

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

2/16/09

Peggy Van Scoyoc (PV): Good morning. This is Monday, February 16, 2009. This is Peggy Van Scoyoc and I am in the home of Carolyn Sampson. She had agreed to be interviewed with us this morning. We start out this morning, you were beginning to tell me about your educational background. You were born in Raleigh, is that right?

Carolyn Sampson (CS): Correct. Born in Raleigh and lived in Raleigh most of my life until I moved away and lived in New York state for thirteen years. While here, I had friends and went to school. We had gotten up to the point where I was telling you about my high school experience, and the fact that my parents, my African-American parents always encouraged education, get your education because I want you to do better than me. I for one bought into that. I have two sisters and one brother. My older sister is deceased now, but I have a younger sister. Joann eventually finished school in Oklahoma. Our brother, he was an art major at St. Augustine's. I'm not sure whether he finished his degree or not. I don't know. But at any rate, I guess we all, at some level, really believed in what our parents were preaching, and did try to make something out of ourselves.

In that effort, I first entered... when I left high school at J.W. Ligon, I went to school for about two and a half years at St. Augustine's. Then I moved away and worked awhile, got married somewhere in there, and had a child. So it was with child that I eventually made that reconnection with college, and I did so while I was in New York state. At the time I was working for the Tryon School for Boys, which is "persons in need of supervision," that's what they used to call it in New York. A lot of my work has been in that area. So I've done that, that is juvenile delinquency. That's what I did for thirteen years.

It was interesting that, I was at a socialization, I was at a party. We used to, as workers we used to socialize more, I did while I was in New York more than I do here in the South. I don't know why that is. Anyway, it was at one of those parties that one of the guests was telling me that they had gone to school at SUNY (State University of New York) on some kind of a grant, and didn't have to pay anything. I'm always listening, I'm always picking information. I'm always wanting to know. So I paid attention. And they told me their contact whatever. So I made contact with... I will never forget his name. His name was Mr. Buck. () So I made an appointment to see Mr. Buck. When I got there, I told him why I was there. He began to tell me how I was not qualified for this grant. I listened to him, and so when he was done, I said, "Are you finished?" He said, "Yes, I am." I said, "Mr. Buck, I really didn't come here for you to tell me how I do not qualify. I came down here for you to tell me how could." He sat up straight in his chair, and he said, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from North Carolina." He said, "I knew it. I married one of those North Carolina women." To make a long story short, he stopped talking to me in the negative, and began to tell me how to position myself to be eligible to receive the EOC grant money. Again, to make a long story short, I did get accepted into the program, and you weren't supposed to make any income or anything, because he told me to quit my job, which I did. I knew I couldn't make it. I was a single mother by this time. And he worked it out to allow that my books and things were taken care of, and also I could get employment. So I worked at La Salle School as a tutor, and worked like a Trojan. I was with all of the young people, and here I am. I'm a divorced woman, with a child. I didn't have a whole lot of time to fool around in school, I had to get it done quickly and get back in the work world. So he allowed me to put all these pieces together so that I could hold on and make it.

What I did was, in that last semester, I had become friends, well, everybody becomes my friend when I meet them, but my counselor signed my card before it was all filled up. So I filled the card to get everything I needed. I had gone through this course, I went semester, semester, semester, not even taking off for the summer or anything. And that last time I said I need 25 hours to get out of here and be done with this so I can go on. And I did. He signed the card and I filled it up. I want you to know that, when you asked me how you're doing and I said, I'm a doing, oh I was a doing. It wore me out, but I did complete.

And then when I got back, I was working at the Tryon School, as I indicated. Mr. Zerlin was the superintendent at that time, Mr. Z I used to call him. I get home after I'm all done, I'm in a rest period and the phone rings. It is Mr. Zerlin, and he used to stutter. He said, "CCcarolyn?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Z, what's up?" He says, "How would you like to have a job?" I said, "That would be great." So again, to make a long story short, Mr. Z hires me back. When I was there working as a teachers' aid, I think I may have been making maybe \$6,000. At that time, I went from \$6,000 to about \$22,000 at the same place. That wasn't so bad then, that was okay.

And that began my sojourn, or continued my sojourn in New York with the division of social services... New York State Division of Youth was where I worked. I started with what I call a front line service, that's direct service to children and adolescents. And then I grew from that to becoming the community involvement program coordinator, and therefore covered a twenty-county area. I did a lot of things in that position, which grew me in certain areas. It also, after I started working with the kids, I got to a place where I thought, you know, if you want to make changes. You have all these people down in the central office who are making all these decisions about what is needed on the front line, and they know absolutely nothing. This is what, I'm just telling you what I felt. They knew absolutely nothing. And so, maybe what I need to do

is, to be a part of that group so that I can bring some, shorten the distance between what is real and what you think is needed, and going on. So that moved me from direct service to administrative. So I went to central office, I moved to central office and in that community involvement program capacity, I sat on the boards and sat in the meetings of the folk who were around making major decisions, and was able to bring that input.

So that's Carolyn's life, moving from the South to New York, so I did that for thirteen years. It was extremely cold. I am not, maybe that's part of the Southern-ness in me. I really never, they used to tell me, Carolyn, you should make friends with the weather. Take up cross-country skiing or something. I tried that. But as soon as I'd get out in the weather, my feet would freeze, my hands were freezing, my nose... I was just miserable. I never could rise above that. So eventually I came back home because the weather drove me out of New York City. And when I returned here, I didn't work for awhile. But I'm always doing volunteer things, so I volunteered to be on, at that point, Sarah Marrow was the (tape malfunction)

