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Y. Stories to Save Lives

Interview Y-0022

Marie Fearrington

7 June 2018

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ABSTRACT – MARIE FEARRINGTON

Narrator: Marie Fearrington
Interviewer: Nicholas Allen
Date: 07.06.2018
Location: Marie's home, 1700 Mr. Willing Rd, Efland, NC
Length: Approximately 45 minutes

Marie Fearrington has lived in Efland, North Carolina her entire life. She was mainly a homemaker, but also worked in a local hosiery mill. She was 92 at the time of the interview. She begins by discussing her education in Efland and getting married right out of high school; she segues into talking about her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She talks about her old neighborhood and how kids grow up now. She discusses meeting her husband, who worked at Liggett & Myers Tobacco company, and his retirement. She talks about aging in her home and how she copes. She mentions Orange County's S.A.L.T. program (Seniors And Law Enforcement Together, run by Archie Daniel). She discusses perceptions on aging and how she stays young. She talks about going to church at Efland Methodist. She tells the story of her brother's dementia, experiencing the hospital after surgery, her skepticism about physical therapy, and positive experiences with doctors. She discusses housekeeping, keeping up her land, gardening, freezing vegetables, how she used to cook for her family, and funeral cooking. She discusses the deaths of her sister to rheumatic fever and her father and mother. She unpacks her take on moving to a nursing home and living alone in the country.

FIELD NOTES – MARIE FEARRINGTON

Narrator: MARIE FEARRINGTON
 Interviewer: Nicholas Allen
 Date: 07.06.2018
 Location: Marie's home, 1700 Mr. Willing Rd, Efland, NC

NARRATOR Marie Fearrington is a lifelong resident of Efland, North Carolina. She was 92 at the time of this interview. She lives alone in a meticulously well-kept house on a large swathe of land. She spent her life as a homemaker, though she did work for some time at a hosiery mill where her mother also worked. Her life is currently defined by chances to visit with her family, which is quite large, including many great grandchildren.

THE INTERVIEWER Nicholas Allen is a graduate student in the department of English at UNC-Chapel Hill, currently earning an M.A. in Literature, Medicine, and Culture. His research focuses on late life and end of life.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW The interview, which lasted just shy of 45 minutes, took place in Marie's living room by natural light. Marie's incredibly sweet nature and strong eye contact do not translate into the recording, but leave one impressed with her strong sense of self and her self-satisfaction at a life well lived, as she mentions many times in the interview.

NOTE ON RECORDING I used the SOHP's Zoom H5 #4 for this recording, which I held between us as Marie and I sat on adjacent recliners.

HIGHLIGHTS OR POSSIBLE EXCERPTS Marie's reflections on late life, what's important to her, and her general insight about living alone at her age are important testaments towards the current movement of aging in place—which she is doing quite successfully.

TRANSCRIPT: Marie Fearrington

Interviewee: Marie Fearrington
Interviewer: Nick Allen
Interview Date: June 7, 2018
Location: Marie's home, 1700 Mr. Willing Rd, Efland, NC
Length: 45 minutes

START OF INTERVIEW

Marie Fearrington: A bowl of cereal.

[0:00:06.6]

Nick Allen: Good. Anything else with that?

[0:00:08.3]

MF: Some coffee, instant coffee.

[0:00:12.3]

NA: Do you just have one cup of coffee a day?

[0:00:13.5]

MF: Mm-hmm, yeah.

[0:00:14.8]

NA: Just the one?

[0:00:15.7]

MF: And don't like it.

[0:00:17.1]

Interview number Y-0022 from the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

NA: You don't like coffee?

[0:00:17.7]

MF: Nuh-uh.

[0:00:17.6]

NA: Why do you drink it?

[0:00:18.4]

MF: I just made it when my husband was living. He liked coffee, and so I'll have maybe one cup every two or three weeks. Very seldom I drink coffee.

[0:00:29.7]

NA: Wow. I have to drink it every day.

[0:00:32.1]

MF: Not me. [laughter]

[0:00:34.7]

NA: So tell me a little bit about your childhood or your parents, wherever you want to start at.

[0:00:39.7]

MF: Oh, lord.

[0:00:41.0]

NA: I'd love to hear about how you came up.

