

TRANSCRIPT: BETTY FLEMING

Interviewee: BETTY FLEMING
Interviewer: Dwana Waugh
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START OF CD

DW: OK, this is Dwana Waugh. It is July 12, 2006, and I'm interviewing Betty Fleming for the Belmont Project. And good evening to you.

BF: Hello, Dwana.

DW: I guess I just want to start first by asking you to tell me a little bit about your childhood and your early experiences living in Charlotte.

BF: OK, I was born in 1948 in the area called Brooklyn here in Charlotte. I lived there until the eleventh grade. That's when urban renewal began to tear down Brooklyn and relocate people. I attended—I'm forgetting the name of the school that I went to—Myers Street School from first grade until sixth grade. And from there I went to Second Ward High School from seventh grade to twelfth grade, graduated in 1967. At that point of eleventh grade, we moved in the Belmont neighborhood area on 1925 Harrill Street. I've been in this area ever since, so I've seen a lot of changes in the Belmont neighborhood.

DW: Yeah. OK. Well, could you talk a little bit about what you remember about the urban renewal process from Brooklyn and what kind of neighborhood Brooklyn was?

BF: Brooklyn was predominantly a black neighborhood, poor neighborhood. The houses, some of them were called shotgun houses, meaning you could see kind of like straight through. If you stand at your front door, you could see all the way to the back, and there were three rooms in those houses: the living room, the bedroom, and then the kitchen. And it had a bathroom. As far as I can remember, there were inside bathrooms at that time. My family never did live in a shotgun house, but there was no heat, no air. We had wood stoves, and my daddy would cut wood and make the fire. We had one stove and kind of like the den area, and then there was a wood stove in the kitchen cooking area. And taking a bath during the winter time, we would have—what was it called?—a foot tub, I think is what it was called. Round tin tub, and they would warm the water and we would take a bath from there.

I enjoyed my childhood. During that time, you could not lock your door and feel pretty safe. Neighbors would watch after you. It was kind of like a community. You knew your next-door neighbor, and both my parents worked—Mom and Dad worked—and during the summer time, we would stay home and take care of ourselves. It was four of us. I'm the youngest. Well, there was four at home. I had an older sister that was like twenty years older than I am, and she was like the mother figure for me. Whereas my mom, I always thought, by me being young, she was mean. But growing up, being an adult now, I can relate to the things that she went through, because I think she was like forty-five when she had me, going through the changes. She did domestic work, so that meant she was gone from early morning until maybe 5:00 at night, riding a bus home, cleaning someone else house for maybe three dollars a day. I'm not sure I know the pay wage. Pay scale was very little.

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My dad was a roofer. He would bring home yarn that they would mop the roof with, and we would make our own toys. We would get a Coca-Cola bottle, the yarn that he would bring home, put it in the top of the bottle, and put a stick in it to hold the yarn in. That was our baby doll, and we would plait her, plait the hair, that yarn. We'd get a sock and cut it, and make that the dress. I remember my brothers making scooters with two pieces of wood and kind of like nail them together and putting wheels on them. It was just neat. In today's time, everything is bought. Kids do not know how to make toys like that.

We were a close-knit family. Although we were poor, we were close-knit. We were raised in the church, and close-knit, loving family. The price of living, as far as the amount of money you could make, was hardly anything, but the food and everything was inexpensive. I remember you could get two loaves of bread for thirteen cents, a pack of bologna was like—. It did not come in a pack. You would get it by the slices. You could go to the store with five dollars and have two and three bags of food. Sodas, they had like the twenty-ounce drinks for like six cents. You could ride the bus for I think it was ten cents.

During the summer time, we would go to the movies. There were like three theatres in the neighborhood, and they would have this promotional thing during the summer where you would purchase a badge and you could get in free during the whole summer. Of course, we didn't have enough money for everyone to have a badge, so we kind of cheated a little bit. We had one badge, and that person would—. One of us would be in the front of the line, and then that person would take the badge off and pass it on back. We would see like current events. You would see cartoon and two pictures. So it was like almost an all-day thing in the movie.