...I beg to differ. I said, "Now who do I have to talk to beyond yourself?" Of course, she began to stutter, because I don't think expected that I was, this African-American, would call her back and take exception. And so in a way, I can't say that I didn't get started in the state of North Carolina without some innuendo or some business of trying to exist as a black person in a white administration, or the whole nine yards. Anyway, that's what I felt. In response to that, I had to buckle up and just stand my ground, which I did. Now at the time my uncle worked for the state of North Carolina, not in high places. But he was the mail carrier, and he carried mail to the governor, when Jim Hunt was in at that time. He was a real likable guy. We are likable people. He said, "My niece is back in town and she needs a job." And later, I don't know if you recall, you probably weren't here then, but there was a hullabaloo in Jim Hunt's administration at some

point, and all kinds of investigations and things were going on. One of the things that turned up in this whole thing, was there was a must-hire list, and my name was one it. This is nobody from somewhere. That began a whole lot of... But anyway, it also sort of cleared up some of what happened to me in the whole process. They did have to renege on that business of I was not qualified, so they couldn't go there. But the person who had to hire me was not happy, because they had some plans for that position. But Carolyn shows up, and they have to take me on. But they didn't make anything easy. It was like, I wound up with a desk, and an office and a trash can. Alright, do your job.

At that time, I was hired as a contracts consultant for the daycare department. I oversaw the, what they called the Cadillac of daycare centers in the western part of North Carolina. There were 29 counties out there, so I wound up being responsible for those. It was all federally funded, but it was coming from somewhere outside of the state. However, these funds could not go directly to the programs. They had to be funneled through the state of North Carolina. And therefore I was the person who was hired to oversee that process.

Well, as it turns out, the main office for those funds that came in, one was in Atlanta and the other was in Washington, D.C. And they had a meeting, they called a meeting. Of course my people, who didn't tell me anything, they could not allow me to come to this meeting. We go to the meeting, Peggy, and the rep from D.C. and the rep from Georgia were black. My people were quite stunned. Me – I was very happy. I thought, oh, our peeps are here. We can communicate. So they took me to lunch after that meeting. You know, that's how you do things. I know you know. They took me to lunch, and they proceeded to fill me in on all that I needed to know. And if I had any questions, I had a direct line to D.C., and a direct line to Atlanta and those two people. That is how I was able to get my feet planted. I believe, I am a believer, and God has

taken care of me in all my places that I've been. And I've had some stuff that I've had, a job that I've had to do. So, while we may have wanted to put up hurdles, we couldn't do that. We're talking about a \$6 million project that was being handled by Carolyn Sampson. I was placed in that position. And the state, I was the one who kept up with those projects, even down to the budgets and stuff like that. These people gave me carte blanche in terms of all the info I needed to know and the help I needed, when all was said and done. Granted, my people were not happy campers where I worked, and life didn't come easy. It was always a struggle from their perspective. And so I worked against the cards all the times that I was there, but I did manage to get my work done. And I was an outstanding employee.

Now, there came a period where I was able to get away. There was another job posted. And you know, it came to me by one of the secretaries who, like I tell you, everybody I meet becomes my friend. So in passing, she said, "Well Carolyn," she just came by, she just dropped by. You know how your friends drop by and sit down. She said, "There's this position in our department that is coming up, and I think you ought to apply." I said, "What is it?" So she brings me the ...

PV: the job description?

CS: Yes. And I read it, and I said, hum, I'm qualified for this. So I applied. And within, I would say, ten days, things were processed and I was moved. And that's when I began to work for the group care facility branch in the division of facility services. Both of these programs were in the division of facilities services. Again, to make a long story short, my people on the other side, they were totally upset. It was like, "How can you do this?" It was a done deal by then. It had already been worked out, signed, sealed and delivered. I gave my notice and I was out of there. But they didn't like it.

PV: So now they're unhappy that you're leaving, when they were unhappy that you were there?

CS: Right. Can you believe it? It was just that we weren't orchestrating it. While I was with them, they demoted me, actually. And do you know how they did it? They went through the personnel folk and had them come in and do an audit. They audited my position and some other person. Actually, it was another gal. She was white. She wound up being placed, because money went along with these, so whatever position it created, where the money fit, she got to be over me. Therefore, I was demoted, exactly. So anyway, I lived through that because somewhere in my psychic, in my spirit, it's choose your battles, you know? I liked her. She was really very good to work with.

So, I did that journey, but when this other thing came up and I was able to move, that was my thing to do, and I did it. And coming in that position, there was one consultant, mental health consultant at that time, that handled a hundred counties in the state of North Carolina. Impossible job, alright. She wasn't very good at it, to tell you the truth. To be truthful, she was terrible. Anyway, so I come along. I don't really know anything about it, but I have to learn a lot. And it was like throw you in, my boss just sort of gave me the guidelines and said, "This is your job. Do it."

What is going on right now? They wouldn't tell you this, but I'm going to tell you. What's going on in the division of facilities service for mental health, is based on what Carolyn Sampson created. Because at the time that I got there, they didn't have any guidelines. They did have any, well, they didn't have a plan of work. So they now had two people, me and this other gal, and we then had the hundred counties to deal with, to license mental health, substance abuse, and DD, for all substance abuse facilities in the state of North Carolina.

PV: what is DD?

CS: Developmentally Disabled. So all those programs that exist in the state of North Carolina have to be licensed by the group care facility bridge. And there was two of us to do that job. So how it got separated is that she did initials and I did renewals. But I covered sixty-six counties. When I came on the job, I had to cover just sixty-six counties, and then you can subtract out of that the counties that she had. Then I thought, well I have got to work up a plan of how I'm going to do this, or make some semblance of being in touch with everybody. Again, it was an impossible job, but there must be a way. So I worked out a plan where I did 100% contact in my territory, and I had over 10,000 facilities to see in some form or fashion, whether it was on paper, I'm being in touch with them, I'm making phone calls. I handled anywhere from 3-400 calls a month. I kept track of all of this stuff too. I was making my visitations, and I made it in such a way that it could happen. I made myself open to these individuals, because I thought, here we're dealing with a population of individuals who cannot look out for themselves. Somebody's got to be on top of it. But for that period of time, it was Carolyn Sampson.