[0:00:42.7]

MF: Well, I was born in Efland, in Efland, lived there all my life, and went to school at Efland eleven years, and graduated in 1944, and I got married in '45 and moved up between Efland and Mebane. We had a little house there, and moved over here. I

believe I've been here about fifty years. My son and husband and neighbors built this house. And I had two brothers and a sister, and I have one brother living. One brother, one sister is dead, and my mother and daddy are both dead. Mother worked in the hosiery mill, and my daddy worked several different places, in the grocery store here in Efland years ago, Forrest's [phonetic] Store, and then he worked in White's factory in Mebane.

And I played basketball for Efland. Now, we had a good team. [laughs]

[0:02:01.7]

NA: Oh, yeah?

[0:02:03.1]

MF: Yes, we did. We played, oh, all around everywhere back then. I come up, I went to church, both Baptist Church and the Methodist Church, but I'm a member of the Efland Methodist Church now and I have been for something like fifty years, I reckon. I've had a good life, enjoyed my children, and I have quite a few grandchildren, twelve great-grandchildren.

[0:02:38.2]

NA: Wow.

[0:02:38.9]

MF: I have four grandchildren and twelve great-grandchildren, and enjoy every one of them. [laughs] In fact, today I'm going to a birthday party. Two of the great-grandsons have birthdays today, so I'm going to a birthday party this evening for them.

[0:02:58.2]

NA: Are they twins?

[0:02:59.6]

MF: No, different families.

[0:03:03.5]

NA: Wow.

[0:03:04.2]

MF: And I've had a good life, and over here, everybody has been so good. I just have the best neighbors you've ever seen. My son, he works for Walmart Distributing up here in Mebane. He drove a truck from the time he got out of high school, for heaven knows how many years. So when they come up here, he quit the truck driving and went to work up here. And my daughter has worked in the hospital in offices there, but she doesn't work now. Her and her husband live in Mebane, and Kenneth and his family live in Mebane too. We've just had a wonderful life. God's been good to me.

[0:03:57.8]

NA: Did y'all see the doctor much when you were coming up?

[0:04:01.1]

MF: Doctor?

[0:04:02.6]

NA: Did you see doctors much when you were a kid?

[0:04:04.6]

MF: No, not much. I reckon I see him more now since I've got old than I have ever, ever seen him.

[0:04:13.7]

NA: What happened when you got sick when you were a kid?

[0:04:14.9]

MF: Well, we went to the doctor. They doctored on us, but I don't ever remember being real sick. And my brothers and sisters the same way. But if we got sick, they always took care of us. I did have my tonsils taken out my senior year in high school. I remember that.

[0:04:41.2]

NA: What was that like?

[0:04:41.6]

MF: It was awful. [laughs] I was scared to death. No, I got along good, you know, but I just didn't like the hospital, just didn't like being away from home. I'd been around home all my life, you know.

[0:04:57.4]

NA: How far away was the hospital?

[0:05:00.0]

MF: It was at Duke. Oh, lordy, I can remember so much about Efland back then, and I think about it a lot now. I start from Efland, I consider down about where the roads divide, and up as far as beyond the fire station, and used to know everybody up and down the road everywhere, but now, you go out and you'll see a little road up through the woods and a nice big house up there that wasn't there when I come along. My daddy never did have a car. And all the kids in the community just went together. We had little parties and things like that, and we all had a good time.

It used to be an old schoolhouse up across the river—well, on this side the railroad; it's torn down now—that Mr. Efland owned, and he let us roller skate in it. All the kids in the neighborhood had roller skates, you know, and it was an upstairs, and the

stage and everything was an old school, and he let us skate there for a long time. Well, the old floor had got just as slick as the floor. We done got all the splinters off of it. [laughs] But we had a good life coming up, really did. I think we had a lot more fun when we come up than kids do now. I really do.

[0:06:51.9]

NA: Yeah, I can see that.

[0:06:54.2]

MF: I really do. I think they have cars, where they get out and run and go here, yonder, and everywhere. We didn't. We'd go to the show once in a while. They had a theater in Mebane at that time. We'd go to the show, things like that, but I just know that we had a better time coming up than the kids do now. [laughs]

[0:07:16.5]

NA: When did you meet Frank?