We would like go to the movie early in the morning, and we might be in the movie maybe until 5:00, until we'd see our daddy. He would come in to get us right at the point of if it was a scary picture, someone's getting ready to grab you, and you're walking out the movie, trying to see what's going to happen. And seemed like he would do that all the time, just make us mad. [Laughter] And then also during the summer, they had vacation Bible school. I would always enjoy that. We would go I think like 8:00 until 12:00. After that, we would run home so we could watch this movie called "Armchair Playhouse," a movie that would come on every day that was always very interesting.

Again, there were five siblings. My oldest sister was twenty. Then I had a brother six years older than I am, a sister that's five years older, and another brother that's four years older, and then myself. We were all born at home. When my mother had me, the doctor told her—. At that point, you could have children at home, but they began to—. The law required that you had to go to the hospital, but she had all of us at home. Again, during the summer time, the neighbors would look out for you. If you did something wrong, which we were pretty good kids, your neighbor could beat you. When your mama came home, you'd get another beating.

After we were grown, we had enough nerve to tell Mama that we would walk the neighborhood begging people for money. [Laughter] There was a little neighborhood store that we would go to that would sell cookies, two for a penny. After begging all day for money, we'd have a lot of stuff to eat. We would like play in the yard all day. We knew not to leave out of the neighborhood, other than walking around our area begging for money. When Mama would leave, she would tell us, "You need to clean up." We could see from our house maybe five or six blocks of the street, and we could see her coming. So one would

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stand on the outside, and the rest of them would go in the house and try to clean up. That person on the outside would run back in the house and “she’s at Plum Street now.” She’d run back outside—“she’s at Morrow Street now”—until she would get home.

I remember one time during the summer time, they had bought a watermelon and had it in the refrigerator. I would come in from playing with my dirty hands, didn’t wash my hands, and I would open the refrigerator and dig in the watermelon, get me some watermelon and eat it. Someone else had done it also, because I could see the handprints in there. So Mom came home, and she’s like, “Who’s been eating the watermelon?” Everybody said no. She would line everybody up; everybody said no. So she came around smelling your hands, and of course I didn’t wash my hands. She tore me up. [Laughter] She tore me up, and then she cut off the piece where the dug hands were in, and she made me eat that piece. But childhood memories were very good.

I remember mostly summer, but I don’t remember too much about what happened on the winter time. There was my sister that’s twenty years older than we are. She was married; she lived in Columbia. She and her husband would come get us during the summer. So after the first half of the summer, we would get out of school like the first week in June, and we didn’t go back until after Labor Day. So we had three full months out of school, which nowadays you go back before Labor Day. But we didn’t get all the holidays that they give now. So we would go to Columbia, and like I said, I called my sister the good sister and nice sister. She never would fuss, and she never would beat me and stuff like that. But with Mom, she worked all day. She was tired when she got home. She had four kids to see to, and Daddy had to watch them. He played a great part in that. He would usually come home

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before Mama did, and he would start dinner. So Mama would get up fussing, and she'd go to bed fussing, and that's why I said she was mean.

But being an adult myself now, being a parent, I can understand. You work all day long for three dollars, I think I'd be mad, too, cleaning somebody else's house and then have to come home and clean up again, see to your kids and stuff.. But we would go to my good mama's house during the summer, and she would spoil us rotten. Her mother-in-law lived in Winnisboro, South Carolina, which wasn't too far from Columbia, and we would go there. She lived out in the country, and it was like one house in the middle of nowhere. We would have to go to the well to get water.

Do you need to know all this? You just want to know about my childhood in Brooklyn or where?

DW: Oh, well, I was interested in you talking a bit about living in Brooklyn and then when urban renewal happened, your feelings about that.

BF: OK--.

DW: But--you want to talk about it?

BF: OK. Basically, that's the way I was raised. I would be the first one home from school, and with our front door, it was kind of like glass at the top, and I had a key. [Phone rings] Mom would put a chain around my neck with a key on it, and I would come home. I could see inside from the door, and she would always leave me a piece of candy there. It was like I couldn't wait to get home to get the candy. So, in the eleventh grade, that's when they began to move people out and relocate them. I'm not sure *how*, what I felt about it, because I'm a child. I don't know. I'm sure if I had been an adult, it would have affected me more. I do remember that we were renters, and when they located us to Harrill Street, I think they

paid our rent for two or three years. I don't remember exactly, because back then parents did not tell you. You were seen and not heard, so they didn't discuss this with us. But I'm thinking that's what happened. As far as the living condition in the house, it was much better than the house that we lived in.

