont Courts since I was three. Therefore it was like home. I wasn't moving away from Mom and Daddy. I wasn't moving away from my sisters and brother. He wasn't moving away from his mom. His mom lived there. We were kids but we got an apartment there. Then I had one child while we were there. Then for a brief period we moved to South Carolina. Then that's when, after the

other kids came along, that's when we separated. Then I got an apartment there. I lived across the street from my mama and daddy.

DW: Both times?

CSM: Both times. Actually the first time mama and daddy lived in one end of the apartment and Larry and I lived in the other end of the apartment. By this time, my brother and sister had grown up and were teenagers and in school. They had to get a larger apartment so they moved across the street. Then once my husband and I separated and I moved across the street from Mama and Daddy when I moved back from South Carolina.

I loved Piedmont Courts. There's no other way to put it. It was comfortable. I knew the people. I knew the people in the office. I knew people around me, the older people that had been there, older women, the widows, married people about my mama and daddy's age. I was comfortable. You don't usually want to leave a place when you're comfortable.

DW: Yes, this is true.

CSM: I feel good about being there. Then of course when I met my second husband--. You do have a desire to own your own home at some point. Of course, we bought a house. By then, my mother and daddy had already moved too. They got a smaller apartment up in the Plaza area, if fact, not too far from where my grandmother and grandfather had build their house. They lived off the Plaza when they moved. We moved further out.

DW: Do you remember what year you moved out from Piedmont Courts?

CSM: In the ‘60s, about ‘66. 1966. I think my mom and dad had moved out in ‘65. I moved out in ‘66, January ‘66 as a matter of fact.

DW: So the apartments by that time were about twenty years, twenty-five years old. Had there been a lot of updates or any updates to the apartments?

CSM: Never. They never got tore up. Sometimes a kid--. I, for one, threw an orange one time and broke a window pane. Of course, that was replaced in our first apartment. Maybe a screen in a screen door, that was replaced in apartments. Generally they stayed about the same, never did get run down or tore up. During the time that we lived there, when we first lived there we had coal stoves, coal or wood stoves whichever one I guess people used. We had that in the kitchen and the living room because Daddy would build a fire in the kitchen stove and of course he used coal and built that fire for Mama to cook. He would carry embers from the kitchen stove to make the fire in the living room. That’s what we had when we first lived there. Then, what year? It might have been the early ‘50s then that’s when they installed the gas. We got gas heat and gas stoves. That was nice. In the kitchens we had those big, old utility tables. They were heavy and you could pull out the cutting board. It was really nice. We had like a little pantry. It didn’t have a door or curtain. We didn’t have doors on our closets down here. It was just like indentions in the wall. The lights, they were on the side of the wall. It was just insert a light bulb. That’s what the lighting was unless you wanted lamps. Then of course there were plugs for your lamps. That’s the kind of lighting and the kind of stoves we had when we first moved in. Up until we moved in the ‘60s that still the same kind of lighting we had. The only thing that changed was the gas. That was nice. I loved the tile down there. They had that hard tile. I think I heard somebody say it was

something like asphalt tile or asbestos tile. I don't know. It wasn't ceramic. It wasn't anything like that. It certainly wasn't like linoleum. It was like this hard tile. It was very easy to keep clean. You could mop it. I loved to wax it to get a shine on it. As far as the office, they had the same kind of tile and they buffed theirs. They got a real shine. Of course, daddy had a buffer. If we wanted to use the buffer we could shine our floors up like that. Our floors were always shiny just like the office. We had really nice floors. I liked that. It was built really so that it was relatively easy to keep clean. To keep from using that coal stove in the summer we did had an oil stove that Mama cooked on because it would get hot. It would get really hot in those small apartments. Those coal stoves in the kitchen like that.

DW: Interesting.

CSM: Cook stoves up until the '50. That's what people called stoves like that, cook stoves.

DW: I'm curious to know about your sense of how things changed from when you were a child living in Piedmont Courts to when you were an adult and married living in Piedmont Courts? Do you still have that same sense that it was a good community spirit that was there or did you see any other changes that took place?

CSM: Are you asking me once that black people moved in? Is that what you're asking me?

DW: No, but I am curious to get your opinion on that. Just from 1941 when you were a child to before you moved out in 1966 did you see the community go through any changes or was it the same?