[0:07:19.6]

MF: Oh, my lord. [laughs] Before ever I got out of school.

[0:07:25.6]

NA: Really?

[0:07:25.6]

MF: Yeah.

[0:07:27.4]

NA: Were y'all in school at the same time?

[0:07:28.6]

MF: Nuh-uh, no. He didn't go to school—he went to school in Hillsborough. His daddy was a plumbing and heating contractor, and he'd done a lot of that with him, but he worked at Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company for thirty-five years, and he retired. He'd been there thirty-five years. He was having some back trouble, and so he just retired. So we've had a good life, we really have, but he'll soon be dead eleven years.

[0:08:08.4]

NA: I'm sorry.

[0:08:09.4]

MF: And it gets lonesome, but my kids and all my neighbors, lord, you never know when a neighbor's coming in and call. And this program that Charlie and them have, Archie and them have, I think is so nice, I really do, and they're so nice. They come and want to know if there's anything they can do for you. Ed was saying the other day that they were coming late with my lunch, come in just real fast. They were running late, says some lady had a prescription that need filling, so they had run and had her prescription filled. I thought that was so nice and them doing things like that. I am able to get up and do things in the house. I don't go outside much, but I can cook, still cook and clean and things like that, where there's so many people even younger than I am that is not able to do that, and I think I'm very fortunate to get along as good as I do and have such good neighbors and my kids are so good to me.

[0:09:27.2]

NA: Why do you think you're still able to get along a little better than some other people?

[0:09:33.1]

MF: I don't know. Just God's been good to me, is all I know. [laughs]

[0:09:40.7]

NA: What do you do when you're feeling a little bit lonesome?

[0:09:42.9]

MF: I watch television a lot. Mornings, I get up and I turn television on first thing. I don't sit and look at it, but it's somebody in the house with me. I watch television. I don't especially like to read. I have had a lot of trouble with my eyes, macular degeneration of my eyes, and it takes a pretty good print for me to do too much reading. I just watch television, call somebody, or somebody'll call me or somebody'll come in, you know. But I've lived a good life, no regrets.

[0:10:33.4]

NA: That's an amazing thing to be able to say.

[0:10:37.2]

MF: Well, that is the truth. That is the truth.

[0:10:44.8]

NA: I think the program that Archie has is pretty amazing, all the people that he can connect with.

[0:10:52.9]

MF: Yeah, uh-huh.

[0:10:55.3]

NA: I oftentimes think about communities that don't have something like that.

[0:10:59.0]

MF: I know. I know I have this cousin that—well, she's in Alamance County, partly in Orange and partly in Alamance. She has land both places. She says in Alamance County they don't do things like this. She's just real fascinated by what all they do, and she has been here when Archie and some of 'em have come, and they go see her too. They don't take her a meal, but they go by and see her every week. She's just partly in Orange County and partly in Alamance County, has land both places. She lives off Mebane Oaks Road. But it is. Archie's just been so nice to everybody, and everybody that I know thinks so much of Archie. I know I do.

[0:11:54.2]

NA: Yeah, we're all pulling for him real hard in this surgery.

[0:11:58.1]

MF: Oh, I know. I feel for him. I know this girl I was telling you about has had this back surgery. All's in her back is titanium rods and screws, you know, and I'm so afraid that Archie might be the same way, that he's had so much trouble. I feel sorry for him. I wish there was something I could do for him.

[0:12:27.1]

NA: How does that other girl get along? Can she move around okay?

[0:12:30.4]

MF: She can move around, but she's all bent over. She can't walk without a walker or a cane or something. I use a walker in the house for safety, because I had both knees replaced. I've had this shoulder replaced, and this one hurts, but I'm not going to have it done. [laughs] And so I feel safer to use a walker in the house.

[0:12:55.4]

NA: When did you start using it?

[0:12:57.7]

MF: Oh, six months ago or something, or less. I wouldn't do that if my children didn't fuss at me, afraid I would fall. "Use your cane or use the walker." And I make out fine.

[0:13:18.6]

NA: So you made it all the way to ninety-one without a walker.

[0:13:21.9]

MF: Yeah, I sure did.

[0:13:22.6]

NA: I'd say that's pretty impressive.