DW: The one on Harrill Street.

BF: The Harrill Street house was much better than the Brooklyn house, because predominantly black and being poor, you know. So I guess I thought I was in hog heaven. Heat and nice hardwood floors. I was supposed to have graduated from Garinger, but I chose to come back to Second Ward at that time. Although they were tearing down Brooklyn, the school was still there. I think it took maybe two or three years in the process of completely getting rid of Brooklyn, because I think Second Ward's last graduating class was '69.

DW: OK. Yeah, I was going to ask you about school. Your senior year, what kind of changes did you see—?

BF: I think in like the tenth grade, they began to bus to the white schools. If I had gone to Garinger, it would have been whites and blacks. But I chose to continue to Second Ward, and it was still predominantly black when I graduated from Second Ward. Now, we had white teachers, but there weren't any students that were white.

DW: Can I ask you why you chose not to go to Garinger and stay with Second Ward?

BF: I don't know. I don't know if I didn't like changes, or I was just happy with my school, although the school received secondhand everything, books and everything else. I was just happy at Second Ward, the Mighty Tigers, and we would play—. Well, football, it was like the Lions versus the Tigers, and the Queen City Classics and stuff like that. I just

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enjoyed my school. And we would have pep rallies. Now kids don't even know anything about pep rallies.

DW: Well, you were saying when your family moved to Harold Street that the rent was paid for the first couple of years. Were you talking about the city paid the rent, or some other agency?

BF: I think it was the city. I'm not sure. Like I say, you were seen and not heard. I think it was the urban renewal project thing. If I had known what I know now, I could have bought the house for little or nothing.

DW: So when you all moved over, did you still rent or did you buy?

BF: Yeah, rent.

DW: OK. And so after you graduated from Second Ward, what did you do? What was your next step? You stayed in Charlotte—?

BF: Yes. I went back to Second Ward another year. I took tailoring school, I didn't go to college. In the eleventh and twelfth grade, I took tailoring. Then I went back that next year after I graduated and still had a class there, tailoring. And then after that, I worked at a hospital. But in the twelfth grade at school, there was like a little job for me. I worked at Mercy Hospital. After Mercy, I went to Presbyterian Hospital. I worked there from about ten years.

DW: Was Mercy Hospital an all black or predominantly black hospital, or by that time had the hospital integrated?

BF: It had integrated.

DW: OK. Could you tell me a little bit about what Charlotte was like to live in, in the late sixties, early seventies, what you remember, what kind of job opportunities there were, particularly for black residents?

BF: The hospitals—. There weren't that many fast food places at that time, but in maybe the late seventies, fast food—. Oh, what happened to the jobs? I don't remember. A school teacher—. Back then, a lot of people that graduated became school teachers. Other than that, I don't know. I don't remember.

DW: So when you graduated high school and you started to work in a hospital.
[Phone rings] OK, I think I forgot what I asked you.

BF: Don't ask me. [Laughter]

DW: OK, I think I was interested in—. So after you finished high school and you started working in a hospital, how did you decide to move to, or to stay in the Belmont area?

BF: I've never been, I don't guess, a go-getter as far as moving out on my own. A lot of girls and young men want their own apartments. I was satisfied there with Mama. After I graduated, I worked at Mercy. Then I went to Presbyterian. Graduated in '67, started working at Presbyterian. I got married in '70, I think. That's when I left from here in this neighborhood, and my husband and I moved together. I think I was out of this area maybe two or three years. We separated and divorced, and I came back to this area.

DW: OK. When you moved, did you move out of the city of Charlotte?

BF: No, I've always lived in Charlotte.

DW: OK. Were you around this part of Charlotte?

BF: Tryon here--,it's not too far from here, maybe five miles from here.

DW: OK. And so when you moved back, did you move to this location?

