START OF INTERVIEW

Darius Scott: The date is August 5th, 2015. I’m here with Miss Evon Connally to conduct an oral history interview. Thank you for having me Miss Connally.

Evon Connally: You’re welcome.

DS: Could you tell me a little bit about your family’s history?

EC: History. Okay. My parents, my father was a sharecropper originally. And after several years of sharing his crop with others, he decided I’m not making anything here. So he chose to become a brick mason and started working for contractors. Eventually he was not, he didn’t have his own business, but he did a lot of jobs on his own. So you would see a lot of bricks in the community that he--. He helped do my steps. Well, he actually did my steps for the house and all over Chapel Hill [and] Durham. He justloved brick masonry. And my brothers I was hoping would carry it on, but neither one of them did. They worked as laborers with him. I have three brothers.

And mother worked at textiles. That was my first job, turning socks. I said, “Mom, this is not going to work. It’s too rough for me.” Picking the socks up, pulling them on your arm, throwing them over your shoulder, get a dozen, batch them up. Picking the…justover and over. So it was too repetitive for me. That was my first job doing that. And I realized that’s not what I wanted to--.

So she did that until retirement. She retired when my son was born at twenty-one. And I have one sister. She was the first one to go on to college. Went to Raleigh. Stayed in Raleigh probably twenty-some years, married and had one son. And now she moved back home here [in] Mebane. She’s a postmaster with the postal service. And she says she’s going to retire next year so we’ll see.

And me, I have a husband and the one son. We’ve been married now almost thirty-four years. Got married on Halloween. So it’s been trick or treat every year. And workwise I started with that sock turning job, ended up going in to Burlington Industries, and I did that for about nineteen years working in the warehouse, driving a tow motor.

DS: What is Burlington Industries?

EC: Yeah, BI, they, Burlington Industries—

DS: What is, what do they do?

EC: Mostly mattress ticking. Right now they’ve gone out of business. It’s a few of them still manufacturing. All the jobs went overseas. So that caused a lot of people to have to go elsewhere. So after I lost my job with them in [19]90, 1990, [19]89 or [19]90, I went with Alamance Regional Medical Center, local hospital. I’ve been doing that now for twenty-four years.

DS: What were you doing with the hospital?

EC: My job title originally was telemetry clerk, worked in the critical care unit answering the phone, taking off doctor’s orders, patient call bells, mostly watching the heart monitors. So I’m still doing that right now. I work three days a week.

DS: Okay.

EC: Twelve hours.

DS: Yeah. How do you like that?

EC: I must like it because a lot of people look at me when they see how the job goes. I mean it’s interacting with people. I meet a lot of people. A lot of times it’s sad, but on an average it’s rewarding to just be there for the families when they’re going through. A lot of people say how do you stand all the death. How do you stand this? I said, well, it must be my calling because I still get emotional with some families depending, but overall just being there as a support. And a lot of people thank me for being there with a smile. So I guess I like it and that must be my calling.

DS: Okay and so you said your father was a sharecropper originally.

EC: Um hmm.

DS: That was before you were born?

EC: No, after I was born, before and after yes.

DS: Okay. And where was this that he was sharecropping.

EC: Caswell County, Pleasant, we did some sharecropping mostly in Caswell County.

DS: Okay.

EC: And we moved a lot. We started out in Cedar Grove and then we moved to Pleasant Grove. That’s the community names. And ended up here in Mebane.

DS: Was that to follow where the farms were?

EC: Yes, if things didn’t go well with this farm, then he’d move on to the next one.

DS: Okay. How old were you when he stopped doing that?

EC: I would guess we moved to Mebane, White Level probably around [whisper] about 1960—I’m going to guesstimate around [19]65. So I would’ve been probably what about eight, about seven or eight years old.

DS: So quite young. Do you recall the moment when you guys went from the sharecropping family to like your father going to work at the mill?

EC: Well, he never worked in a mill.

DS: I’m sorry.

EC: He worked with the brick mason.

DS: The brick mason.

EC: I remember the most exciting part was we lived in old houses, white, no running water, no bathrooms, and I remember we bought, my dad bought a mobile home. So that was like, “Oh wow we’re living in a trailer. Yay. We’ve got running water, washing machine, all those things.” I remember those times as being really great. I really do. I probably was seven or eight, somewhere in that range, nine, starting school good, and I justthought I was something. My grandmother lived in Mebane. So the lot that they built the house on eventually, well put the trailer on and then eventually built the house on was next door to her. So we had family. It’s always been about family.

