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MARTINA DUNFORD

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ALICIA T. ROUVEROL: This is Alicia Rouverol of the Southern Oral History Program. This is an interview with Martina Dunford of the Edgemont Community Center in Durham, North Carolina. Today's date is February 18, 1999. This is my tape number 21899md.1. This interview is part of the New Immigrants Project, which is part of the Listening for a Change Project.

I think we're ready to go here. Do you want to start by talking first about Edgemont Community Center, and a little bit what you know of its history and what you came into when you first started to work here?

MARTINA DUNFORD: From what I know about the Edgemont Community Center I know at some point in time it was totally white, and actually more affluent people lived here; it was sort of one of the upper places to live back at some point in time. Then the Housing Authority bought it out, and African Americans started moving in. So, of course, 'when they move in others move out' sort of thing happens. It just happens. I've been in Durham for nine years. I've actually been fortunate enough to work here in the Edgemont community for those entire nine years. I came from Virginia to go to grad school—actually it's eight years, I take it back, because it was '91 when I came; January of '91—and came into Durham to go to school and to work. My first job was here as a coordinator for Parks and Recreation. Surprisingly, well I guess surprisingly—I don't know if it was surprising because I've worked in several neighborhoods, or a neighborhood, when I was going through college. When I came to Durham my friends

were like—I told some people that I was going to work in Few Gardens. They were like, You're going to work where? I said in Few Gardens. They were like 'Have you lost your mind?' People considered it "a war zone". Things were happening down here. Fortunately over the years we've been able to change that. I don't know if we've really changed the image as we've changed the statistics; that's something that people don't really research and look at. The same situations or the amount of situations that were happening before are definitely much less than when I first came here. I've been here, I've seen the change come about. It is due largely to the efforts of all the agencies here, but Few Gardens is the only housing development that has a nonprofit that sits in the midst. That's what Edgemont is—it's a nonprofit organization that is designed to actually root for, help empower people. Move them in; move them out. So we take on all aspects of the community, be it from birth to death. We have a child care center that we serve kids here in the neighborhood with. We have this center itself that deals with basically five year olds and up. We have our senior programs. We have our youth adult programs. We have our teen programs. We have afterschool services. We have all sorts of programs to help the people here in the community. Again, we're the only community in the city of Durham who has a nonprofit. We get to reach the people on a different level. We get to establish rapports. We're open all day from basically eight until sometimes eight or nine, ten, depending on what's going on. But we are here and have a total open door policy. We have been able to establish rapports with the people here in Edgemont, which allows them to come in and trust us to a certain extent. We have been able to direct some people's lives, which is fortunate to be able to do that. We reach outside of the community; we try to—

AR: So beyond Few Gardens—

MD: Right, because Edgemont actually encompasses about a half a mile radius around this particular area. So it's not just Few Gardens. It's all around. It's to Driver.

AR: What streets?

MD: To the North is Holloway Sreet. To the East is Driver. To the South is Angier. And to the West is Elizabeth Road--Fayetteville Sreet and Elizabeth Road. They sort of change over in there together.

AR: So then you would provide services really for anyone potentially in that—

MD: Exactly.

AR: Section? Do people mostly come to you?

MD: Yeah.

AD: Is that--?

MD: We don't do pick up. We don't have pick up transportation services. Most people come here on their own accord. Not that we won't serve anybody outside that radius either; we will, but then they will have to provide their own transportation.

AR: Can you talk a little bit about the types of things that Edgemont's done over the years? I guess part of why I'm asking is, when I was reading it sounded like there was a community center formed around 1941 through 1942 in Edgemont through Duke, through some—

MD: Right, Duke, Duke—

AR: Through a church on Duke's campus or something?

MD: A chapel.

AR: Yeah. I'm assuming that that was the beginning of the community center—

MD: Right, right.

AR: Was that right?

MD: They've been the liaison between the community—this community—and the community over at Duke. They've provided funding and funds to make it work. They've been the ones to sort of oversee, and made some things happen for this community back in the day. They still do; they still volunteer their services and their time. We have tutors that come in every day that help. Then we have EPA, Edgemont Parenting Association, that the Duke students have collaborated with the Edgemont staff in developing a relationship with parents where we can provide services for those guys to whatever need be; to actually get them out and invite them to cultural events and share some time with the parents also.

AR: So it sounds like Duke has had a pretty major presence?

MD: Yeah.

AR: So that's like fifty years that the center has been around. That's really remarkable.

MD: Yes it has, and it's gone through--and I think that's basically because the services it provides is a basic need here in this community and surrounding community. It tells a lot of things. I mean, it's still in existence after fifty years. That in itself tells you that there is a dire need to have a place like that around here.

AR: Exactly. And what about finance support over the years. Was their support from the city and other—

MD: Yeah, we're—the biggest funding source is United Way, and then we do grants and solicit funds from other agencies and places. Z. Smith Reynolds is also a basic funder. The city of Durham contributes monies to the Edgemont Community.

AR: And it sounded like there were also programs that had come through, like I guess Operation Breakthrough and the NC Poverty fund and stuff. Do you remember hearing about anything like that? Operation Breakthrough programs that happened through the center or something?