BF: Yeah, I moved back with Mama, and then the husband I'm married to now, we began to talk. Then I moved in with him on Parkwood. After we got married, we still stayed in Parkwood for a while, and then we moved here.

DW: OK. And you own your home here?

BF: Yes. Uh-huh.

DW: OK. So I guess I'm just interested in hearing what you think or what you remember about how Belmont was in the seventies and the eighties, what your memories—

BF: Seventies and eighties—. Seventies and eighties, it was some whites still in the seventies. Still a basically nice neighborhood. Then after it became predominantly black, it was like drug-infected. The area just came down. Crime and break-ins, shootings, deaths—the area really came down.

DW: Did you have a sense that, I guess in the seventies, when the area was still integrated at least a little bit, did you have a sense that there was a community spirit in the area, that people bonded together kind of like in—

BF: No, I don't think I've ever seen that since I've been in the Belmont neighborhood area, because you have people moving in, moving out, moving in, moving out. And it have never been like close-knit or family. It have never been that way. Like now, the people that live across the street, the ones next door, and the ones next to the one across the street are the only ones I know on this block. Neighbors don't look out for neighbors like they used to do, and it's just different.

DW: Yeah. Well, what would you say would be the cause of that difference?

BF: Breakdown in family. You have children raising children, people not respecting you like they did long time ago. They'll curse you if you look at them. No respect, just

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none. I might sit on the porch, and group of teenagers might walk up the street cursing and drinking and whatever. It's just a breakdown in the family. I'm in daycare now, been in daycare while, and I can even see it there. My sister teaches school, and she can see it. I work with three- and four-year-olds, predominantly white. They are some blacks there, too, but you just can see the change in people compared to years ago. When I was growing up, your mom could look at you, and you knew you need to sit down, be quiet, or whatever. In school, on my job, look at the kids. Shoot, they'll stare you down as if nothing's going on. My sister-in-law works in an elementary school, and she's told me about different things there, too. If you say something to a child, child call mama, tell mama that night, that parent is there that next day, cursing you out. It's just a breakdown.

DW: Well, now did you ever get involved in any kind of neighborhood associations?

BF: At one time, I attended the neighborhood community thing, and I got out of it. I know I need to start attending meetings, but seem like I just can't find that time.

DW: When you joined, when did you go to meetings?

BF: I don't know. It's been so long, I can't even remember.

DW: OK. And was it a time issue, then, that you remember why you stopped going?

BF: Just because of the busyness of my life, I guess. That shouldn't really be an excuse, because with the neighborhood, with us working together, we can make it work. But I didn't play my part the way I should have.

DW: Do you feel that the neighborhood association is making a lot of strides in the neighborhood now?

BF: Some, but not a lot. I'm sure, I feel pretty sure that ten, twenty years from now, is going to be completely different because of the whites moving back in and the

neighborhood association will probably be built back up. And hopefully, the trouble people will be somewhere else. Where that is, I don't know. But I feel like it will be some changes. And it might not be the changes that we want to see, because as I have lived, I can see like when we first moved here, this is where white man wanted us in a certain area. And then white man began to move out. Now they want this area back, so white man's coming back. So even if--If they want to get rid of us, I'm sure they will. Even if it's raising the taxes so high that poor blacks mans can't pay for it, and your house is gone. I honestly feel like if they want this area back, they going to get it back. So it's still—. It is sad to say—this is 2006—it's still prejudice in the world.

DW: I was going to ask you how much control did you feel you have or had in making a housing choice, which I guess kind of goes with what you were just saying. Is it your sense that people in the neighborhood, including yourself, had a lot of choice in deciding where you want to live in the city of Charlotte?

BF: I think basically we have a choice as where we can live. As far as that's concerned, they've gotten real modern about where you can live. If you have the money, you can buy wherever you want to buy. But it also comes with—. A lot of neighborhoods have the neighborhood society that says you can't paint your house this color or whatever. You have to abide by those rules. But in a lot of ways, money speak, so you basically can buy what you want to buy. But there's still places like—. I've heard of people burning crosses in yards and stuff like that, but not a lot of that's going on. I think you can basically live where you want to live if you have they money.

DW: I wanted to ask you, too, if you could just talk a little bit about how you see race relations change or stay the same in Charlotte, from the seventies to present day.