CSM: I think it was the same. I think it was the same because I practically knew the same people. Nothing really changed. It was just very comfortable. I don't think I noticed any changes at all. I think about the only changes I saw was in the church and we were getting different ministers. That was it. Not really in the Courts.

Mr. Dillehay, he was the head honcho of Piedmont Courts. In Charlotte they have another public housing named Dillehay Courts now. Mr. Dillehay was the head honcho. I guess the offices were public housing were there in Piedmont Courts. Sometimes he would take a stroll down through the Courts. It would just go and it was like a grapevine. People would say, "Oh, Mr. Dillehay's walking through the Courts." He seemed to be like a pretty tall man. Of course, he wore the same--. In summertime he wore this Sear Sucker suit and a white Panama hat, very striking figure. He looked like he belonged over in Myers Park. He would stroll down through there and I guess survey his kingdom. I don't know. It would go through the Courts like wild fire. "Mr. Dillehay's going through the Courts." I think people had a respect for him but I think it was also like fear. I think people were more afraid of authority back then than they are now. I think they've probably been raised like that for generations. And we resent authority and definitely the boss.

DW: I wanted to ask you too about whether you felt stigmatized living in public housing? Was there any sense of stigma that was attached?

CSM: I didn't, not really. Villa Heights, no one ever asked me where I lived. 1st Ward, those people were probably, some of them were in worse shape than we were. Then there were a lot of--. In junior high I know of an incident that happened with me. I didn't feel--. I don't know why. I didn't let people make me feel really bad about where

I lived but I knew later on that I better not let people know I lived in the Courts in school. I knew later on not to do that. I was in Junior high. It was the seventh grade and I had met a new girl. She didn't live in the Courts. Of course, at that time, I didn't know where she lived. She was just a girl I met at school. I invited her to come home with me after school because I was at Piedmont Junior High and could walk home. She came home and like I said my mama was at home. My mama, she was like mothers should be. She asked twenty questions. What's your name? Where do you live? Blah, blah, blah. Of course the little girl told her. We went out on the playground. We played for a while. Then I was invited to her house. That morning I went by cab to her house. My daddy had to work. We only had one car we could afford. I went by cab. When I got to her house her mother wasn't even at home. Then when her mother came in she had been playing bridge. She didn't ask what do you want for lunch, who's your friend, anything like that. To make a long story short, either the girl became aware of where I lived or her mama made her aware of where I lived or whatever, we didn't ever stay friends. I guess her daddy owned a business and was on the school board at that time. I was a girl from Piedmont Courts. I'd see her in high school and we never spoke again. That happens. Later on, like at school they said, "What's your address?" I said, "832 Seigle Avenue, apartment 332." That's what I'd always say. Nobody ever knew that 332 was Piedmont Courts. That's what I would say. You learn. It didn't make me feel bad because more important to me was my family. It didn't make me feel bad. I was just smart enough to know. I mean, it wasn't like they came from a different school than I did any way. It wasn't like anyone was going to be really chummy with me unless they lived in the

Courts which there were people I went to school with that lived in the Courts. So it didn't matter a whole lot. Not at all.

DW: Well, that's good. Could you tell me a bit about Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church and the role that the church played in the community?

CSM: Gosh, there's so much about the church. This woman, Ruby Moore, I know that a group of people approached her when they saw her teaching a little Sunday school class out on the playground. They'd already started planning Seigle Avenue. I remember when I first went to the church; the first class I was in was called Cherubs. I was a Cherub. Oh Lord, that was a long time ago. But I was a Cherub. Later on, especially when you got to be a teenager, there was something always going on at the church. At one point they had a lady who volunteered to come over and give piano lessons. You could take piano lessons. Nancy was in the Girl Scouts there, my sister. They had that. They had a wonderful program with the Boy Scouts. Then we had choir. We had different groups of choir. We had the Pioneer Boys, the Pioneer Girls, Junior Girls, whatever and each one of us sang in the boys choir, the girls choir, the adult choir, the senior choir. You were in choir practice. Miss Mattson was the director of religious education. She was our choir leader. We would memorize anthems that we were going to sing on Sunday. I remember Jerusalem, we sang that. We thought that was wonderful. We could sing Jerusalem. We were just about twelve or thirteen years old. We memorized this so as a treat she would pile us in the car. You know no seat belts back then. You didn't have to worry. Now there weren't that many cars on the road. She'd pile us in the car and take us over to Stanley Drugs which was on Seventh Street. They had a fountain over there, a soda fountain. We could get cherry smashes or we could get

milkshakes or whatever. That was our reward. She was good to us like that. Then there was the--.