Anyway, my life was going along okay. I worked hard. We had to do at least 1,400 miles on our car. We all had, because it was a territorial kind of thing, so I did a lot of driving around the state of North Carolina. Every month we had the minimum you could have on your car was 1,400 miles. Then I also have family too. By this time I have three kids and still a single parent, doing what I can do. But I did, I did do my do for the state of North Carolina and for the mental health individuals in this state.

Then I was known as the... I used to go places, and they'd say, "So you're that Carolyn Sampson." I showed them, but I ran a fair ship, you understand me? I treated everybody the same, I didn't care who you were. I remember, there is a, you had this Cadillac of program

aficionados, or whatever you want to call them. Going down toward the coast, there was this one guy and he called me. He wanted to have a meeting because he wanted all of his people to hear from the horse's mouth (I was the horse,) what the deal was going to be. Well, I had no idea. I used to sometimes, there was an older lady in my church who I would get to ride with me, particularly if I was going four or five hours away. She went with me on this particular trip. When we get there for this meeting, I walk in. There were about twenty people around the table. I made a meeting with him. When I get there, there was a room full of people, which is intimidating, you know, to say the least. I sat at this end of the table, he sat at the other end. He proceeds to do his little thing, and talk. And then he gives me the floor. And I say again, I had to pull a Mr. Buck on him. I had to say, "Well, you know, you can continue to do it that way, but you will be written up. I will be forced to write you up as being in non-compliance. So, if you want to be in compliance, these are the things that you will have to do. You will have to do them, and fill out my reports, etc." Again, he sat up in his chair, and he turned to all of his 10,000 people. And sort of said, "And this young lady here will be your contact. Whenever she calls, and whatever she wants, you make sure you get her the information." You know, this guy, whenever I was coming to his territory, he assigned one of his workers to me. It was almost like, he met me at the train station, he put me in his car and he drove me everywhere I needed to be in that area. Lunch, dinner, the whole nine yards. I was treated like a queen. But they did excellent work. They satisfied what I needed. And then we developed a workable relationship with one another. And they were able to bring their programs into compliance, because that is all I was asking for, which is right. If you're going to do this, you need to do it right.

So anyway, that's my story and I'm sticking to it. I have had a good life, I think, in terms of things I have been able to do and the lives I've been able affect. I'm not the president of the United States – yet. I have done my due, all with my North Carolina education.

PV: Did you retire out of, from your, from that job?

CS: I self-retired, because I've run into another, what would you call it? Discrimination, I guess. It was at the time of evaluations. You get evaluated every year. In this particular, for one thing the lady who hired me into group care eventually retired. I didn't get her job. Some guy from outside of the place, he came in and he took over her job. Well, we were going along, and he brought me in for my interview. He said to me, prior to this I'd had complete outstandings. I had always been an outstanding employee, like 100%. I worked very hard at my job, and I earned every outstanding I received. He said, "You know, we're into this process, and we can't show all over a certain number of outstandings." So, again to make a long story short, what he was leading to say is, "I can't give you an outstanding." On the backside of that, what he really was trying to do was position the one girl who was there when I came for a step-up in leadership. So he couldn't do that and given me an outstanding. He took away, he gave me less than outstanding for that review.

I took exception to that, and I filed a grievance. While, you know you have to go through so many changes, it was progressing up the line, they continued to just harass me in my position and in my job. Just all kinds of things. In fact, I could pull out some things now, I'm getting all these kinds of emails about, what did you do and how did you do it, etc. So finally, my report gets to the second person in charge within the division, and it gets held up. Now, that person was an African-American. So it was not all of the white people. He was what I consider a gatekeeper. It stopped there. Well, in the meantime, with all this other stuff going on, I decided enough is

enough. I went in to work this day, and I wrote my resignation. I sent it by email, but then I got up. Because I didn't think anybody was there. I was told nobody was working. Neither the chief or the assistant was in the house, they were supposed to be out of town to a meeting. But I took a hard copy around to put it in his in box, and he was standing in the door. So I gave it to him, in his hand. And then I went back to my office and proceeded to pack up. To this day, he never said a mumbling word to me. If I had been in his shoes, just out of curiosity, you know, so you didn't care for me, maybe. Maybe that's why you're... but I would have had to ask why. What are you going to do? I'd have had to ask something. It is just my nature wouldn't have allowed me. He never said a mumbling word. So I packed up my stuff and I left. I took care of all my business with the personnel people. When I went back to do the final, the personnel folk, I had made friends with the people in the personnel office too, and they said, "Carolyn, you have upset everybody in this place." One, I guess I was African-American, female. You weren't supposed to just say, "forget you," and leave. Because people think that you can't... they can fire you, but you can't remove yourself from some situations. I really think that that's true, that most people do. So they were upset that, I guess they couldn't make me suffer anymore. I left there and I never looked back, because my feeling was, I serve a risen God, and He has taken care of me this far. He's not going to leave me now. And I've managed. Maybe not at the same level. I was making fairly good by that time, but not good enough. I should have been making much more money, but I was able to fend for me and my family.

Anyhow, when they see me now... for a period there I was doing research for a lawyer. And he took on cases of clients who were in these facilities, who were abused, misused, neglected, or even died, that kind of thing. Some of them died while in care. I was the researcher. I would go in and do the research for him, search the records and things like that. So they saw

me in a different capacity that was not tied to the state. Initially, they tried to have some reticence about giving me copies of information. But you know, all that information is public record. Then I decided at that time, I don't work for these dudes. I came out and I called the governor's office. Of course, to make a long story short, I never had any more trouble, because somebody from there called them and said, "Don't do that." Or whatever they were thinking about doing, they couldn't do that. They got word to all their people that when she comes in, give her what she asks for. So that worked out very well for this lawyer, because one, I'd created many of the records that were there. I could read down and I'd see, this was submitted by Carolyn Sampson. But I also knew their system. I was a mental health person and I knew the system. I was a regulator, that's part of what our job was, was to regulate these facilities. And so that worked really well, for families who had causes and for the lawyer who had to do the research too, to get the info that he needed to wrap his case up, so to speak.