[0:13:22.6]

MF: I could make it now, but I would be awfully slow. [laughs]

[0:13:33.7]

NA: When you're reflecting on life, how do you think about the process of aging? Have you reflected on what it means to get older?

[0:13:44.8]

MF: I don't consider myself old. [laughs]

[0:13:49.0]

NA: That's what I'm talking about!

[0:13:50.1]

MF: I don't consider myself old.

[0:13:52.1]

NA: How do you stay young?

[0:13:52.9]

MF: I don't know, just doing what I feel like doing and being good to everybody.

[0:14:03.1]

NA: What do you look forward to every day?

[0:14:04.9]

MF: Getting up and talking to the kids. Kenneth calls me every morning at his work, from his work at his break time, and Joyce calls me two or three times a day. And the grandkids, I never know when they're coming in and there's so many of them, I enjoy every one of them. But I just enjoy life, I reckon. I've stayed fairly well. I have had this surgery and all, but I come back.

[0:14:45.6]

NA: How long ago was that surgery?

[0:14:47.3]

MF: In 2000.

[0:14:52.3]

NA: Was that the most recent surgery you've had?

[0:14:54.6]

MF: Most recent was this shoulder. That was since Frank died, so that must've been about five, six years ago, something like that. But we lived a good life and enjoyed every bit of it. We had a house at the coast for a while, and we'd go down there mostly every weekend and during the week. After he retired, we would go stay maybe two or three weeks at a time, come back home, clean up and mow and do things like that, then

go right back, and the kids would come down on the weekend and grandkids that was here. Oh, we've just lived a good life.

[0:15:46.6]

NA: If there was any one thing you could change, do you think you'd change anything?

[0:15:52.0]

MF: Well, I don't know what it would be.

[0:16:00.1]

NA: You seem like a pretty happy lady.

[0:16:01.3]

MF: I am. I really am.

[0:16:03.9]

NA: That's a wonderful blessing.

[0:16:05.3]

MF: It is, it is. God's been good to me, me and Frank, and the family, and we all get along real good. Everybody's just—they just can't do enough for you.

[0:16:21.2]

NA: Do you still make it to church?

[0:16:22.9]

MF: Oh, yeah, I go every Sunday.

[0:16:26.5]

NA: How long have you been at that church?

[0:16:27.8]

MF: At that church? Fifty years, I reckon, more than that.

[0:16:32.4]

NA: What church is it? Can you remind me?

[0:16:33.4]

MF: Efland Methodist. Yeah, I go every Sunday. My neighbor picks me up. Joyce could pick me up, but my neighbor lives right across around the curb here. She goes. She picks me up and brings me—drives up under the carport and they wait on me like I'm a little child [laughs]. But I've just got along real good. I think I've done good to stay well as I have to be as old as I am.

[0:17:11.0]

NA: Yeah. And you said your brother had dementia.

[0:17:13.7]

MF: Yeah.

[0:17:13.7]

NA: What was that like?

[0:17:14.5]

MF: Oh, it was terrible. He lived in Efland, had a house built over there kind of across from the Esso station over there on Highway 70. He lived alone, and he come over here a lot. In his later years, he would hear people coming in, trying to break in his house and things like that. When I'd come in the mornings and open the blinds, the first thing I would do, look and see if he'd come over here, waiting for us to get up or something like that. You never knew what he was going to do. I forgot how many years he's been dead, but quite a few.

[0:18:12.4]

NA: Do you remember when the dementia started?

[0:18:15.0]

MF: No, no, I really don't. I don't. But he was real bad with it, and it worried me, him being by himself. He would come over and eat with me a lot and he would do some cooking himself and all, but he really got bad. I hope and pray that I'll never get nothing like that. I feel like sometime now that I could do some crazy things. Maybe I'm getting dementia too. [laughs]

[0:18:59.8]

NA: What makes you say that?

[0:19:01.4]

MF: Some of the crazy things that I think about, I reckon. I don't know what else. No, I think I've done real good to be as old as I am and still able to wait on myself.

[0:19:19.1]

NA: Uh-huh. I'd say you've done real good to be as young as you are. [laughs]

[0:19:23.2]

MF: As young as I am. Right.