Right out here was the camp on Camp Stewart Road, the Presbyterian camp. Each year several of us would get to go to camp from the church. I don't know how many years I got to go. That was part of the church. Then the church had a softball team. Then the church would have a fish fry. The church had a clothes closet. The sunshine day nursery began at the church. They used the church building to start the nursery. Gosh, what else went on over there? We had Vespers on Sunday night. People don't have Sunday service night much anymore. We had Vespers. What else? Sometimes we just visited other churches. A lot of times, our choir, our group would visit nursing homes and sing for them. The church was a main stay in the community there. There were a lot of people from the Courts who went to the church there--.Let's see. I can't remember. There was so much that went on there. I can't remember. We'd take day trips.

We tricked Miss Mattson one time like kids will do. Back in the 50's they had a place out on Wilkinson Boulevard called the Star Castle. This was when rock and roll music was starting. She was very--. She was an old maid. She was very straight laced. We talked her into taking us to the Star Castle. It was a high glassed in building and it had like boxes like at the drive-in. You could speak through those boxes and ask the DJ to play a record. He was up there. You could see him. She was so straight laced we said, "Oh, take us out to the Star Castle." Here is this very religious, very stern woman drives these young teenage girls out to the Star Castle. Here is these kids out there dancing, just boogey-woogeying, some of them even hugging and kissing. Boy, she saw

that and she whipped that car around and she got us out of there as fast as she took us. Needless to say we never got to go back to the Star Castle with Miss Mattson again. She didn't trust us anymore after that. I don't know where she thought she was going. You know how teenagers are. She was a good woman. We'd help her in the office when back then they mimeographed the bulletins and things. We would fold the bulletins or things like that. You could either have friends to play with, go to the library, go to the church. There was something going on all the time around there. Kept us pretty busy. I would be anywhere I could be rather than be at home doing housework.

DW: That's never a bad thing.

CSM: Slip out the door.

DW: I'm curious when you talked a lot about your earlier memories of Piedmont Courts. I curious to hear your thoughts of the transitional period of Piedmont Courts in the late '60s and '70s when blacks started to move into the Courts. What are your memories of that shift?

CSM: I wasn't there too long. I'm trying to remember the family that moved in. I think, if I'm not mistaken, they were either the first family or the second family that moved in the Courts. It was Isaac and they had a little boy. I'm trying to remember the wife's name. They moved in on the porch with my mama and daddy which would have been across the street from me. It was just the three. They were very quiet and he had a job. I can't remember about the wife if she worked. I believe she was a stay at home mom at that time. That's about all that I remember about them. I didn't know the family who moved in down in the back of the Courts. That's where the first family moved in

was in the back of the Courts. Then Isaac and his family moved in. [Interuption-cell phone ringing] I can't believe that's my pocket book.

DW: Do you want me to stop?

CSM: Yes, I'll see who it was later on. Anyway, that's all I can remember but later on, Sheila. I met Sheila. Sheila lived down in the Courts. She lived on the wide street. She was young black woman. She works at the Diamond Restaurant. As it turned out, Sheila married Isaac's son. They're really the only people I knew really well that lived in the Courts. Then I would see some people at church but I never really knew their name or anything. The woman who works there, but I can't think of her name. The memory is gone. What is her name? I can't think of it. Anyway, they were the only people that I knew that well to talk with. I saw Sheila at the reunion, when we had the reunion. She showed me the apartment that they lived in. Sheila really came after I had moved--.

DW: Do you recall any sense of neighbors in Piedmont Courts that this change was a welcome change for blacks to move in to the Courts?

CSM: I don't think anybody was really mad or upset about it. I know my family didn't mind one way or the other. I never really heard anybody say anything negative about it. I knew that eventually people would probably start moving out. I think what happened was that it was like things that they have known were changing. People for the most part don't like a change. I can honestly say I never hear anyone say anything ugly or be nasty about the whole situation. I guess they more or less accepted it, but they weren't comfortable maybe that's it--. Like Isaac and them, they were just really nice people. How could you not like somebody like that? They were nice. They were quiet.