PV: Did you see a lot of discrimination in those cases, or what was going on in those facilities?

CS: Actually, what I saw, I don't, in many of the ones that I dealt with there was not so much a black and white thing as it was just injustice toward people who can't help themselves. When you're in need, I even think about that, just being in the hospital, if you have a need, that may not be the place for you to be, because one, they weren't paying very much for their employees to work. Consequently, you get that level of employee, right? And they take shortcuts. But many of these cases, like where you're into ICFMR, which means that you need skilled nursing, or you're in rest homes, you really need skilled nursing, or you're going to need a lot of care, the patients were not being cared for very well, were not being watched. What I saw, in the cases that I dealt with, I saw more of that, and they can be cruel to you too.

Before my older sister died, she was in care. I would go to see her, and she'd have bruises on her body. Now, she was thin, like you or thinner, and then her clothes weren't there, her clothes were missing, that kind of thing. But that also said to me, because you really have to show up in these places when you have relatives who are there. I'm sure, now her disposition, her element caused her to not be the easiest person, but yet still, you are there as a caretaker. Not to become angry with these people and handle them in such a way that you hurt them.

So for his cases, even, some of them were manhandled, abused, not treated very well, not taken care of. There were bedsores and things like that. It was not so much that, some of that, a lot of that has to do with how much care, how much rotation happens for these individuals. If individuals are allowed, if they're incontinent, and then you don't clean them up in a timely fashion, they become irritated, their skin becomes irritated by that, and then that increases to other things. Clients wandered. One of them who died in one of the cases I dealt with, he had Alzheimer's or something, and so he had wandered away from the facility. He wasn't being watched. You have to say that he wasn't being watched. Exposure to the elements wiped him out. So it was more of that kind of thing.

My sister happened to be an African-American. I don't know how much of that was a part of her care. I didn't think along those lines. I just thought about what I didn't see was happening in just care, whether she was white or black, and then a lot of the bruising and things. We found that we had to be in there quite often. When you're in and out, then they tend to spend a little bit more time taking care of you than they would otherwise. She and I, and the rest of my siblings, were products of schools in this area.

PV: Before I turned the tape on, you were telling me that your primary education was all in predominantly black schools, so your elementary school was a black school in Raleigh, at that time. Hunter?

CS: Yes, Hunter Elementary School.

PV: And it was all black? And then you went to Ligon High School, which at that time was also an all-black school.

CS: Right. All black. I think it's now a magnet of some sort. That certainly mixed it up, somewhat, because we've got kids coming in from everywhere. I never rode a bus. I was never bused anywhere. I walked to school. I was within walking distance. In the earlier days, I was off Battery Drive and I walked to Hunter. And when we moved to Ligon, we were on Home Street which is very near Ligon High School, so we were able to walk there. And then, by the time I got to college, I did have a piece of a car. In fact, I think I got that car to back and forth to school in. My daddy found, it was a Chrysler New Yorker. Yes. It was in really good shape. He'd work on it. He taught me how to change oil and tires, and check on this and that under the hood. So I was able to do that and get myself back and forth to school.

PV: When you were going to St. Augustine's?

CS: St. Augustine's, that's where I started, and to work. Because you know, we had to work. And I wanted to work because, when I worked I had my own money. And you could do what you want. By that time, I was becoming a little fashion-conscious. And while my parents were able to keep me in clothes, but they couldn't, they weren't going to go the whole nine yards, so when I started making some money, then I could do that. I could step it up a notch. So I had been working for a long time.

The very first job that I had here in North Carolina was for the North Carolina Mutual Burial Association. Very glamorous. When I got there, they were behind six months in their filing. Isn't that horrible? They just had one person in the office. Anyway, I was able to get that all taken care of. They rather liked me. So I went from there to, it had something to do with mental health. I was a secretary in their office. It will come to me. Anyway, so those are my first two jobs in North Carolina. From there I got concentrated in school, and from school I... my sister and her husband were working in the training schools in the division for youth facilities in New York, and so she asked me to come up and I did, and that's how I got my... I went up during the summer program. From the summer program, I got hired on at Tryon School for Boys. Things moved from there.

PV: You are the president of Cary's division of Dreamfest?

CS: It's the Martin Luther King Jr. Taskforce of Cary. Dreamfest is one of my initial initiatives.

PV: Tell me about that. How did you get involved, and what all do you do?

CS: Well, I got involved, it wasn't even called the Taskforce at that time. It was a committee, the MLK committee for this area. It originated between Good Shepherd United Church of Christ and at that time the Cary United Church of Christ. They have since changed. They are no longer a member of the UCC. During the time that there was all this business about gay liberalism, they took exception to that, so they removed themselves from the UCC piece and changed their name. Anyway, those were the two churches who started this whole MLK celebration for the town of Cary. I have to remind them, I feel like I do anyway. During, I got involved around 1995.

PV: How long have they been in existence?

CS: I want to say 1995, was their very first year, or the second. Somewhere in there, so maybe it was 1994. But in all of my records, I have it as 1995. I just came on as a volunteer committee member, or whatever. At that point, as I said, it was the two churches who were doing it, and they did a service, and they would get a march. I think they tried to do the march thing, and the service. Somehow, again, I'm processing so much information, but as I remember, it was, I became the chairperson of the events of the program committee, or something like that. And I proposed, I said, "Well, you've done such a good job in developing this relationship between the black church and the white church, maybe you need to spread this, open yourselves up to spread this and see if we can't grow this around the town of Cary."

PV: So the Good Shepherd Church was the African-American church?