DS: Okay. And was there anyone else who lived in your home while you were growing up?

EC: I have three brothers and the one sisters.

DS: One sister and your parents.

EC: Um hmm.

DS: Okay, and I do wonder when you were growing up did your parents tell you stories about your older relatives like great grandparents, great great grandparents?

EC: My dad was a family man. He would take, he would take off on Sunday mornings and visit his brother, either one of his brothers. He had, there’s ten of them total. So he would pop in on either brother or sister have breakfast with them. Then he had several brothers, a couple of brothers that would come. You wake up on Sunday morning and they’re in there eating breakfast, having a good time. So it was always about family.

DS: Okay.

EC: Yeah.

DS: And the history about like your great grandparents?

EC: My grandmother and grandfather, that’s the reunion we’ll be celebrating, my dad’s dad next Saturday, the Pulliams. And originally we did not know of a Pulliam reunion that Dad would go to. We would always go to Mom’s on her side. So several of my cousins and I decided twelve--this is the twelfth year--twelve years ago that we would start Charlie Cleveland Pulliam reunion. So that’s what we’re celebrating, my grandfather. And he had two wives, my grandmother and a previous wife. And then my dad had two wives, my mom and a previous wife. So it’s like a Pulliam tradition. He had a couple of brothers the same thing. His brothers did the same thing. So both families now celebrate. Granddaddy had three girls and two, well no, he had one girl and four boys before my grandmother met him. So Granny was eighteen, and she took on him and his four children.

DS: Goodness.

EC: Yeah, and so then she started having her children. And she had the six, my dad and other two girls and their brothers. So it’s always about family basically. I mean I don’t really bond that much with my coworkers and they wonder. But I always tell them family is everything. So that’s my main focus, family.

DS: Yeah. Backtracking a little bit. Could you talk about where you were born?

EC: I was born in Burlington at the local hospital. By that, by the time I was born we were living probably in Pleasant Grove somewhere out in the Burlington area. My sister and older brother, both of them were born in Chapel Hill. Everybody would go to Chapel Hill for births. But it was February, and I think the weather was bad. So my uncle took my mom to Burlington. So I’m an Alamance County born and bred.

DS: Okay, awesome. Could you talk about the physical environment you grew up in before your family moved here for the masonry work?

EC: I have a couple of memories. We had, it’s old, like I said an older home, older houses, snakes. I remember Mom beating a snake off the tree, and at that time they would take the broom out in the yard and sweep. Like you sweep your floors inside, they would sweep the yard. There wasn’t a lot of grass to rake or mow. It was justtrees, older community, older areas. Other people had lived in the houses and we followed in. We never really owned them. We were passing through basically.

But yeah, I remember one supper we were sitting at the table and something I said. We all sat and ate and we had to have no hats on. We couldn’t chew chewing gum. Well, we could chew it, but my dad always despised the popping when you pop your gum, couldn’t do that. But it was something I said at this particular meal that did not go well with him and he could just look at you, same thing with mom, they could look at you and you knew that you were in trouble. So I was being smart, going to get up and take off running. My dad got up and came to the door. I ran out the back door. I mean which we had a wood stove in the kitchen where we cooked on. And then I don’t know steps or something, but when I jumped out of the door, I feel and broke my arm. So I broke my right arm from running from a whipping that I thought I wasn’t going to get, ended up getting the broke arm and the whipping. So we were taught respect. It was basically a look. You know how parents now have to fuss and repeat and don’t get things done. That was not allowed. Dad was strict. I can’t really say I remember Mom actually whipping or spanking, but she would say things and tell us to do something and we would do. That was the end of it. No talking back, none of that.

We didn’t have all of the electronics. We went out and played, and I mean, we were fine. We would go out and figure out stuff to do. I never remember using the word bored and I hear it almost on a daily basis. I’m bored. Do something, figure out something. This generation now, this age era is the me generation as I call it. And everybody wants to be entertained and catered to, but back in my growing up days, we were not allowed to sit in on adult’s conversation. We were humble; we were quiet. The exciting thing was getting in the car and riding to town. I mean just going. You might be going to get groceries. We might not even be allowed to get out of the car, but the exciting thing was going. So it was fun back then. We were close knit. It was five of us and we stuck together.

DS: Yeah. And when you were passing through these different houses with your family, would you meet other kids around. Would they be the same kids who you met before or different kids depending on which farm you were on?

EC: Well, I can’t remember any--. I don’t really have any childhood friends that I kept. So I guess each time we moved it was a different, different group.