They were nice. It would be like any other neighbor if you were nasty. You wouldn't want to associate with them. But they were nice. I wish I could remember the woman's name. I can't remember her name--. What is that? Why is that?

DW: Do you remember--? You were saying your grandparents lived on Belmont or lived in Belmont community. Was there a sense that the two, Piedmont Courts and Belmont, were one and the same? That people who lived in Piedmont Courts felt that they were a part of the Belmont neighborhood?

CSM: No, we were separate. We definitely were separate. In fact, some of the boys would say and this never happened, I don't know why they would do that. But the boys would say we going to have a fight with the boys from Belmont tonight. It never happened. It never happened. Oh Lord, no. They were separate neighborhoods. Belmont was a little--. Belmont was another little place that was just a little town within itself because they had the bakery. They had the soda shop. They had a beauty shop. I mean, Pegram Street was like a little town, grocery store. They had two good grocery stores there. They had Covington down on Belmont and Pegram. Then they had Polks at Pegram and Kennon Street. Then what was the name of that little drug, little snack shop there on Pegram? I can't think. Anyway, it was Rowland, Mr. Rowland owned that. It was on Pegram and Kennon across from the grocery store. It was like a little separate area. I used to get my hair fixed on Pegram Street up near Parkwood, up near the school. They had everything up on Pegram Street. Belmont was more houses other than the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army's been then since I can remember. Of course, it's not the same building because the building was wood and it burned down many years ago. That was separate. 1st Ward was separate.

DW: We were talking about Piedmont Courts. After you moved out did you still have any relationship with Belmont or Piedmont Court neighborhoods, communities?

CSM: Well, my grandmother had not moved off Parsons Street yet. Piedmont Courts, we still had friends down there. We had an old family friend. She was like a second mother to us, Willie, Willie Wingate. She was still there. We'd go visit her and spend the night. Like my husband was in the military so if he had duty or something then we'd spend the night, make tuna casserole. So then I was there. It seemed like it wasn't probably any longer that '67 because then Willie passed away. She was about the only person left that I knew really that well--. I don't know.

DW: After you moved out then by 1967 you moved to a different location. You still attended Seigle--.

CSM: I attended more then. I attended the church because my daddy was still going to church there. He was like the custodian and still was involved in the church there then. I still went to church there. I think we moved to Boston for a short while. I think it was then--. It was probably I'd say more like when we moved out where we are now my church going became less and less, probably about '76. Of course, it was more than once or twice a year at that time. I loved the church too. I loved the church like I loved the Courts. I just fell by the way side like an old weed. What can I say?

DW: I'm also interested in hearing what you think about the changes of the community in the '70s and '80s and '90s before Piedmont Courts was torn down last year. What changes did you see or observe looking at the community until it was torn down? I could probably rephrase this a little better.

CSM: Yeah, changes are sort of broad.

DW: Yeah, I guess I'm curious find out what you think about the area prior to Belmont or prior to Piedmont Courts being torn down last year given the media portrayals of Piedmont Courts.

CSM: In the first place, it was very surprising. I don't know. They went in there, when was that the '70s or '80s and cleared out a lot of buildings to cut back on crime. They renovated the apartments, updated a lot of things. Unfortunately I never got to see inside of an apartment after it was renovated. I wish I had. They changed some of them around to make them up, closed off some of the end apartments and made larger apartments out of them which would accommodate larger families. The one thing I can't understand is how is it that a place can last and stand for twenty-five years without major renovations and without having to tear out buildings and then in the next twenty-five years it's being torn down. Granted, people would say it's old, it's worn out. There are other buildings standing today. You have to take care of things in order them to last. If you don't know how to take care of things then it's up to the people who's in authority to see that you know how to take care of things. You have to learn. I don't know how you do that. I understand it's going to be different once new apartments are built. I guess people in the know believe they have the answers. The base line or basic thing I believe is that everybody should have a nice place to live. It's up to you to keep it that nice place. It's just a mystery to me how it can get so run down.