CS: No, that was the white church. And the Cary First [Church of Christ] is what is called now is the black church. They are located over here on Davis Drive. Good Shepherd is off of Maynard. They had this relationship over the years. And what they did was every fifth Sunday, one or the other was in each other's church. So the blacks would come over and perform the worship for Good Shepherd, and vice versa. Then in that they had fellowship time. There was always a meal served afterward so that people could get to know one another. And they have also communicated and worked with each other in other kinds of ways. But that was a relationship, and I have all kinds of pictures regarding that. But anyway, those guys began this piece... (tape malfunction) As I said, in committee and etc., I was moving toward, let's make this a community thing, rather than a shared thing. I think you've done really great, but open it up and see if it can become community-oriented where we can involve everybody in the process. I think they bought into that, because we moved in 1996-1997 toward activities where it was expanded to include the community of Cary.

Then moving along in the story, in 1998, in fact it was the same year that Lyman came on with the Town of Cary, he came to our meeting and he said, "You know, we've been watching you with the Martin Luther King committee, and you've planned some really great programs. How about we partner, partner up with one another to provide an MLK celebration for the Town of Cary." At that point, we had established the Dreamfest handle (that's what we'll call it.) So they took it to council, and Jess Ward was on the council at that point, and he was also a member of the board on our board, on our committee. So they met, they did their decision-making process, and in that year they agreed, the Town from now on, they would partner with the MLK Taskforce, and we've been doing it. So 1999, it was the first year of our partnership, actually, and we've been doing it ever since. And it becomes known as the MLK Jr. Dreamfest activity. The Dreamfest is taking on the number of the year, or whatever.

And that very first year, we did an eight-day celebration. Wow is not the word. Oh My God! You know, I'm telling you, I was sheltered then. Even that was, it was quite something. It was a lot to man and to handle and to orchestrate. So, we decided that we wouldn't do that. We would move to a weekend. So we broke it down to a weekend, and the weekend is primarily what we've tried to stick with since then. Only in these past few years, because of the entertainment and how we were trying to orchestrate it and getting people in, we've had to stretch it out a little bit more.

And then the past two years, we added a celebration on his birthday, which we hadn't been doing before. That entails two events for this year, where it was one last year. We moved to a luncheon thing this year, which was very good, and I think we might want to perfect that, or try that. And as an over-all these years, you can do a thing annually, but it never ceases to amaze me how many people say, "Oh, you have a celebration in Cary? You have an MLK celebration in

Cary?” After all of the publicity, all of the emails, all of the blitzes, all of the whatever, there is still many of us here who say, “I didn’t realize we have an MLK.” This is the eleventh year, this year is the eleventh year. Anyway, that says to me that you have to do a thing over and over and over again for people to get it, and for it to grow.

So it has broken down to, in that first year when we started, we had a dream. We called it “Dream of Inspiration,” which was a musical celebration. Every event had a dream theme, and it still carries over to this day; dream of history, dream of expression is the art exhibit that goes up every year. These are all the parts of MLK. And always in the past, we started with the musical event. And so in the past three years, I think, and maybe four, we have been, we combined what was once one song, an independent activity in with the Marvelous Music series, and then we brought the, we called it a One Song Review, so we brought one song. And we do that as the pre-performance as the kickoff event for Dreamfest annually. This year we are probably going to do something a little different, but that’s what we’ve done for the past three or four years, and that worked out really grand.

Did you come to the () Singers event? Did you make that?

PV: No.

CS: It was awesome. It really was. We had a sold-out event. It was a full house. Even when we had the one song event as an independent, a request went out, an invite went out to the world. I call it the world, I just go to the world thing, because I always, for me, I like to plan activities that are for everybody anywhere. Nobody’s excluded - family-friendly, the whole nine yards. I also like inter-generational things. So kids as well... now lots of adults can’t go there in their mind. And I say that because it doesn’t manifest itself in real life. But really, from my perspective, your kids can sing, they can sing. They can stand here with you. They can be a part

of this. I am not excluding them from this. So they usually get excluded by the parents, not by me. Anyway, they were invited to bring one song to the occasion. And for over seven years, all I knew about the people who said yes and signed up was their name, their group, how many was in that group, and what they were going to perform. But I will tell you, Peggy, God, it has to be a power greater than me. Excellent, excellent.

PV: So you didn't hear them ahead of time?

CS: No. They came for the call. They had to be there by five o'clock if they were going to perform. And then maybe, but I was so busy orchestrating, you're not really listening to anybody. And every time I came to the mic, I'd have to say, () I have never to this day we have never been disappointed. The spirit, how the things meld together. Now I always had a cameo performance, so if it all fell apart there were professionals somewhere in the lot, telling them how to play it. But it didn't matter. The caliber, the material, the execution was excellent, excellent.

Now, always, for over all these years, it has been something else to get audience. I mean, these are free things. This is, they pay \$18.00 to come to the Marvelous Music series. We've got the same thing down the street for free. And very few people attended. We'd wind up with all participants. The participants were there. And then when we had large groups, choirs, their parents would come. But as far as like the world attending, because it is a nice event to attend, that didn't happen.

So, when we had an opportunity to mesh with the Marvelous Music series, I said, why not. We've had to drum up an audience for where we are. It is a lot of work, and gathering people together is a lot of work, a lot of work. Let's give it a try. So then it became, I turned around and said, so for all those people who had supported the events over the years, they

receive the same invitation, and what I'm asking you to do is come and let's join together as a community choir, Vision United Singers is what I called it, and perform this one piece that everybody gets. And you learn your piece, either as a choir or as an individual, or whatever. And we have one mass rehearsal, and that rehearsal will put it together in the Holy Spirit. And then we get to rehearse for call, because you are always about an hour out on call, and that's it. And then we perform our piece at the beginning as a pre-performance for the event that is happening. Fantastic, really.