[0:19:26.9]

NA: Can you remember any really impactful experiences in a hospital or anything like that that still sticks with you?

[0:19:40.5]

MF: No, except when I was in the hospital, I was wanting to come home. That's the only thing that I can remember. [laughs] No, I got along pretty good with—let's see.

The knees, they were done about three years apart, my knee replacement, and then the shoulder was done, oh, since Frank died, and he'll soon be dead eleven years this year, this month. All I was wanting to do was get to come home, just come home. They don't keep you very long. They shoot you out of the hospital just as soon as they can. I reckon the insurance won't let them, you know, stay any longer than you—really than they think you have to.

[0:20:34.0]

NA: How long did you stay for your knees?

[0:20:36.7]

MF: Well, the first one, I think I stayed four or five days, and then I went to rehab at Burlington and stayed maybe two weeks.

[0:20:53.4]

NA: Oh, wow.

[0:20:53.4]

MF: Then come home. I couldn't see that it helped me, but I stayed anyway. I worried them to death for me to come home, because I could do at home what they were doing for me, you know.

[0:21:07.5]

NA: What were they doing for you?

[0:21:08.8]

MF: Oh, all sorts of crazy things, exercising that I could do at home, taking a ball and rolling it and crazy things that I thought, but I got along good.

[0:21:26.5]

NA: You don't think they helped you much to do the exercises?

[0:21:28.8]

MF: Nuh-uh. I believe that I could've done just exactly what they did. But I got along all right.

[0:21:43.2]

NA: Do you have a regular doctor now that you go see?

[0:21:44.9]

MF: Mm-hmm. At Kernodle Clinic in Mebane.

[0:21:53.8]

NA: Do you like him?

[0:21:54.3]

MF: Oh, yes. Dr. Feldpausch. Yes, and I've got an appointment with him the 24th of this month, just a regular checkup.

[0:22:07.9]

NA: Right before your birthday.

[0:22:08.4]

MF: Day before my birthday. When they sent me the letter telling me, I said, "That's the day before my birthday. I don't think I'll even go." [laughs] But I will.

[0:22:21.5]

NA: Why do you think you like him so much?

[0:22:23.1]

MF: Well, he will sit—I have seen doctors that they don't tell you anything after they see you. He sits down and talks to you and tells you what he found or what he thinks or this, that, and the other. And he's real good. I sure do like him.

[0:22:59.7]

NA: You've got a beautiful house, Marie. How do you keep it so nice?

[0:23:04.6]

MF: Well, I just try. I go over the floors, vacuum, dust, and things like that. If I didn't mess it up, I don't have to do it every day, but I cook and my daughter cooks an awful lot, and she brings me a lot of stuff in passing. I have the three bedrooms and a bath and a half, and I have ten acres of land here.

[0:23:37.1]

NA: You have ten?

[0:23:37.4]

MF: Uh-huh.

[0:23:38.3]

NA: Wow!

[0:23:40.3]

MF: My great-grandsons do my mowing for me.

[0:23:47.9]

NA: What have y'all used all these acres for over the years?

[0:23:50.7]

MF: Well, we've raised some cows, had a pasture for cows, and we let a fella keep—we raised pigs several years, too, and that was back when Frank was working and

doing that, too, and he done a little bit of farming. He worked second-shift work in the morning, then go to work in the evening. And we have a little pond back in there, and it's just growing up now. My son-in-law and granddaughter had a garden last year, but they just let it grow up this year. They decided not to have a garden this year.

[0:24:38.7]

NA: Did you have a garden?

[0:24:40.2]

MF: Very little. We usually had a small garden, but it's been quite a few years since we had a garden.

[0:24:50.4]

NA: What did you like to grow?

[0:24:52.8]

MF: Grow?

[0:24:54.6]

NA: What did you grow in the garden?

[0:24:56.2]

MF: Oh, corn, tomatoes, beans, squash, cucumber. We did it all [laughs] when we had it, and I would freeze and can. But those days are gone forever. I'm not going to have a garden. I'm not going to freeze anymore, except help the daughter-in-laws when they have—and my daughter, when they have stuff to freeze and stuff. I help them.

[0:25:27.7]

NA: They still freeze?

[0:25:28.3]

MF: Yeah.