As kids we had to go to bed early. One of the things we thought we would sneak and do is that we would put a little peephole back behind the door. We could see people, if they came to visit, come up the stairs. We lived in an upstairs apartment. We start

working on this. It is like concrete, then you get to mesh metal, then it's more concrete. We gave up on the job. This whole time I've been thinking: how in the world do you tear down something that's built like that. Everybody knows, you're young, but everybody knows the building in the '40s compared to building today or even twenty years ago, they were made to last. I guess people want something new; I guess our planners, the housing authority. I still wonder how in the world do you tear down, I mean this is brick; brick on the outside, concrete and metal on the inside. How does it go? That part had not deteriorated. Maybe cabinets, maybe lighting had deteriorated but the rest of it I don't think it had. I guess they figured well we get a new building. We get new tenants. It's going to be a new life.

Honestly, here's what I think happened. Honestly, the minute I saw downtown being revitalized I told my sister I will guarantee you Piedmont Courts will be torn down. That was long ago I said Piedmont Courts will be torn down. Sure enough, I said, "I told you didn't I." Because you don't want people coming in to the city and right here in places where you're trying to sell condos for 150 to a million dollars, do you want people coming in seeing run-down public housing. That's my opinion. I knew it was going.

DW: Are you of the opinion that Piedmont Courts should have been--? Let me rephrase this more open-ended. Where do you think should have been the best solution for Piedmont Courts?

CSM: Well, it's sort of hard to answer because I have sentimentality but at the same time you have to give way to people who probably have studied this. Even though, sentimentality says, "well maybe it could have been renovated." Then the other side says, "Well maybe they do need a new start." I don't really have a really set answer for

that. If I did I would say they probably could have done something with the buildings. I understand it's going to be quite different. I understand that. The residents will not be long term residents that they will learn to be able to take care of things. That there will not be any felons allowed in there. How do you police that? How are you going to say I'm watching you at twelve or one o'clock in the morning? Make sure you don't allow a felon in your house. So that's their dream. Dreams are one thing. Reality is another thing. You can't police people twenty-four hours a day. You have to first start, like you said, with the selection process. I honestly believe that everybody should be entitled to a nice place to live. Hopefully this is going to be really nice. Maybe the thing with it being mixed housing it will be much better. There are supposed to be lots of--. I think the Salvation Army and I believe is it McDonald's or the Kroc Foundation, K-R-O-C foundation, the guy who founded McDonald's. I think they are supposed to be building some kind of new center there. Hopefully it will be a very nice place. Maybe the selection and policing process will work for it. As far as the building themselves, they were pretty strong.

DW: Do you imagine that once all this revitalization takes place or finishes in Piedmont Courts and in Belmont, do you imagine that the mixed income, multi-racial community will actually occur in the Courts and in the neighborhood, and be successful?

CSM: I would hope so. Well, my neighborhood is very diverse. If it can happen in a private sector why can't it in a public/private sector work**.** I just--. Trying to think about human nature when it comes to things like this, what people want and what they don't want. You don't want to pay $200,000 to buy something that would end up becoming a slum area. Nobody would do that. I probably would think. As far as, I

wouldn't hesitate if I thought that area would be the kind of place or the housing or the condos would be a place that I would like to live. I wouldn't hesitate. Personally, I would hate to see the church die. I think people, around the city; I think they need multi-cultured mix. I really do. I believe that. A lot of things are made so that you keep out certain income. Like, for instance, those places right into downtown. If you don't have a lot of money you're not going to buy a condo or a townhouse down there. They are keeping a lot of people out. Same as Myers Park, they don't have to worry about multi-culture because they charge a million, a million and a half for a place. This guy cutting the grass out here, he can't buy that. This retired military man, he can't buy that. They need that. It's good for the city.

DW: Whose responsibility would you say it is to assure that everybody has a chance at fair housing? Whose responsibility ultimately do you think it should be?

CSM: Local government. Probably working with public housing, with the Authority. I don't think it should be anybody outside an area such as somebody in Raleigh shouldn't be seeing some is taken care of here or somebody in Washington DC shouldn't be taking care of something here. I think it should be local.

DW: Why? Why would you say that?

CSM: I think that our local government would have more interest. Of course they would be right in the area. It wouldn't be anything foreign to them. They would actually be here to see and hear what's going on. That's why I think local. It's not Raleigh's business. It's not Washington's business. It's our business. Of course that grant comes from Washington. Still I don't know how many fingers they have in the pie. I'm sure they are going to see that their money is--. Hopefully, I don't know about that

though, that they would see that their money would be used for what it was intended to be used for, wouldn't you?