What I also think is fantastic is the number of people, I've been trying to get to a hundred. I haven't gotten to a hundred yet. But we had forty-four performers this year as the Vision United Singers, and I think it was maybe seven Vision United dancers. The theme, the one song is the theme of that, and that's usually danced every year. And then we bring the one song, which winds up being something unifying, like the song this year was *Miracles*. And it talked about the things we need to do in the world. You know, there's stuff going on in the world. But just let me do what I can for those who come within my reach, because that's the way miracles happen. Something... I'm doing a very bad job of paraphrasing it, but you get the idea. So that was, so it has a meaning. And I feel like, we need to leave our audience, when we get the chance, our captive audience, with a message about what this whole thing is all about.

Now, the song for last year was *Make Us One*. And then one year we did, we actually sang the one song, and the dancers danced to the one song. But if we all sang one song, what a wonderful world it would be. So that's the kind of message we do in our one song that we bring.

Anyway, so I'm looking forward to the Spirit deciding what our song for next year's going to be, and maybe we'll even get to do more than one song. I don't know. It sounds like it, from my first meeting with the town. We met last week to do exit, to do the exit for Dreamfest

2009, and then to begin... We always work, as soon as that's over, we start working on the next year. It takes a year to kind of get it together, it really does. I don't know that people understand the labor of love. Anyway, we keep working on it. We keep perfecting, we keep doing what we can do.

This year, the two town reps who, because it is set up that, there is the program specialist who works with all of the diverse groups, I being one, () etc. He is the liaison in our working relationship. He was new this year, never done a Dreamfest before. And also, his supervisor, Kris Carmichael is new. So Lyman [Collins] asked in our meeting, he said, "You know, this is the one year, the first year we can get a fresh perspective. I'm really interested in hearing what you think, what you." And I was sitting back listening too. And Kris said, they were excited. I think they liked the work process, the plan, etc. We worked very, in fact, I enjoyed working with them. I had to say that before I came out of this meeting. But Kris said that there was several poignant, I like that word, that's very very deep, moments out of the activities that she attended where she wished there had been so many more people to have the experience.

And that's how I feel. Every year I feel that way. I mean really, I can't tell you how much hard work goes in. How many hours that I put in, not to mention other individuals, and just getting the individuals there, the volunteers requires a lot of work. Anyway, we plan, we think, we do, we invite participation, you know. Not that we want to plan the plan and lay it on you. We want you to participate in our plan. It's so hard. I don't like saying that people don't want to, they just want to show up at the banquet, maybe. Nobody wants to do the work, nobody wants to do the cooking, nobody wants to do the cleaning. Nobody wants to bring in and arrange things. Anyway, but it gets done, and for me, I have this saying that the why it's so great. We just cannot not work for peace, work for the realizations of people's dreams, not continue the work of

those individuals who died, you know, on the line for all of us, equality and all that kind of stuff. We just cannot not do that. So with my wearing-out body, I continue to do all that I can. I just feel compelled to do that. I have this calling. So when I was talking to the orthopedic about my shoulder, by the way I'm going to have to have a shoulder replacement, he said, "What kind of work do you do?" I said, "Why, do you think I work on the chain gang, or something?" he laughed. I said, "I'm a mental health consultant." I teased myself, but I think, it's the weight of the world that is wearing my shoulders plumb out. Anyhow, I just continue to do what I do.

For this community, I think it's really important, I really do. In this meeting, as in all meetings, I revisit the fact that Raleigh, in this area you've got Raleigh, Cary and Durham who actually really orchestrate an MLK celebration of some sort or focus. If I had to order it, it would be Raleigh 1, Cary 2, Durham 3, in terms of the amount of impact we've had.

PV: So Cary is ahead of Durham?

CS: Yes, Cary is ahead of Durham. In my opinion, Cary is ahead of Durham, okay? Anyway, now Raleigh has been doing it for almost thirty years. But still, you can plan a program, but it's the people who make that program. People may or may not be a part of the plan.

All of the people that showed up, for instance, this year I did walk. I've either been out of the country or I've been sick and I wasn't able to do the walk. We used to try to do a march here in Cary. Maybe we got up to 125 people participating. But it occurred to me some years back, and we talked about it, let's encourage our people here to walk with the Raleigh folk, alright? We've got something going on there. Let's join that effort. So I don't know how many folk, because there is a whole lot of people in Raleigh. But that very first year that I participated, I was just done away with. I'm there, and that year one of my board members, he's also my

photographer, so he must have been 85 years old, I don't know. It was he and me, but we're there. And you know, there's a few people around become, by close to ten o'clock. Ten o'clock is the hour together. Hoards of people came out of nowhere, best I could tell. Women pushing their babies in strollers, I mean, walking with purpose, not so lagging along, but with purpose. And all of these people, I'm telling you, we were just surrounded by folk. And it has grown. Last year it was like 2,000 or more. This year, even with people going to Washington, I think that affected our numbers somewhat. And when I found out folk were going to Washington [for the Obama inauguration,] I'm going to tell you the truth, I said, "Go, we will be here next year. Go to Washington." But Bruce's outfit in Durham, I mean in Raleigh. We were walking down the street toward the capital. It goes from, not toward the memorial auditorium, so we walk from the capital to memorial and as we're walking, and I mean it was very crowded. I could even show you that on film too. Six buses went up the street, which was very affective to, there was cameras, all the news people cover the Raleigh march, leaving for Washington. Is that the word we use again? Yes, it was just amazing.

PV: They were headed for the inauguration.

CS: They were headed for the inauguration. Six buses to get going. And then he had left behind a crowd of us too, which I thought was just magnificent. And as I'm walking, I look and I think, I recognize those ladies. I used to be a member at Community United Church of Christ, which is a very involved proactive group of individuals. That's their mainstay kind of thing. But at any rate, Marge Eckles is 96 years old. She was walking. And I thought at that point, let me not open my mouth to make another complaint. I'd better step it up a gear. Rob tells me, "Oh, you did fine." I did, because that was, I don't walk a whole lot and can't walk too far. I have lung issues, just all kinds of things. But anyway, while the devil was trying to keep me in the

house that day, I did manage to rise above it, go beyond it, and I dressed myself well because I didn't want to get out there in the cold, and I really didn't know what the weather was going to be like. And I made that trek.