[0:25:29.5]

NA: That's great.

[0:25:29.0]

MF: We did last year, froze corn, tomatoes, okra, and all that stuff.

[0:25:35.0]

NA: When you were cooking for your family, what kind of meals did you used to make for your family?

[0:25:44.1]

MF: Meals?

[0:25:46.9]

NA: Mm-hmm.

[0:25:47.0]

MF: Well, I worked, and I would come home at 3:30 and I would start fixing supper pretty quick. Frank come in at 5:00, and we would always have good meals. I'd have a meat and at least two vegetables, and lots of times dessert. They liked pies and cakes, and I would make them.

[0:26:13.0]

NA: Did you like to cook?

[0:26:13.8]

MF: Oh, lord, yes. I loved to cook.

[0:26:19.3]

NA: What's your favorite dish to cook?

[0:26:20.0]

MF: Oh, my lord, you've sunk me there. I don't know. But I do make a lot of pie. I keep a lot of pies in my freezer, coconut pies, and candied yams and things like that in the freezer because I'm always having something at church, a meal, and I don't have to worry about cooking. I can take it out the freezer and take that. Or funeral, somebody get sick or a death in the family, I always take something some food to the house. That's the way I was brought up, and I have done it all my life.

[0:26:59.4]

NA: That's a wonderful thing.

[0:27:04.5]

MF: I reckon that's the reason I've got so many friends. [laughs] I've always been good to everybody.

[0:27:21.5]

NA: Yeah, I like that thought.

[0:27:22.6]

MF: Huh?

[0:27:23.1]

NA: Being good to everybody pays off in the end, huh?

[0:27:25.2]

MF: It does. It truly does. It truly does.

[0:27:36.5]

NA: So you're the last one living of all your siblings?

[0:27:39.5]

MF: No, I have a brother in Hillsborough. Today's his birthday. He's eighty-eight.

[0:27:45.6]

NA: Oh, wow.

[0:27:47.8]

MF: Yeah.

[0:27:51.0]

NA: How long has it been since your sister passed on?

[0:27:53.7]

MF: In [19]57. I believe it was '57. Oh, I don't remember. Seventy-nine, [19]79. I don't remember, honestly. I can't think right now what year it was. I know her and my daddy both died in the same year. My mother died two years earlier, and then my daddy and my sister died in the same year.

[0:28:24.6]

NA: That must've been really hard.

[0:28:26.0]

MF: It was. It truly was. We have always been a real close family, real close.

[0:28:47.5]

NA: Do you remember what happened?

[0:28:49.6]

MF: What happened what?

[0:28:50.6]

NA: To your sister and your father.

[0:28:53.2]

MF: No. I forgot what. Daddy, his mind had got sort of bad. And my sister, when she was young, she had rheumatic fever and it always left her sort of sickly-like. But they lived a good long while. I don't know how long. But I know Bunny and Daddy both died in the same year. It was sort of rough. At that time, I still had the two brothers, and one of them died since, and then the one with the birthday today is eighty-eight, so he's getting on up there. I believe he said Daddy was about eighty-seven when he died. We were talking about that the other day.

[0:29:58.2]

NA: Do you remember what it was like when your sister had rheumatic fever?

[0:30:01.7]

MF: No, not really. She didn't get out and play with us as much as we did.

[0:30:23.8]

NA: Yeah, I've heard it's just terrible.

[0:30:27.6]

MF: Yeah, mm-hmm. But I don't remember her being ornery or anything like that. She always got along good with everybody, but she just didn't get out and play with us as much as the rest of us did.

[0:31:01.2]

NA: Do your grandkids call you Meemaw?

[0:31:02.8]

MF: Meemaw. Yeah, that's the reason that little thing is there. One of 'em seen it somewhere and they come in, bringing that. First time they had ever seen one. Most is

Mawmaw or Grandma or something, but they call me Meemaw. And they're always bringing me pictures, the little ones. I've got 'em from less than a year old to sixteen—no, to eighteen or nineteen.

[0:31:35.5]

NA: Wow.