DW: Yes, I think that goes back to human nature again.

CSM: Don't be trying to pull one over on me. I hope I do see recreation, a place where these residents can meet and it can be done peacefully. I don't know. I guess the real purpose was to give people another chance at decent housing. That's all I can think that it would be. Of course if I had gone to some of those meetings at the church that I received letters about I would know more because they had their fingers in the pie with some of this planning and all was going on.

DW: Seigle Avenue?

CSM: Yes. Their building is called the Hope building also. That was long before this Hope Grant.

DW: Interesting.

CSM: Yeah, what a coincidence.

DW: We were talking before about whether you feel public housing, there's a stigma attached when you were living in public housing. Do you think now the perception--? What is your sense of whether public housing is stigmatized today?

CSM: I think it's worse. I think it's worse. Instead of somebody trying to find a way out of public housing people look at people living in public housing as on the lower end of the socio-economic end of the stick. I think it's worse. That's coming from somebody that's been there a long time ago. People always say, "My money, my money." Well it's our money. It's everybody's money that pays for this. I think the stigmatism is more. Nancy, a long time ago, drove the school bus. She was driving in

black areas and even then those kids were saying things about kids in Piedmont Courts. I think it's worse and been worse when a child lives or a person lives in public housing. I don't think that these fights and shootings has helped the image any. It's probably helped to worsen the image of public housing.

DW: So do you think given the stigma and the negative image that gets attached because of the violence that happens, do you feel then that once this area gets revamped that--? Do you foresee that this same stigma will carry forth or do you see it differently?

CSM: If the plans that they have for this area works out I'm thinking and I'm hoping that it is going to be different, that there won't be the drugs and violence in this community--. There probably won't be such a crowded situation. Maybe it will be like whenever we lived in public housing that they will be very strict. I don't see why if a person rents a place or is in authority to rent a place why he cannot say if you tear up or if your friend are not desirables then you have to move. We can't risk other peoples' safety. There are people out there who do want to better themselves and public housing can be a stepping stone. People don't realize that that's always had something. People that's always had, you know, to be out there floundering with three or four children and trying to make ends meet. If nothing else, if you have a decent place to live and lay your children lie down at night that's more comforting. They should hopefully have a really great selection process and be a lot stricter--.Don't let me be the boss. [Laughter]

DW: That might not be such a bad thing [referring to Miller being the boss].

CSM: I was telling Jennifer Gallman, she's the media specialist at the public housing, I was telling her my incident with Mr. Dillehay. I was sixteen years old, married, a kid. Me and my best friend was playing. We were playing. I was a married

woman playing. We were out playing. My grass had gotten a little high at my apartment. Mr. Dillehay came by and he says, "You need to cut your grass." So being a kid I thought he was playing around too. I said something. He said, "I'm not kidding." Me and my friend went out and we got that lawn mower out right away. To this day, I cannot stand for my grass to even grow a tad. I remember that. I thought that was funny but he didn't think it was funny. That's how strict they were on us. You have your grass cut, couldn't even let that happen. It takes something like that. It really does. Some people need keepers. Some people need bosses.

DW: Some people get them even if--.

CSM: Some people get them even if they don't want them. My husband for one. He gets them even if he doesn't want them. Poor old soldier. [Laughter]

DW: I guess one of the last things I wanted to get your opinion on was about Charlotte, the city itself and Charlotte's role in housing in the city. You were talking about the local government should have a definite hand in public housing. What do you think Charlotte's role is in the nation in leading others or being an example to others in public housing? Do you see Charlotte as an exemplar?

CSM: Yeah, I do. Actually, maybe I'm just biased but I think Charlotte's been a great leader in a lot of ways. I think that probably a smart media person is going to see that this Hope thing and this new renovation and revamping of this area will get a lot of publicity. Of course you know Washington is going to use it. Yeah, I think you will see Charlotte in a lot of magazines when this comes about. I think you will see us in Newsweek. Look, look, look if Charlotte can do it, New Orleans can do it. If Charlotte can do it, Memphis can do it. Downtown St. Paul can do it. I think so. I think we will be

a good example for this country, for this nation, with public housing. Let me ask you, do you think that public housing works better than maybe Section 8?

DW: Hmmmm.

CSM: It's just really different?