BF: Seventies. So when you say seventies, that's kind of blank. I remember before that with the eating places and the bathrooms that says "black" and "white." I was a little girl at that time, but after that, I remember we could basically go and do whatever we wanted to, without any trouble. People, the whites, treated you nicely, so I really never have had a problem with that.

DW: That's good. So to you, are you saying that you see, I guess over the past thirty or forty years, that race relations in the city stayed pretty much the same, that blacks or other minorities are still treated the same as they were thirty or forty years ago?

BF: Maybe a little progress, but basically the same.

DW: What kind of progress would you say you've seen made in the city?

BF: Progress as far as—?

DW: Race relations, or even job opportunities or housing.

BF: Job opportunities, I think, are much better with the education, because there are more blacks going to school now, and we have proven ourselves to be as smart as anyone else. Jobs is according to how you apply yourself as to what kind of job you can get. The same thing with housing. And what was the other thing you said? The housing, jobs, and what else?

DW: I don't know. [Laughter] Yeah, just in general what you've seen. I was reading a couple of articles, one in the mid-eighties and then another article more recently, and they were talking about how Belmont was considered as, quote, a fragile community, because of the high crime rate in the city. I guess I was just curious about what you've seen in terms of crime in Belmont, how you've seen that develop in the neighborhood.

BF: How have I seen that develop?

DW: Or I guess I will rephrase. If you'd just talk about crime in Belmont,. What you remember or know of things.

BF: In the beginning, it was like very little crime until it became predominantly black. That's when everything just went haywire. Break-ins and shootings and killings and stealing. We've been kind of lucky here. When we lived on Parkwood, there was one break-in. Here, there have been maybe two or three. One day I came home, and that whole back door off of that door was on the ground.[Pointed to home next door] Police didn't come out. They just told me to do a report, and that I didn't like. Somebody broke into the house over there. That's our house also. It's like--. I make ceramics, and someone broke in. They didn't actually get in. I could hear the breaking of glass.

I was in here, and when I went out, I saw the person and I kind of like on my own investigated it, because the police came out and they went around the neighborhood, but they didn't see him. After that, I went around the neighborhood, and I saw him. It was like since he didn't actually get in, they couldn't do anything. When the investigator came out, it was like I almost had to lie in order to—. Kind of like, see, when he broke the window, he knocked over something in there. But they were saying that they couldn't actually do anything since he didn't actually get in there. So. And I don't know if it would be different if it was in a white neighborhood or whatever.

DW: Hmm. It seems to me from what you've said about looting and break-ins and other crimes in the neighborhood, and then comparing it to how you were talking about Brooklyn where people could leave their doors unlocked, the safety seems to be an issue in the neighborhood. Would you say that is one of the biggest issues that people face, or are there other things that the community looks at more or just the same?

BF: I don't think that safety is an issue, because, it's like I've never had any problem. I feel safe here, and I don't know if it's because the people that's doing the crime is in this area and know the people in this area and not—. And maybe it's outside people or visitors or whatever that come in and do they thing and then leave. But as for safety, I feel pretty good you know. My husband is a long-distance truck driver, and I'm here a lot by myself at night. I do have a gun, but it's up there. He always get on me about you need to have the gun by the bed. I have an alarm system, and I'm a believer in God. I tell him nothing going to happen. God got my back. He's not going to let anything happen to me, and that's my safety net.

DW: Yeah. OK. You were talking about the police earlier. What are your feelings about the police and their relationship to the neighborhood?

BF: I don't think they're involved like they should be. I don't know if it's because of it being a predominantly, well, all black—well, it's not all black now; the white are moving in—because it's been a predominantly black and whether they don't care. I hate to say this. I don't know if they don't care, or I've heard sayings like before, that the blacks kill the blacks, that kind of stuff, but, I'm not sure. But you very seldom see them in this neighborhood. I don't know if it's because also the neighborhood is not doing its part as far as—. It's what you put into something as to what you get out of it. By me not playing a part that I need to play about neighborhood meetings and voicing my opinion—. Because it can make a difference if people work together. So I can't basically say whether all those questions you have asked, whether it plays a part, because I really haven't applied myself to see whether that'd probably work or not. You understand what I'm saying?