[0:31:35.7]

MF: And the little ones come in, they'll bring me a picture. Of course, it's just something they scribble, and if I don't put it up on the refrigerator or somewhere where they can see it, next time they come in, says, "Mamaw, where's my picture?" [laughs] So I have to keep it a while and then throw it away, but they're already bringing me something. And they love it when they get out in the yard. They'll go pick little wildflowers, little things with a stem about that long and they bring 'em in and I fix a cup or something and put water in it and put it in there till they leave. But they're always picking flowers for me.

[0:32:25.6]

NA: That's wonderful. And you have a lot of pretty flowers in the house right now.

[0:32:28.8]

MF: Yeah. [laughs] I grow some gladiolas out here. I got one or two over there on the table I picked yesterday. When Frank was living, he had awfully pretty flowers from the road all the way back here, and just a bed of 'em, oh, real wide, half as wide as this room. But I don't have 'em anymore. They just come up every year, the glads, so every summer I have gladiolas in the house, fresh ones.

[0:33:08.8]

NA: That's pretty great, having that reminder of Frank.

[0:33:12.1]

MF: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. Lord, I'll never forget him.

[0:33:23.6]

NA: Have you ever thought about that you might need to go to a nursing home?

[0:33:28.7]

MF: Yeah. I told my kids, I said, "I want to stay home as long as y'all think that I am able to do my work, stay home, and when it's time for me to go somewhere, I don't want to go, but I want you to put me somewhere or somebody to look after me." And I says, "I don't want to go to a nursing home, but I will go. I'd rather be at home." But I never seen anybody yet that'd rather go to a nursing home, but I said I just don't want to burden either one of 'em to look after me. They have families of their own. I've got sense enough to know that they need to be looking after them instead of worrying about me. And the way they are, I know they would visit and all like that. So it don't bother me. It really don't.

[0:34:36.9]

NA: What do you think, if you did have to go, would be the most important thing for that nursing home to offer to you? What would be the most important thing to have at the nursing home to make it okay with you?

[0:34:53.2]

MF: Visitors to come to see me. And I know my family would, so that would be no problem whatsoever. Just to come check on me, see that everything was going right. If it wasn't, if they'd see that it got right [laughs].

[0:35:16.9]

NA: Well, it seems like you're doing pretty great for yourself right now.

[0:35:19.6]

MF: I am. I'm doing fine.

[0:35:27.2]

NA: Is there anything that worries you about the future?

[0:35:33.9]

MF: No, that I can think of.

[0:35:37.9]

NA: Isn't that great? I think not having to worry is a wonderful thing.

[0:35:42.9]

MF: I think that the kids would look after me and see that things was all right.

[telephone interruption]

[0:35:54.4]

MF: That was my neighbor that used to live across the street here, and she lives in Mebane now, and she calls every week to see how I'm doing. Now, what were we talking about? [laughs]

[0:36:07.3]

NA: We were talking about how you never have to worry about anything.

[0:36:11.4]

MF: No, I mean I worry. I tell you, I've lived here now for eleven years by myself, and I've always just had the fear, I reckon, of some meanness, somebody trying to break in or something like that, but as far as really worrying me, it don't, but just the thought about it. You see so much of it on television. [laughs] My granddaughter's friend built this for me last week and said, "Mamaw says anybody come in that door, you hit 'em on the head just as hard as you can." [laughs] But I get along fine.

I tell you, one time something that I'll never forget was one night—I have a neighbor up there by the name of Charles, and they visit a lot, him and his wife. And he says, "I'll see you later." And I said, "All right." And I had already closed the blinds and closed the door.

Somebody knocked on the door, and I says—I shouldn't have said anything. I wouldn't now. I know better. I says, "Who is it?"

And he says, "Charles." I thought he said, "Charles."

And I went to the door and it was this tall, skinny colored man. It was about quarter to 9:00. And I don't usually talk to anybody after 9:00 o'clock unless it's an emergency or something. And he had one of these spray bottles, you know, like a household spray. And when I opened the door, I opened the door and stood there with my hand on the storm door, you know, and he started talking. I says, "I absolutely am not interested. Thank you." And I closed the door, and it scared me after it was over. And I looked out there, and it was a car just plumb full of colored people at 9:00 o'clock at night, and it scared me. And I don't know. I've just always thought about that.