Now, if you park on this end, that means you gotta walk back, okay. So I walked down and I walked back, and I want you to know, by the time I got back to my car, I was really winded and had worked up a little heat, because I had all these clothes on, and of course, the day got warmer. But at any rate, I felt really good that, for this year anyhow, I'm making it through all the stages. Making it to the events, I'm executiving, executing. I'm doing my part.

In the afternoon, we do service projects. And this year, we the town of Cary and MLK concentrated on refurbishing trails at Bond Park. Well, I had anticipated more volunteers than we, who came but, there were 23 volunteers from the Service for Peace, the kids and their parents who showed up, and I mean, some I don't think were any taller than this. They enthusiastically embraced the wheelbarrows and the shoveling of the mulch into the wheelbarrows and pushing them down the path. They weren't fooling around, they were really working. And that wasn't a clean job either, you know what I mean. They would get a little dirty. They worked, and worked and worked to get the job done. I was just, I was very happy, very pleased. Just got away with that one... but I felt that they understand the importance of doing service. Martin has a saying that, "Anybody can be great because anybody can serve." That was anybody serving in action. And they did it with cheerful hearts. When he called a halt to it, they were sad. "Oh no, you mean that's all we had to do?" I thought, "Oh, wow."

But anyway, my vice president usually has the job every year of what I call, doing the begging, because we bake up the food for the reception. That VIP, which is our signature event, we usually have quite a spread, and it's the community. She's made her rounds around the

community, etc. One of the places that she'd asked for a donation was Lowe's Foods. They always give such a grant layout. At the end of the night, she remembers, she forgot to pick up... I mean, I have to send them written kind of documentation, etc. for them to make this decision. Oh my word. So anyway, I said, "Well, you know, Sharon, you gotta go." I said, "Maybe call them." She said, "No, I think I'll just show up." When she showed up, she tells me that, oh, she got the dressing down of her life from this individual. She said, "She talked to me just like I was a child. But I apologized." I said, "You were the right person to go." However, the moral of the story is, we were able to take that blessing and feed these 23 people who had done all that work. I thought, that was perfect. We didn't have it here, but we did have it for this occasion. So I wrote her a note, and I said that, by that faux pas', we were able to feed these folk who labored so hard to do a service. So I hope that made up for the fact that she forgot to pick it up. But Sharon said that her only excuse was that she used two cars. It got to be too big for the little car where she switched out she left her notes behind, so she was going only by memory. And I will tell you that my mind, these days, is really wearing out too. I can't keep it all, so you're apt to, without it being written down, I try to keep my notes now, I'm liable to forget something or somebody.

Anyway, so we get through 2009. By all discussion at the table, we talked about how we can envision making it better in 2010. All I can say is, we have to try, we try to do that, and hopes with high expectations that the world will get the picture and join us at these events.

PV: Who are the key players in the African-American community in Cary who participate in all of these events, and who are real leaders in the community? Besides yourself, of course.

CS: Well, let me go through my list. I don't know if you know Sally Jones? Well, Sally makes all of the Dreamfest events. And she did sit at the meeting table, the planning table this year as a representative from that Cary church, Cary First. She has participated as a Vision United Singer. Didn't this year because she's having trouble with blood clots in her legs. And so I understood that, so I said well, okay, I'll let you go this time. But you can come and sit in a chair and participate in that way, which she did. And she brought two other ladies from her church this time. They were, they didn't sit at the planning table, but they were participants in events.

This year, my daughter who sits on the board, I'm trying to pick out black folks who support, but there were more, there are less blacks who will take the, these are my words now. Maybe I'm wrong, who rise to the occasion to stick with it. Oh, Renee Palmer is another supporter, and she was a board member at one point. She hasn't been a board member for a number of years, but she had participated, and did participate in this year's events to the extent that she could. She was one of the speakers for the (). She spoke at the birthday celebration. She had something to bring. She did an excellent job too. We had an excellent program for that night. Very few people there, if you read the Cary News article, it tells as much. She said, "I hope you'll be pleased with this article." But she's spoken the truth.

Who else? Oh, I have, not everybody is from Cary. Monica Keele and her daughter, who happens to be a Top Teen of America, they participated, not only, but also did some skut-work. They always come in saying, "What do you need me to do?" that kind of thing. And her husband, they drug him along this year and he took pictures at the events where he was present. And some others, a lot of them from Raleigh. But from Cary, even on the board, there's a large majority of... now the vice president, both vice presidents, the first and the second, are white.

Many of the others who really participate are white. Then we have a Pakistanian, Mike, he's been supportive over the years since getting involved. He's a stick and stay individual. I love that guy, he does his job, I mean really, he's there.

I hope I'm not leaving anybody... Sherrod has been a supporter. He was our presenter at the African-American History Comes Alive at Barnes and Noble last Saturday. Excellent presentation. I wish you could have been there, really. There's so much. His focus for this event, because it was MLK, he has MLK presentations like stamps. He informed us that Martin is on 150 stamps worldwide and in 50 states, whatever. Then he had all that stuff, he had quilts made, beautiful workmanship. And then he had a powerpoint presentation that he presented. Aside from the fact that he has internalized all of this information. Linda Maloof, who is the contact person there at Barnes and Noble, she asked some really good questions. And he was able to just, he didn't have to look up anything. He would say, "Oh, that was in 1779, and this was..." and I was standing there and I was going, "Did you know that?" I asking, and they said no. I said, "I didn't either." And just the wealth of information he was able to share. And then he gave everybody this book because he wanted us to be equipped.

PV: Oh, African-American Collector's Guide to Stamp Collecting, by Sherrod Gresham, so this is his own book.