DW: Yeah, from what I know of public housing. It seems to me yes.

CSM: There's probably pros and cons to both sides.

DW: Yeah.

CSM: I know that I would probably have less hard feelings about public housing rather than Section 8 because we go back to this human nature thing. It's very hard for me to think about once I lived in public housing and in order to own my own home you qualify for a loan and you get a nice house. Then you see your old husband who is seventy going out to work and the guy next door never get a lick. Oh my gosh, this human nature, this thing comes out and says, "I don't understand that." Yeah, I think I would be more inclined to go along with public housing because I've been down that road. I'm saying like, if I can do it you can do it. If all my friends who grew up with me can do it. You can do it. Dwana, you would be amazed at the people who own their home and businesses, just amazed. Those who came from public housing. If one group can do this another group can do this. You just have to want to do it. You have to want to do it. Maybe that sounds easier said than done. Maybe. I don't know.

DW: I was going to ask what you attest to the spirit that everyone keeps going forward. What is it that drove you and your friends to move forward out of public housing?

CSM: The reason I'm smiling, that's strange that you should ask that because I've asked that same question. What is it that spurs a person on and makes them make a go of it? I'd like to know that myself. One of the reasons--. This friend that I met again after fifty years, she was my best friend, she was the one with me when Mr. Dillehay came by to say cut the grass. She had married young. She had married even younger than I. She was fifteen. I saw her husband but the guy that she married I saw him down around Central. He became a street person. Evidently he was an alcoholic. I wondered, "Where is my friend? What happened to her?" I had not seen her in fifty years so I knew she and this guy. Even if he was a street person, I said, "Where is Billy?" He said, "Well, she lives in Greenville." I didn't care if he was a street person. I was going to ask where Billy was. I got to searching and I found out that her father had passed away. I found out her new married name. I saw her daughter. They'd only had one child. I did the detective work. We went to Tennessee this summer. I past through Greenville and I met up with her at a restaurant. She was a young kid when she got married. She went back to school. She became, she worked for a large mill there in Greenville, not as a mill worker but in the office. She became an accountant. She ended up marrying a man who was very successful, owned his business. She, as a kid, took her child, left this alcoholic, went back to school, got her education. That's when I said what is it that's spurs one person, I mean, who told her you need to go back to school. You need to be successful. you have this child. It was just amazing to me. What is that? What is that spark? I asked the same question. I told her you know what I really admire you. That was really great that you decided on your own to leave this person and to go back to school. Simply amazing to me how--. The kids in the Courts, the different jobs, the different places,

what's happened to them. We're not famous. We're not movies stars. We did have kids my age. We had three girls my age group from the Courts at Central in the National Honor Society. That's pretty good. Three. Three that were of the same age in the National Honor Society.

DW: That's great.

CSM: I don't know where they are today. I looked in my--. But they were smart girls. That's the kind of kids that were in the Courts. Nobody told us, "Hey, you have to study. Hey you have to go to school." I asked the same question. You know what. If I have to give an answer other than maybe I think at first it begins at home, environment, parents. I think that's what--. I had my parents. I had good parents. They were strict. We didn't get out after dark. That's what Nancy always tells people. You know why we got married young? So we could stay out after dark. My first husband was the only boy I ever dated and I married him. My parents, they were strict but people respected us. They respected my parents. I'm glad I was raised that way. I wouldn't trade a minute of my life in Piedmont Courts and every person in these pictures wherever Nancy put them. They would say I love Piedmont Courts. Then again, you might ask, "If you love Piedmont Courts so much why did you leave?" "Because it's back to that human nature." That thing inside that says I want a place of my own. I want to go off, establish my family, my own little nest and that's what it is. Thomas Wolfe, you can't go home again. Memories we can go home but we'd never be able to go back there again. That place, it's all up here now, in our heads.

DW: Well when you had your reunion I think I was talking with Jennifer Gallman as well. Was that in March of last year?

CSM: It was May of this year.

DW: May of this year, okay.

CSM: Right down there. They opened up the gates for us. They already had the chain link fence around the Courts. They opened it up and some people from the Housing Authority, course like Nancy said, from the media, people that's building the new apartments and condos. They were there. It was very nice.

DW: There was a lot of people that came back to--.