DW: Yeah. I guess I'll just clarify [Laughter]. What I think I'm hearing you say is things might have been different if you had been more involved with the neighborhood association, and other residents were involved—.

BF: Um-hmm. Right.

DW: OK. I wanted to ask you how much impact you feel Piedmont Courts had on Belmont.

BF: There was in Piedmont Courts a lot of drugs and crime in that area, too. I'm sure some of it came from Piedmont Courts to Belmont area. Trying to think whether crime have gone down since—. But see, Piedmont Courts, they been out not over a year; I don't think so. I just can't tell yet. Not sure.

DW: I was also wondering, did you feel that Piedmont Courts and Belmont worked together, the two communities worked together? Or was Piedmont Courts its own kind of area and Belmont its own area, even though they're both very close?

BF: Worked together as far as—?

DW: Just any neighborhood issue, or anything that was important to the community.

BF: Maybe their own little area.

DW: If you had to say today what issues will be important to you for the neighborhood, what would you say would be the more important issues?

BF: I would like to see the neighborhood cleaned up, people knowing each other, taking up for each other, even if it mean a mixed neighborhood, which I don't mind. I can live beside anybody. I've heard different people on my job, or the parents at the job might say, "We have a neighborhood party every year. We go to the neighbors and have a Halloween party in the cul-de-sac and stuff like that." Nothing like that is ever done over

here, where neighbors get together and communicate and talk and have fun, and block off that end of the street and have the children running wild and just playing and having fun.

DW: I wanted to ask you about the city itself. I was reading an article in the local newspaper and they were talking about the housing shortages because of so many people moving into Charlotte. Well, one, I'm curious what you think about the housing crisis, I guess, in Charlotte.

BF: Everywhere you look, they're building houses and apartments, high-priced condominiums. This apartment might sell for fifty thousand dollars and things like that. I don't see how it could be a shortage. I know that there are a lot of people in the Charlotte area, but again, I see houses being built everywhere. I don't see any low-income type things like with—what was the area that they tore down before--, like Fairview homes and the predominantly black neighborhoods for lower income? They've torn all those down and remodeled, and they say in the beginning, "OK, you can move back in." But I've heard that you have to qualify in a certain way, which I think is good. But after a while, the rent go up so high that they can't afford it. So I'm not sure what the poor person is going to do, how the poor people are going to make it. Did I switch some of that? Did I answer another question?

DW: No, no, that's fine. This is good.

BF: So I'm sure it was Piedmont Courts when they rebuild. Prices going to be so high that I've always wondered what did they do with all those people that they moved out?

DW: You were talking about urban renewal before. I guess I didn't ask you blatantly but did you see urban renewal as a positive change?

BF: Yes and no. Yes, because it got us out of the slums, but I think there was a material motive behind it. I know they built a highway and did other things, but no houses in

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the placement of that. I'm not sure what their motive was for doing that. Sure, it gave us a better place to live, but after twenty or thirty years, it seems like we are *back* in that same place again as far as the low income and the slum-like area. And then now it's trying to turn around again by moving us out again. So the cycle never stops, it doesn't seem like.

DW: Yeah. Well, you were talking about wondering what happened to the people in Piedmont Courts. Have you seen many residents in Belmont move out in the recent years or months after this urban renewal?

BF: Yes, because there are a lot of houses up for sale, and the white people are snatching them up. I've heard of one that's a white couple that I went to see not long ago that had a child at the center that I worked in, and they start talking about this area and how realtors are snatching up any house that they see over here that's empty. Buying them so they can, I'm sure, sell them again for triple as much as what they're paying for them. If I had the money, I would be doing that, too.

DW: I'll take part in that. [Laughter] Yeah. One of the things that I wanted to know also was, with this whole urban revitalization of the area, what you foresee as positive changes and what you foresee as negative changes that might come from it.

BF: Negative is the way that they're doing this, you know, to see—. We want this area back, so we're going to get rid of whoever we want to get rid of. That's the negative thing that I see. Positive, I don't know about positive. If we can hold on here and the neighborhood grow again in a positive way—I know I'm saying positive and probably shouldn't be saying positive—but if it grows in the positive way as of good, honest, solid people here that take pride in what they own, what they have, whether the race is white, black, blue, green, that would be positive to me, I think.