DS: That’s interesting.

EC: Yeah, because my first years at school I started out at Cedar Grove Elementary. And I’m not sure if it was two or three years, but I also went to Pleasant Grove Elementary and that’s two different communities. And then when we moved to Mebane what was the, it was West End, West End Elementary, I think the fifth grade, and at that time they integrated. So we ended up on sixth grade going to Mebane Public which was integrated schools. But I remember elementary school May Day we had some fun. That was a whole day of dressing up and having fun, playing all day. It was a great time.

DS: This was at West End Elementary?

EC: West End, um hmm. May Day.

DS: May Day.

EC: We would wrap the flag pole and it’s a tradition.

DS: That’s awesome.

EC: That was good. Everybody was…treats, snacks it was great.

DS: Did you have stuff like that at the other schools, Cedar Grove?

EC: Yes. May Day was always, I’m not sure if it was the first of May, but it was always May Day. We call it May Day, activity outside all day.

DS: And I have one more question about the farming and the homes. Would they be furnished? Would you have to furnish them, moving stuff?

EC: I think so. But—

DS: It’s hard to recall.

EC: I’m not sure about that. I’m fifty-seven now. So that’s been a good fifty-some years, fifty years at least. I think they were furnished.

DS: Okay. Interesting. Okay, so I know you mentioned the home you moved into in Mebane was different than what you were used to. It was a mobile home, had water.

EC: Right.

DS: What about the school then, the environment itself, the community? Did it feel different as well?

EC: Back in like first, second, third grade we went school to school. That was pretty close knit. We had, it was all black schools of course. And it was, I guess you would say I don’t have a lot of memories of elementary, but like the May Day is a good one. And the teachers were much sterner, and it was as though, I felt as though I was with like a parent that leadership type role adult. But now I detect that the schools are actually more like friends. It’s like a friend kind of thing. So I see the kids being more verbal and opinionated and, but at that time we were, I don’t think I got any spankings in the school, but at that time they were allowed to spank you. I might have gotten a paddle or two.

DS: So it was pretty much the same whether you were in Cedar Grove or Mebane, West End. That was the way things went.

EC: Right. That level of respect was, it was I won’t say it was beat into you, but it was actually, it was forced on you and after a while you said okay. This is the way I’ve got to do it. I’ll do it that way. So yeah.

DS: Interesting. And when did you come to the White Level community?

EC: I’m thinking, that’s when we moved in the mobile home. So that was like I say around [19]60s, [19]60s.

DS: Okay. So you’ve been here since then.

EC: Um hmm.

DS: Wow.

EC: Actually once I married we moved to, my husband is from Caswell County, Sweet Gum. So we moved in with his mom when we first got married. And that was in Sweet Gum. Stayed with her about a year, and I was twenty, in the twenties and oh well. Here I am world. And I told him I said, we just can’t, it was so far. He worked in Hopedale and I worked at BI or on, in Burlington. So driving back and forth. We were both on second shift, and I said, “Look like we could find us a place in Burlington.” So we did. We moved into a home in Burlington on Holly Street and stayed there about a year with the promise that the guy was going to sell us a home. We rented with option to buy. But he never decided to sell. So after about a year we moved to Graham and bought a house. And we stayed in Graham about fifteen years.

And then one day visiting Mom I saw the sign out “land for sale”. I told him. I said we’ve got a chance to go back to Mebane. And so it was a struggle, but we finally got, we bought the land. We stayed in Graham and sold the house and moved here in [19]99. So--

DS: Okay. So you came back to Mebane.

EC: Back to my roots, yes. Yes. And my husband has adjusted pretty well because he’s used to the country living. And I think he’s pretty happy being here.

DS: And what do you think drives that move back home? I’ve heard that from Omega too because he moved back after going off to Mebane.

EC: There is truth to the statement there is no place like home.

DS: Okay.

EC: Yes and especially if you’re family oriented. It’s convenient to be nearer [to] family. My grandmother, auntie, I had one aunt that lived next door to Mom. My mom, my grandmother and then my aunt. And she had a son and then cousins, it feels better to me to be in an environment with family. I mean neighbors are good. But it’s nothing like family to me.

DS: Okay, and how has it changed over time White Level?