And I tell anybody that anybody that comes to see me after dark, if they don't call my name, they don't get in. I don't even go to the door. But other than that, I'm fine, but

things like that makes you wonder. My kids told me, said, “Don’t you ever go to the door to anybody,” and I haven’t. I haven’t, and I’m not. I’ve had people to knock at the door and I wouldn’t go to the door, and I wouldn’t answer ‘em. But I just—they have drilled it in to me not to go to the door to anybody that I did not know, and I don’t.

[0:39:30.5]

NA: Yeah, that makes good sense.

[0:39:32.7]

MF: It does. It truly does, because if any of the family come after late or anything, they call before they come, “We’re coming.” I’ve even had ‘em to drive up under the carport and my phone would ring and say, “Mamaw, it’s me. I’m under the carport.”

[laughs] And so then I’d go to the door. But I don’t go to the door to anybody that I don’t know. If I see ‘em, I get out of sight of ‘em, you know, and I still don’t go. I just don’t go to the door.

[0:40:10.7]

NA: Do you feel like this is a pretty safe community?

[0:40:12.8]

MF: Mm-hmm, yeah. Fellow across the street here, he’s an ex-policeman. He was from Virginia. And I wear a Lifeline thing. I can call somebody real quick if anything was to happen.

[0:40:44.2]

NA: Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about?

[0:40:48.0]

MF: I don't know of anything. I think I've done talked myself to death. Have I told you anything you wanted to hear? [laughs]

[0:40:53.9]

NA: Yeah! I'm just very interested in hear about how people are living when they're living at home when they're older and what things used to be like.

[0:41:08.9]

MF: Yeah, there is definitely a difference in the way we come up and the way kids come up this day and time. Of course, we didn't have television for a long time, didn't have television, no telephones or anything. I didn't have a telephone till I come over here. I been here at least fifty years. Frank and Kenneth and the neighbors would come and help. He built the house except for laying the brick and building the kitchen cabinets. So that makes you think a lot more of it, too, you know. He would get off work and come home from Liggett & Myers and eat supper and come right over here and work till about 9:30 at night, and then come home, shower, go to bed, get up and go to work again. [laughs]

[0:42:00.0]

NA: Wow. How long did it take him to build the house?

[0:42:03.7]

MF: I don't know. Not long. And I know we had a neighbor that lived over here, or two neighbors, and one of 'em, they were working down in eastern part of the state, and I can't think where it was. It's not too awfully far. And Frank had got the top on the house and was fixing to put the black paper on, you know, and the fellow had this construction company. He says, "Henry," says, "let's go home and put that black paper

on the house for Frank so it won't mess it up." And do you know, he quit his work and he had a construction company, and him and he was a neighbor over here, two neighbors, and they come and when Frank come home from work, they had almost put the black paper on on top of the roof for him. And that's the kind of neighbors that we had.

[0:43:08.0]

NA: How did Frank react?

[0:43:09.3]

MF: Oh, he was shocked to death, but he would've done the same thing for them. I know, as I said, his daddy was a heating and plumbing contractor, and one Christmas morning one of our neighbors called, a friend, and said, "We are having the family for dinner today," and something about the pump, the water or something. Christmas morning, now, and Frank and Kenneth went up there and fixed the pump for 'em. Just things like that. And I've always said you had to be a neighbor to have a neighbor. But that was the kind of people that surrounds us.

[0:43:58.2]

NA: Sounds like a great community.

[0:43:59.3]

MF: It is. It truly, truly, truly is. You're not gonna put everything—are you gonna put everything on that thing that I said? You think I'm crazy? [laughs]

[0:44:23.4]

NA: It's been recorded, but we can talk about—is there stuff that you don't want to be on there?

[0:44:27.5]

MF: [laughs] No, I don't care. I don't care.

[0:44:31.0]

NA: Yeah, it's recorded. You've had such a great life.

[0:44:34.4]

MF: I have had a good life.

[0:44:36.6]

NA: That's a wonderful thing to share.

[0:44:37.8]

MF: I have got a good life, but I don't know that anybody's want to hear anything about me. [laughs]

[0:44:44.0]

NA: Well, I want to hear it.

[0:44:45.8]

MF: Okay.

[0:44:47.2]

NA: I'll turn it off now.

[End of interview]

Edited by Nick Allen