DW: I was going to ask you, and this might fill in what you just said, but if you could create an ideal neighborhood, what would that neighborhood look like?

BF: Nice green grass, flowers, no junk like that. I tell my husband, "Clean up; get rid of all this stuff." None of that unsightly stuff. Painted houses or brick houses; children walking the neighborhoods with their parents; dogs running around on their leash, not in somebody's yard; people standing on the corner, talking and chatting and stuff. I guess a storybook life.

DW: Do you think this ideal neighborhood could come once all these revitalizations finish taking place in the neighborhood?

BF: I guess anything is possible. I would like to believe, I would like to hope, I would like to think that in 2006 we should be moving forward, not going backwards.

DW: There's been a lot of talk about the Hope Six funding this revitalization, that when people can return to either Piedmont Courts or Belmont, that it'll be a mixed income community. Do you think that that could work?

BF: Mixed income.

DW: And I guess also would be mixed races.

BF: Um-hmm. Possibly, because with all races in there and I wish that—and I know this is probably impossible—get all the bad folks together [Laughter] and just put them in one little area and let them tear up over there and do whatever they want to do over there. But I know that's not possible.

DW: Well, I guess it could be an ideal. Ideally that could happen.

BF: I don't think so.

DW: Yeah. I was talking to someone the other day, and they were saying that having a mixed-income community could be a very good thing, because then poor people will have someone to look up to and try to be like.

BF: Model.

DW: Yeah. Would you say you would agree with that, or would you see anything negative that might come out of having all kinds of economic classes living in the same neighborhood?

BF: I'm thinking it would work if they're good people, but how I can word this? If they're good people making little bit of money, medium amount of money, a lot of money, I think it could work. But if you get the undesirables back—. Like the saying, one apple spoils the whole bunch, but I think it could work.

DW: Yeah. Just to clarify, would you tell me what you mean by good people and undesirables?

BF: Good people as far as taking care of their property, not stealing, just want something out of life, not laying around on the government. And then, the undesirables are the ones that are doing those things, stealing and not caring.

DW: You were saying you work with a daycare, but it's not in this community?

BF: No.

DW: OK. Do you feel that the churches in the community play a very active role in trying to get things done here?

BF: Not really.

DW: And I guess I just wanted to go back to the role of the city really quickly, and just ask you what you think the role of the city should be in terms of housing decisions that

are made. What do you think the city should do? Or should the city have any role in helping communities like Belmont find the good people that you were talking about to live in the community?

BF: I think that they could go back to even thirty years ago, or when the urban renewal began, and get a panel and just study the things that have gone on, the changes that have gone on, the good parts about it, the negative parts about it. Get together and problem-solve, and see what they can do differently or how they can solve the problem. Call meetings and have people from the neighborhoods, if they will come out, and let everybody talk about what have happened, and to see. Because it's like the world is destroying itself because of the things that's going on. You're building; you're tearing down because of what man have done as far as destroying things. I don't know if it's because of the dollar that they see that they can make, but the wrong way and the right way of doing it, and everybody's different. I don't know. I just guess if they would come together and try to form a team and see what have gone wrong or right in the last twenty years, what was the cause of the downfall, what was the cause of the neighborhood becoming the way it is, because it wasn't like that in the beginning.

DW: I think we kind of danced around this the whole time, but I guess I'll just ask you outright. What changes have you seen over the years in Belmont since you first moved to this area and to the present day?

BF: What changes I've seen?

DW: Yes. So if you were on this panel that could be made up, what would you say?

BF: That I've seen the neighborhood go down, because in the beginning there were the pretty houses with the flowers and the green grass and all of that stuff. People could sit

on their porch and talk and whatever. Now, can't do that. It was peaceful. You did not hear any cursing and stuff. You'd open your door, and that's all you'd hear.

DW: What would you say causes that? I know before you said that when it was still some whites living in the community, things didn't start to change until it became all black. What would you say caused the decline?