EC: Well, over time our elders have passed on, and unfortunately like my grandmother’s house, my brother lives in it. And my auntie, they had one granddaughter. And she chose, I guess like me, she wanted to get out and say here I am world. She married and had a son, and she decided she didn’t want to live in White Level. So that house has been sold, and now we have Hispanics living there, which they are excellent neighbors. I mean, a lot of people say what they say, but those are excellent neighbors. Whenever they garden, they’ll always take mom something. So they fit in very well. And then you saw the houses along the front of Mrs. White’s Lane. Those are new. This development used to be a sub—well, it’s still a subdivision. And it was a private subdivision. There across the street from me was, is a ten-acre plot and there was one family that lived there. They’ve sold since we’ve been here, and it was planned to be another subdivision within a subdivision. But somehow that deal fell through. But these out here on the front of Mrs. White’s Lane, that’s part of Rutledge Run subdivision. And now that part of it is Mebane city limits. So the Mebane city limits ends right at the corner of our lot and it goes all the way down. Then our lot is a square. So at the back of our lot is Mill Creek subdivision. Did you come down [Highway] 119?

DS: Yes.

EC: Yeah, okay so that Mill Creek subdivision is part of the city, Mebane City and then my subdivision goes down. It’s about eight houses down there. We are considered the EJ, ETJ or EJT or whatever. Extra-terrestrial jurisdiction [extra-territorial jurisdiction] of Mebane. So we’re not city, but anything happens we, like police or whatever we have to call the county, the sheriff department. So for some reason they decided to doughnut hole us in this little subdivision and the rest of the city.

So getting moved in here, that was a definite challenge. Trying to get the city to, first of all this is a modular home. So they said you can’t do a double-wide. Okay, we didn’t do the double-wide. We did a modular and we had to build a septic tank. And then getting that approved and perked and passed and inspected and all that. That was a challenge. But we prevailed and so now, I think all my neighbors, we have city water, not Mebane City but Orange-Alamance water. And all my neighbors have septic systems down this way. But I think on this end on up to this, Mebane City water, garbage, trash, well garbage pick-up, trash pick-up. And they of course pay extra city taxes. So with us being here we’re just county taxes. So that’s one thing that’s keeping people down, not really down, but out of the city. We have an option to go inside, annex into the city, but most of the people want to justpay county taxes. So say you know how much my taxes would go up if we—so that’s another dilemma.

DS: What do you think about it?

EC: Well, I would like to have a paved street, a sidewalk, curb and gutter and all that. And with that I’m sure comes extra costs. So getting my husband and some of the other neighbors on board would be the thing. So I’m ready. They’re not. So hopefully as time goes on, yeah.

DS: Okay. So thinking back to when you first moved here, so now I guess it’s more people and more diversity.

EC: Yes.

DS: Would you describe White Level historically as an all African American community?

EC: At one point, yes. But right now we are more diverse. It’s seven houses here and out of the seven there would be two black and five white. So we are more diverse. And then this neighborhood of mine I have two. It’s eight lot. I have two, three blacks, and then there are other whites. So we’re starting to blend a little better.

DS: Okay.

EC: But overall it’s historically black. And then there’s another section to White Level well, two different sections. But if you keep down Mrs. White’s Lane is Fuller Road. That area was Fuller territory. It was all Fullers. And like I said the seniors have died off and then the children have stayed, but the land got sold to different ones, and there’s different, there’s a lot of whites on that end too. So we don’t really stand out so much as a historically black [area] anymore but predominantly.

DS: And looking out at the geography and the houses and the land and stuff, does it look any different than when you were moving here?

EC: It’s, as far as looking different. Yeah, yeah, I would say so. The houses are more expensive I guess you could say. But the ones that were originally here we have several of them that are gone down [run down] and nobody’s doing anything with them. So yes and no. It’s better, but it’s still some problems.

DS: Okay. That’s interesting. Well, and were there other kids around in White Level who you played with?

EC: There, yes. Yes. And actually one of my best friends Stacy Evans, she married, and her and her husband built a house on her home property. So she’s down near my parents. She’s still ( ). And a couple of other families the kids have moved in, grown up and built and moved in. So yeah. Some of them are still here.

DS: Interesting. And when you, how did y’all meet up? Did you have bikes or did you walk?

EC: We walked. Stacy and I would hang out for like hours and hours. I’d go to her house and hang out, her and her mom. Her mom had a little dog Sparkle. I’ll never forget Sparkle. Sparkle was spoiled rotten, a Chihuahua like Kiki. And we’d play and then Stacy’d get tired of ( ), she’d say let’s go to your house. So we’d go down to my house, down in the woods. And we’d go out and play dolls and mud pies and hours and hours and hours. And it was just, it was fun, justfun, we could always think of things to do. The lightning bugs…but now nobody wants to leave the house. It’s too hot. My son particularly, he hates to even go outside. I said boy you’re dying. You’re body’s aging faster than mine.