CSM: A lot of people who came back. People later on said if I had known I would have been there. We didn't have any way of getting in touch with people that we had lost touch with. For instance, my friend, Billie Faye said, "I would have been there." My friend in Indiana, she said, "Oh, I would have to have notice but I would have been there." We're trying to get another reunion. It'd be nice. The majority of us, like my friend Evelyn and Joyce, Joyce was in that picture too, we've know each other. Nancy and her friends, three or four of them, they've been like this all these years. My poor old friend, where is she? [Shows the pictures from the May 2006 reunion of former Piedmont Court residents]

My poor old friend, right there, she's getting Alzheimer's. What is it? We don't know when we're growing up, when we're bouncing around how we're going to end up. My poor friend, of all the things in the world, poor old Ruth who would have ever guessed it. She loved music. Me and her used to go to the movies and see musicals all the time. We could sing practically every song from the musicals. We played on the front porch. We played Monopoly, just the two of us.

DW: That's a long game.

CSM: That was a long game. It's a good thing we had plenty of time. That's what we'd do in the summers. It would be so hot. There would be no air conditioning. We set out there and play Monopoly.

When I was pregnant with my first child and it was so hot. The little girl that lived next door to my mama, she was about ten or eleven, I would play jack rocks with her. I was twenty-one and she was ten or eleven and I would play with her. Nothing to do it was so hot. Those were fun times down there. I can't see it but this is where they playground was, right outside our house. This was our apartment right here at the end. These trees are so big now but I've sat under that tree many, many times. That's all there is. This is made down like our apartment would be at this end. These are the apartments downstairs. That's Billie. They used to come around with ponies and take pictures. So we had our picture made on Billie, 1947. I was about nine years old.

DW: That's a cute picture.

CSM: It is a cute picture. I love that. Billy had polio. Used to kids once the polio scare before the vaccine, kids couldn't go to pools and things in the summer if there was polio. He got polio. He had a paper route. When he'd carry the paper and he had extras we'd go around there on Seigle Avenue and sell them, make us some money. He'd let us have them. Me and Nancy would sell them, get us some money for candy and drinks. He's a good kid. He's got white hair now, snow white hair. He's a good kid. I don't remember his cousin. Everybody had a crush on Nancy. Nobody had a crush on me.

DW: Wait until I talk to Nancy. She'll say something different--.

CSM: She'll tell you. She'll tell you they had a crush. She'll tell you I didn't ever talk to anybody. I was a very shy. I stayed in the house and read or day dreamed or stuff like that. She got out and played ball and fought with the boys and everything. Then they'd have a crush on her. [Laughs] Not me. I just minded my own business.

DW: That's great**.**

CSM: Are we through now?

DW: Yes, I was going to ask you if there was anything else that I didn't ask you that you think is important or anything else you'd like to say.

CSM: [Pause] Lord, I can't believe I'm speechless. Nancy will cover everything. It's so funny about sisters. That's another thing. Growing up in the same family, oh my gosh, you are going to find out things are so different. There's a story about the blind man and the elephant. One's feeling the tail, one's feeling the trunk and one's feeling the legs. They are different parts of an elephant. They describe him and he's different. He's still the same elephant but they're describing him differently. That's me and Nancy. She'll say we were poor. I'll say, "Nancy, we were not poor." I say, "We may not have had as much as other people but we were not poor." That's her story. Then instead of saying we lived in public housing, you know what she says, we lived in the ghetto. Dan says, "We did not live in the ghetto." She tickles me. You'll see things different when it comes to Nancy. It will be all together different. You won't even think you're talking about the same place.

DW: Different perspectives are good.

CSM: Even if they do come from girls who was raised in the same family. I know the director down at the Shepherd Center, she said, "I know your sisters and you

were raised in the same household but you sound differently." I said, "Yeah, I know isn't that weird." I don't know where she was. She is real talkative. We've always been friends.

I had anorexia then. [Points to a picture of herself] When my baby was born I weighed 103 pounds. I weighed eighty-nine pounds. Look at them skinny legs. Nobody would believe that now would they? Too many biscuits on the hips. Isn't that something? You change over the years don't you? Nancy she's about ready for you. Speaking of food, I'm going to go find some.

DW: I guess I will stop the interview here. Thank you so much.

CSM: Thank you. It's been fun.

DW: Yeah, it's been great.

END OF INTERVIEW