BF: I guess back to what I said before. The breakdown in the family, children raising children, not being properly trained as to how you raise a child or—. Just a breakdown of the family. The Bible says that each generation gets weaker and wiser, and it's just not a lot of caring. And the reason why, I'm not sure.

DW: I wanted to ask you what keeps you here in the community instead of some other area in Charlotte.

BF: It might be not being—. Can't afford to move, for one thing. Even if I could, I don't know if I want to. I like the neighborhood, even though it have declined. I've talked to my husband about trying to get this property fixed up and building houses for the elderly to let them live in, because we own like a lot and a half. But getting that money together to get it done, you know—. I would like to do that. I like the neighborhood. I've been here so long that—. I really don't like changes, moving, and I'm pretty satisfied with the neighborhood, although it have had its downs. But seem like it's turning around some.

DW: Yeah. I wanted to ask you what kinds of things do you like about the neighborhood, aside from not wanting to move.

BF: I guess the area is kind of like—. It's close to the highway, it's close to my church, it's close to this, it's close to that. And then there are some neighbors in the

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neighborhood that I have known a while. And I would just like to see it change, go back to the way it can be, the way it used to be.

DW: What do you think in fifteen and twenty years the neighborhood's going to look like?

BF: I don't know, because I don't know what white man have in store for us.

DW: I was talking with someone else, and one of the things the person was saying was how one of the things they think will come out of this urban revitalization is that property taxes are going to increase, and that there will be a rise in homelessness for some residents who live here and lived in Piedmont Courts.

BF: I agree with that.

DW: Yeah.

BF: Because I did mention they would get us out even if they had to go up in property tax.

DW: I'm fascinated about the Civil Rights Movement, and part of this project is looking at the Civil Rights Movement in the South since the 1960s. I wanted to get your thoughts of what you think the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement is for Charlotte or for Belmont itself.

BF: Hmm. What is the legacy that the Civil Rights have for Belmont?

DW: I guess I could rephrase that a little bit differently. Of what you know as the goals of the Civil Rights movement and, say, the sixties, do you think that they have been played out in Belmont since you're lived here?

BF: I think their goal was to make it equal for us, for the black people, that our rights are equal with the white man. So you want to know if it have been played out?

DW: Uh-huh.

BF: No, because I don't think they would ever let us be equal. [Phone rings] Some of them might. I lost my train of thought. I don't think we would ever be equal because I think that race is like they're the supreme being. And of course it's not like that with all of them, but whatever they want, it's like they going to get it. So the only thing I can say is one day everything will be all right. It might not be here on earth, but in heaven, everyone will be equal.

DW: Yeah. That's one of my last questions. So is there any way to make whites not have the power? Is there anything that people, as broadly as possible, could do to make that shift happen?

BF: With the voting, with attending meetings, letting our voice be heard, one hundred percent participation in the minorities. But you're not going to ever have that either, I don't think. Like with my husband, he don't vote. I talked to him. "What's my one little vote going to do?" So you have millions of minorities thinking, "What's my one little vote going to do?" Whereas if all those millions that have said that vote, we can make a difference. But I don't think we will ever, and again, it's sad to say. I think we've made a lot of progress as far as back in my great-grandparents' days, but I don't think we will ever be there.

DW: Yeah. And this is my last question. So do you see the neighborhood associations which you know of, the activities that they're doing, do you see that they're striving for some of the same goals that civil rights leaders of the past were striving for? Or do you see it as a separate kind of movement, I guess?

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BF: See, by me not going, I can't honestly say, because I don't know. If you do this survey in a couple of more years, I promise I'm going to go to those meetings to find out what's going on, and then I can give you a good answer. [Laughter]

DW: OK. I'll check back. [Laughter] Well, I guess the last thing I just wanted to ask you, is there anything that I didn't ask you that you think is important that you'd like to be heard, or anything that you want to mention that you'd like to be known?

BF: Not that I can think of. I think you've covered a lot of stuff and have gotten answers that have covered what you need. So I can't think of anything.

DW: OK. Well, I want to thank you for doing this interview and taking time out to do it.

BF: You're welcome. I've enjoyed it.

DW: Yeah, me, too. Thank you.

BF: You're welcome.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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