DS: You need the sun. [laughing]

EC: But yeah, it has changed. And yes, and Stacy actually has a son that lives on the corner house. So he’s started his family so.

DS: Okay. Do you think it would be safe for kids to walk around like you did nowadays?

EC: I think so. We’ve not really got a high crime incident yet. I’ll knock on wood for that. Mostly everybody knows everybody still. So I think so.

DS: Awesome. Switching gears a little bit. What role did religion have on your experience growing up? Was church something everybody went to?

EC: Oh yeah.

DS: Yeah, okay.

EC: Definitely, every Sunday we were, yeah. After first moving back I wouldn’t go to Sunday school. But now I look forward to it. Yeah, so yeah, it’s a big part. And the church that I’m a member of, my grandmother was, my grandfather, great grandfather, then my grandmother and my mom and now me, so I’m having a little trouble getting Donnell in there, but he grew up in the church.

DS: Your son.

EC: Um hmm, so it’s a big part.

DS: Could you talk about your observance and the routine going to church?

EC: Um hmm.

DS: What?

EC: I’m Baptist. I’ve always been Baptist. I say sometimes that if it wasn’t for Mom, Mom doesn’t drive, that I wouldn’t be going to that particular church. But because there’s churches everywhere, White Level has two, three actually pretty big churches. And sometimes passing a church and running late thinking if I was here, I wouldn’t have so far to go. It’s about twenty minutes from here Prospect Hill. But like I said, I’ve gotten involved. My role in the church is assistant church clerk. And I am part of the missionary, and I’m also secretary to the missionary. So I’ve got a lot of stakes in the church. So I couldn’t just pull up, pull out and I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t. And it’s very important to me that my pastor, I really love him. He’s been there thirty some, thirty-eight years. Reverend James Brown. And he’s a good speaker, good teacher. He spends a lot of time teaching. As a matter of fact today we have intercessory prayer. So he does a lot for the members. We’re not as out in the community as much as I’d like to be, but the spiritual part of it, he definitely spends a lot of time teaching and preaching, helping each member.

DS: That’s interesting.

EC: Um hmm.

DS: So one on one and it’s a learning experience.

EC: Definitely.

DS: That’s awesome.

EC: Yeah, that’s a very important part.

DS: And how long have you gone there?

EC: Lifetime.

DS: Lifetime. Okay.

EC: Yes.

DS: Is it, is the size of the congregation stayed the same?

EC: We’re losing members for some reason or another. Most of them are family, I can probably tell you seven or eight main families that started the church and then their children and friends are still there. But we’ve had some new members to come, and it’s not as, the attendance is not as good as it used to be. So there’s a falling away from the church. I’m not sure if it’s work because I mean even with my job I worked, a hospital never closes. So I worked last weekend. So I will definitely be there this weekend. But some of it is work, and some of it is they’re going to other churches, bigger churches. And then the least little falling out now people don’t want to work it out. They want to walk out. So we're experiencing that.

DS: Okay. I guess people see they have so many options they run every which a way to see.

EC: Um hmm. Yeah. Want to see if the grass is greener. And sometimes the person that leaves is the problem. They take the problem with them. Yeah. So yeah.

DS: Could you talk about what you know about the history of the church itself? I know this area has quite a few historic African American churches.

EC: Yeah, my church, like I say Warren Chapel is a family church. And we celebrate our 100 years in [19]99 is a hundred year celebration. So it’s an old, old fixture. There’s a new, we built a new sanctuary [19]98, seven, [19]97. And then the old church is now the fellowship hall. So it’s a beautiful, I think I’ve got a, I don’t know if I moved it. I probably moved it during the cleaning for the family. But it’s in Prospect Hill, which like I said is twenty minutes away.

And we have Kimes’ Chapel, which is on [Highway] 119 as you leave the community. They have grown a lot. They have a young speaker, Reverend Tyrone Austin. And he lives in the community. And then also we have Greater Canaan, which is a new church, but the community members, a lot of them are here, and they built their sanctuary probably 2000. They do a lot for the community. Every third Saturday they’ll have a food distribution. So anybody can go in and sign up and then they’ll distribute whatever they can collect. So and then we have White Level Primitive Baptist Church, which is really an old church. I’m not sure how many years old it is. But it’s historical. It was, they were working on putting it into the historical, I don’t know how that came. I need to follow up on that.