CS: Exactly. His own book. He put it together, he says. You know, he had to learn the hard way, and so he took time to write it down so as to educate us as we think about and embrace that whole process of collecting information. I thought that was really neat and I was glad he had that to share with folk.

Dr. Clark supports me. He participated in the birthday celebration this year. He is also another sharp man. He knows a lot historically. And he collects African-American art from

Ghana and, I want to say, I know Ghana is one of them and I want to say Nigeria, but I'm not sure. But I do know Ghana for sure is a place, and he has lots of stuff that he has put on display for some of our exhibits here, when we do the, he does the case and etc. So he was out this year, and that was really good. We are all beginning to have our health issues, so I was glad that he rose above it and came to participate. And his being there and stuff that he had, I think that the crux of his talk was, and the bell, not the Liberty Bell but the Bell called Liberty, because his perspective is, it is not a Liberty Bell if all people aren't free. Heaven. It's so deep. But anyway, he was very well received by those of us who were there and the information he had to share. Over the years, I've always had a lot of good feedback from his talks and his presentations.

Anyhow, oh and Gwen Johnson, she was present. She has been a supporter. She is also my boss these days. Aside from that, we have been friends for over twenty-some years. We came into each other's lives because I licensed her facility. She runs an () up in Durham. And so in this relationship, we kind of give ourselves away to each other, for years I supported her in the Girl Scouts. See, her daughter was growing up, this Leslie person, and for all the years she was a girl scout leader, her mom and I, her mom was the troop leader and I was the associate troop leader. That's a lot of work. Have you ever done that?

PV: No.

CS: That's a lot of work. We tease each other about that. So I encouraged her to become a board member, and was willing to support events. So whenever we're having something, I have to tell her, you know, you've got to make sure to mark this date. Its MLK time again. That's right, you've got to do this, you've got to do that. So she was with us this year.

Oh, and we picked up another young lady. What is her name? I picked her up at one of the events. And she indicated an interest. So I'm hoping that for 2010, she'll be able to get in on

the beginning plans, planning process and help us out a lot. () Anyway, Janet West. That's an African-American person who participated this year. Gerald Hinton, he was our guest of honor.

PV: Tell me about him a little bit. He, what is he?

CS: He is a recording artist, actually. He does, yes he is. He does a lot of presentations for non-profits gratis, or for a love offering, you know what I'm saying, to help people out with their, doing fund-raising and things like that. But he also has a ministry, and through his music is able to do a lot of unifying and stuff like that, so I appreciate that. And he's a good artist. He really is very good.

Anyway, every year, for not since the beginning but at some point we established a guest of honor for the occasion. The guest of honor actually is to preside over all of the events. And if they have some claim to fame, we give them a point. For example, we had an author one year. And of course, for two years we've had an author, and they get a chance to do book signings at the VIP reception. Anyway, and they're also expected to bring their network to the events. And that has happened in the past. Last year, our guest of honor was David Manning, who was, his main claim to fame these days, he has lots of fame, but he heads up a travel agency. And we had 150 people from all over the United States who showed up here, following. You know what I'm saying, when you have an entourage of individuals who follow you, and you know I have that recorded somewhere too on all the states who were here because he was in town and he was doing this event. He never made it to, he was only going to do the date, the 18th, and we had snow which kicked out the VIP reception. Anyhow, but he was here and his influence brought a lot of people to this territory. So it really is, on one hand you might say, is a small kind of task, but get to greet, to welcome, and to just show favor, and definitely, hopefully bring their network to the event as part of what the VIP person does.

Oh, Shirlene Robinson is an African-American person who waited on me. Every year Kwanzaa happens. And every time I'm involved in one of my piers' events, I always use it as a time to get information out of them, but also to build toward Dreamfest, and Kwanzaa allows me an opportunity to build toward Dreamfest. While I'm sitting at that table and talking to people as they go by, you have to be a little assertive, you have to reach out to individuals. But this past year, I was able to reach out to over 50 people, talking about, "Don't miss Dreamfest 2009." And I was recruiting Vision United Singers. I use every opportunity, every opportunity. But that's just an example of just touching base within and collecting their information and so you can, I can send them the program, you know, what's going to be happening. I can be in touch with them. So I use those opportunities in that way, and Shirlene Robinson was one of the persons who I met at that, at the Kwanzaa event and she participated. Several of the people who came through actually lived through the experience. Some become intimidated by the fact that we don't practice, practice, practice. But I try to tell these folks that it is not so much a perfect sound that I'm after as the community of people who are able to bring together in a unified effort. I believe that we should make a joyful noise, but that didn't necessarily say anything in tune, you know what I'm saying? And really, I have found, like I told you, for seven years we've put on a program and hadn't heard anybody that was perfect. So I think beyond what we do as individuals, my creator, or God, watches over, and he will pull it together. Even for this rehearsal, maybe we had twenty people. I told you we had 44 at rehearsal. One of my friends went back to her church and she said, "Carolyn worked so hard," this is a white friend, alright? "To make this happen. And we need to support her." She said, the hands went up all over the place. And I had two males in that rehearsal, and come that night the males almost outnumbered the females. So, you have not because you ask not, right? And then if you just leave yourself

open to the possibilities, it will happen. I was very, very pleased. We did an excellent job with our song. As a matter of fact, I told Lyman in our meeting, I said, "You know, you might just have the Vision United Singers featured. A featured performance." That's a thought.

Anyhow, let's see who else is on here. There are a few of us who make it to the forefront and do their do. Rolesia, that was her name. That was the person we picked up in this event who has volunteered to participate futuristically.

PV: Well, Carolyn, I just want to say thank you so very much for taking your time today to talk to me, to give us this wonderful interview. You just are doing fantastic work for Cary and for the entire area, for all of the community. We really appreciate knowing about what you're doing and we appreciate all the efforts you are making for all of us. So thank you so very much for all of your information today.

END OF INTERVIEW