DS: Okay. And switching gears again to talk about the West End Revitalization Association, what has been your role with WERA?

EC: Originally one of my cousins was involved, and he was over, he had too much going on because he’s very involved in the church and then family and what not. So he asked me if I would be willing to join the board, and I was like well I don’t know what to do. So anyway I went to one of the meetings and got involved and was accepted as a board member, became the secretary, board secretary as a matter of fact. And we started, after being involved we started doing things like the [Highway] 119 bypass issue. There was a committee formed after, well, we attended city council meetings. We tried to engage the community petitions, different things and make sure that once that bypass is built we would have access. Then the destruction that happens with construction, we wanted to make sure that the community wasn’t destroyed or compromised and tried to get people more involved in the process. So our role as an organization was to inform, keep people informed and get them involved.

DS: Okay.

EC: Because a lot of people have, not a lot, several people have already sold properties to the state for the bypass. But we wanted them to know you’ve got certain rights. Don’t justsettle for two dollars when you can get two thousand or whatever. So as a board member we test different water samples to make sure that the water’s not contaminated. Sewer issues, some of them, even putting our septic tank in. We had problems where it wouldn't perc. The land wouldn’t perc at first and then we had to go back further, deeper, more expensively to actually get a septic system to work. And then there’s a lot of people that have had failing septic systems. So we tried to work with them on getting, like I said the fact that people didn’t want to pay the county and the city taxes, that kept a lot of people having to pump the septic tank this month, couple of months later pump it again because it’s something about the soil, it doesn’t absorb like it should. Even with our system we had to dig, we had to dig like this, this, this and this, like a snake-like—

DS: Goodness.

EC: And then you put gravels in and then you do the pipes.

DS: That’s a lot.

EC: It’s a lot. It’s expensive. But the water is, the sewer is pulled away, and then so West End opened, helped open my eyes to…Omega’s really good about talking. I’m sure you know that from meeting. But he’s got a lot of knowledge about different aspects like what rights you have, basic rights. We stuff go. And like I said if we could convince the neighborhood, the ones that had septic, failing septic systems to go ahead and attach to the city sewer, then that would have saved them the money of pumping. To have your septic tank pumped now is probably greater than a hundred. But back I know one lady in particular the first house when you turn in, she always had trouble with her system, and she’d have it pumped frequently like two or three times a year. So but she didn’t want to, she did not want to go into the city, but now she’s the city’s. Then what comes along with that is shame. People don’t want you to know. So getting to the truth is a challenge too.

DS: Shame.

EC: Well, they are justnot wanting you to know my septic tank is not working properly. It’s a smell that goes with it. You can smell it when you are in the yard or when the wind blows a certain way. But I don’t understand that, but yeah, there’s a little shame that goes along with it.

DS: How has it been interacting with people who are reluctant? Are there any particular moments you recall?

EC: No. I had pretty much visited, I would say another family that’s Mr. Joseph Thompson. He’s gone now. But I pretty much visited every house in the community on our first, especially when I first joined West End, to get an idea and let people know that this, this and this. So I found most of them were accepting, it’s okay come on in. Let’s have some water, get you some Kool-Aid or whatever. But the details I didn’t, some of them I didn’t get details. I had to get it through the grapevine that they were having trouble. And then getting them to say yes, I‘m having trouble. I want to go ahead and annex in the city. But it wasn’t that, it wasn’t that easy. Everybody wanted to say I don’t want my taxes to go up. So there we were weighing that. And we’ve been weighing that over and over again. I don’t want my taxes to go up. But if your taxes don’t go up, I mean if you don’t sign up for the city services, then you’re living with actually it’s not a bad situation. I mean I don’t think anybody is at the point of being condemned or anything. But it would be better for some of the elders because Mr. Joseph passed on. Ms. [Rothis?] passed. Miss [Raleigh?] is gone. Those are three houses that I know were having trouble. So now the younger people are in there. So I need to go back and do another round to see if things have changed a little bit.

DS: Were you able to win anyone over?

EC: I would not really say that, no.

DS: Okay.

EC: No, I feel like I was wasting my time so to speak, but somebody got to do it.

DS: Somebody’s got to do it. That’s right.

EC: Right. Right. So it might as well be me. We have another, like I said another section of White Level that’s dirt road, and so we were working with them to have the roads paved, this one and that one. And that went nowhere because to have our road paved back in [19]99 would’ve been greater than 40,000. And what the state said if you go in and pave it, do the curbs and gutters and get it up to standard, then we will take it over. And I thought, me personally I thought if we’re going to pay $40,000 to get it paved it’s our road, we’ll just go ahead and maintain it. So we never got anywhere with that.

DS: So they wanted you to pave it.

EC: Pave it and bring it up to standard is what they said.

DS: And who exactly would be paying, the whole community, everyone who lives here?

EC: Um hmm.

DS: Would they handle the billing, you guys come together and—

EC: We would have to split it.

DS: Wow.

EC: So one of the, somebody I was talking to said why don’t I call the local state representative, and that is my next plan once we get through all these reunions and I got some time to think. That’s going to be my next goal.

DS: Yeah. And that was one of my questions. I think I skipped it by accident. How have the roads in general in the community changed over time especially compared to say Mebane as a whole?

EC: We have always, not always, but mostly since back as far as I can remember. It used to be a dirt road. Miss White’s Lane, but I can’t even remember how long it’s been paved. But it’s always been paved. Then after, I see we’re getting some potholes now that need to be redone. But that has basically been kept up. But this road was dirt when we moved in and because it was a private subdivision the road was part of the homeowners’ responsibility. And then originally the homeowner group was tighter. I know two original families, three, have moved out. The ones that actually signed the subdivision agreement, they’ve moved out and either sold or are still renting.

So other, the main problem that I have with the whole, my whole life I would say is the dirt road. I mean we’ve, my husband has made several trips to pick up gravels and patch the holes, and we’ve talked to different neighbors, and we, and he’s gotten a little money to help out with it, but we don’t actually have a homeowner’s agreement, and we’re not following that. So we probably would be good to get back on track with that, develop it, bring it back up or whatever needs to be done. So I probably need somebody to help me figure out how to get the homeowners, subdivision homeowners’ rules to whatever established, re-established and then get each homeowner to participate.

DS: Yeah, that must be frustrating having to deal with--.

EC: It is. It is. It is. It is. At one point like I said when I first joined WERA, I went door to door to everybody and I got signatures opposing the bypass, and then as the fight went along, I participated on the bypass committee which the state established. And then of course it was approved when it originally came. It was, we were wasting our time basically. But it’s delayed. It’s been delayed so that’s a good thing. So most of my neighbors agreed that they would not like the bypass because of the fact that entryway, we didn’t have, once it’s installed it’s going to be a divider in the highway, and so as far as getting back on [Highway] 119 we’re going to have some hardship. So we still fight, we’re still fighting that because I asked for a stoplight to be added out on Miss White’s Lane. And they said no, there’s no need. So—

DS: So thinking more about how the bypass would impact the community, you say there would be a divider, and it would be more difficult to access [Highway] 119.

EC: Not like, when you go out and you get to a stop sign, imagine you can’t really see over the hill. You just, you can see once the car’s in view, but imagine the traffic increasing and trying to get out there.

DS: And still not being able to see.

EC: Um hmm. So I don’t know if they’ll make us go down and then come back up. I’m not sure how it’s going to end.

DS: Are there other ways you anticipate it affecting the community here?

EC: Yeah, we’re going to have more traffic so more pollution. It’ll be an increase of [poor] air quality [that] will change. I don’t even know if the crime rate would increase or not. So we really don’t know the full impact of it yet. But with everything new you always say no if you’ve got a choice until you can see it. Of course it’s going to be great to get on it and go straight out to the highway instead of snaking through Mebane. But that’s what we’ve always done. So—[laughing]. But—

DS: I see.

EC: I know some of them say, some of the concerns were that the crime rate would increase, pollution, diesel trucks we think there will be more trucks passing through. And my number one concern was getting out there on it. How are we going to do that? How dangerous is it going to be? We don’t have a long list of accidents right now at that intersection, but I see that as being a possibility. That would increase.

DS: And do you remember when people started talking about environmental discrimination being a problem for the black communities in Mebane?

EC: I remember being enlightened so to speak. It never really occurred to me that things were not right. But once I got involved with the organization, WERA, and saw some of the other communities and the facts were put right in front of me, I realized that there is a problem. There is a disparity.

DS: And what were some of the things you noticed right away?

EC: Dead ends. Dead end streets. There’s two, three, there’s three here in this section, three dead ends. And the dirt roads. And the way they snuck, they boxed us out of the city that almost appears to be intentional. If you have city over there and city over there and city over there, why not have city all over. So I’m a perfect, perfect example.

DS: Were there ever any moments either with WERA or just as a citizen, a resident here, that you came face to face with maybe some officials and you were like, “Why is it this way?” How do they respond to that? What is your experience with that like?

EC: Well, I’ve had several incidents, city council meetings, bypass meetings and been allowed to voice my opinion, and each time the response was like the road for instance. That’s your responsibility because you’re a subdivision. It’s always, they’re quoting, the rules are being quoted to me not really saying I can help you. Water and sewer, when we were trying to get our septic tank in, the first thing they told me was go over to Mill Creek and talk to them and ask them can you run a pipe from your house to the city through the subdivision. Now I was young and dumb but not that dumb. But we did it. We went and spoke to the homeowner’s association of Mill Creek, and they were like, okay we’ll get back with you after the meeting. And of course we would’ve went past, the guy that owns a house that’s backed up to us is probably $250,000 house, three-stories. But when I went back to the city and explained to them that the association said no, then their response was I don’t, yeah, we can’t annex you into the city. And so that’s when my husband was like no, I don’t want to do that because of taxes. But anyway, yeah, but it’s always they’re listening, but they’re not really, there’s no solutions.

So and then the last encounter we had it was about the new subdivision that was going to come in. They were going to come from Mill Creek through the center of the road and attach to the subdivision. And they were asking us for right of way to do that. And so our question was can you pave the street, just pave the street. So they got back with us and then they said, “No. We’ll figure out another alternative.” And the next thing we know the subdivision fell through. Their plan was to put $200,000-plus homes. They were going to put ten in there. So that fell through, no investors or whatever, but that fell through. It was already approved through the planning board, through the city council, everything. The lots were already, but all of a sudden, boom it fell through. So there is a problem.

DS: Yeah. And what would you say is the worst of the environmental issues being faced by White Level?

EC: The worst, right now we are, other than the dirt roads with the air quality we’re already at a certain level with that. And like I said, I need to go back through and visit with the different homeowners about the sewers, whether there’s leakage or anything. But our main problem right now would be trying to maintain air quality I guess on that.

DS: What’s the challenge there with the air quality?

EC: Well, I mean like with the dirt roads.

DS: Okay.

EC: The dust. I need to get on that and talk with my local representative to see if the state would have any assistance for me or to encourage, try to encourage them to help us to get that done. But other than that we don’t have any, we have a convenience store, but my main wish for the community is that we had a community center. And we do have two, even this lot here if I was really able, I would like to have purchased that maybe and make like a park. And that way the community could gather together and have somewhere for seniors, after school, somewhere to congregate. So we don’t have any central gathering place. So I would say lack of a community center would be one of our main problems.

DS: And are there any, thinking about WERA and your activist work, do you recall any particular successes and breakthroughs either for yourself or others?

EC: Successes, other than being a part of the organization and the delay being, the bypass being delayed and the fact that they did stop to listen, like I said no results yet. But the fact that there was a pause and say what do y’all think. So that feels good to have been a part of that. But I mean like I said it was approved from the beginning. We knew we couldn’t stop, stop it, but we could slow it down. So that feels good being a part of that process.

DS: Okay. Awesome. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

EC: Well, it feels good to be interviewed for a change on my opinion. I didn’t prepare. I didn’t have any way of preparing because I mean it’s my life. I’m living it. So it feels good that you want to take the time to bring us to the light, and I’m hoping that somebody somewhere down on the future trail will look back and say oh yeah, there was somebody working on our behalf trying to make a difference. So that’s the main thing. I want to make a difference. I don’t want to just be here and living [in] this world for whatever years I’ve got and go away and nobody know nothing. But I mean even in the city they’ll say oh Lord. Here come Evon Connally again. Well, Evon is on the line again because Montrena, the city planner she knows me by name. So yeah, it’s good to be a part of, it’s good to be alive because I see so many people going day by day. Every time I turn around and then being working in a critical unit that I’m in, the death that I see. Some of them are [phone ringing] three at a time, four at a time or whatever. So it’s good to be a part of the progress. [phone conversation]

DS: Okay.

EC: Yeah, just good to be a part of it.

DS: Oh great. And one last question I thought as you were speaking. Do you consider yourself an activist?

EC: I never really thought about it. I guess I would be classified as one, but no, I don’t. I don’t really consider myself one but yeah, I guess if you look at the whole picture I guess yes. I guess I, some people think I am but I don’t.

DS: Okay. All right.

EC: I’m just a community, I’m just a person that, I want everybody to have the basics and that’s why I worked. I feel like I fit in so well with WERA because it’s your rights to your basics of life. So yeah.

DS: Awesome. Well, thank you Ms. Connally.

EC: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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