MD: They may have at some time. I'm not aware. I know that Operation Breakthrough does service a lot of the young people, meaning the children zero to five. A certain age group. They come through and pick up and drop off. They are still busy utilizing services, these people, utilizing services of Operation Breakthrough in this community.

AR: So it might have been that this was earlier than--

MD: It would've had to have been much earlier than '90.

AR: So it's less of a presence now?

MD: Well, to a certain degree yeah. There's less, but they still use it. It's a tradition. It's become a tradition. I hear a lot of parents say, 'Yeah, my kid's going to Operation Breakthrough,' and it's basically because of some focal point here. Operation Breakthrough has had some influence in this community because it's like a traditional thing. My mother went to Operation Breakthrough; my grandma went to Operation Breakthrough. So it's a traditional thing. They go on.

AR: So maybe you could talk to me a little bit about how the constituents that you have served have changed over the nine years. That's really the time period that you've been here and kind of watching that.

MD: There's a positive and a negative to that, and I've watched it happen. That transgenerational thing—that system is what has happened that is scary. And that's the negative part of that, because people are coming and staying longer. At one point in time they were staying longer. It seems like an easy way—it takes away that self-independence that people need and that push forward for strength and survival to do better. That type of thing is what's the negative side to this whole thing, because they seem to think that. It's not a think, it's the way they feel. Because God knows, if you grow up in a certain environment that's what your accustomed to; you think that's okay. Again, like we were speaking earlier, for those people in the African American community that's fine if you grew up with the same things, not having this or not having that and this. That's just the way life is. But when you have to take on a culture of someone else's and see that there is a difference, then you have to—if you choose to meet those criterias, then you have to take another step up. Those are steps that you've not been taught how to do. So all in all, society looks at the African American community as if it's lazy and demeaning and don't do anything—or it's all about trouble—when in actuality it's not that as much as providing equal opportunities at the same time. If you've already established and given—it's almost like a game when someone else has been given the rules before you have, so you've played that game and you know how it works. It's almost like an amateur playing a professional in a game. He's been playing for twenty years, so he knows the ins and outs of everything. The amateur is coming in and having to learn it.

But they put them in the same arena. And society has done that with the African American culture. They expect them to deliver and live up to the expectations without giving them the game—the rules of the game to play with. Until now—then we still have a partial set of rules. It's like, take this and you make out of it what you can get out of it. Then you are expected to be on that same level. And that's ridiculous; that's impossible to do. So in essence, they will always be behind the gun to a certain degree, because the more advanced things get, we're just for some of us are just—yes, there have been opportunities, and people will say that we're better educated now than we have ever been. But God knows you should've accomplished something over the last fifty, twenty, one hundred years. So that's expected. But are we there? No. We could not possibly be there, because they started fifty years before we did. Now we've got to play catch up and then get to where they were while they continue to advance. So it bothers me that society expects us as an African American to be there. Not that we're not there and we don't feel good about ourselves, because within our own culture we're fantastic. It's fine. But it's what society requires under that sort of governing rules called the constitution. They require everybody to be this, that and the other, but they don't want to provide that same law or those same things for us to be there. It's blatant. It's there. You cannot take a person out of the United States and set them in China and say function, because you don't have the tools to function with. So why can you not understand that about a culture that has not had the same things that the other cultures have had? When we ask to be on the same page, we did not say I needed to sit beside you to know these things. I just ask for the same equivalency that your going to give them, and quality. Give it to me and we'll figure it out. But it didn't work that way. So we're busy fighting, trying to help the

people in the 90's—in this last decade in the 21st century—to understand that this is what is expected of you by society. So we're trying to change the attitudes and behaviors and perspectives, because that's not acceptable. In our community there are some things that are, and we can deal with it and don't have a problem with it. But society as a whole does not accept this and that and the other things.

AR: And as you're saying before, then what happens once you have the Latino community here—

MD: Exactly.

AR: —moving into the community. What have you seen in the nine years that you have been here? What was it like when—

MD: Well, to have another culture move into—like I was saying before, you just can't afford—right now the African American community sort of feels like, Okay, so what? We don't have the time or energy to figure out what they want or why they're here—what their purpose is—when we're so busy trying to straighten our own situations out. Do they threaten us? It's starting to begin to be that way. You can't really blame them, because they've even had in many cases less than we've had recently. We've experienced that back in slavery, in that period of time. As we grew older or as things started to reconstruct we—and taking on that European culture and idea about having things and doing things in a different way—we've sort of advanced. Now they seem to be the minorities. They're coming in with less than what we have now, which makes them feel like whatever they're doing is gaining ground. So they'll work at menial jobs for pennies, whereas—not that the African American won't, but they just feel that personally, 'Now I deserve more. There's rights that say I deserve more.' And when you

become knowledgeable of what is required—that belongs to you, and is of yours, and you have opportunity to receive—then you don't take less. It's not that we don't want to work in the fields, in the streets, or as a trash collector, or whatever they call the demeaning jobs or whatever. It's just that it's gotten to the point where, why do we have to work all these jobs when all the white people are working all these desk jobs and getting all the better education? Now we've come to a point that we realize that we don't have to do that. I have an opportunity to get an education and have a desk job, and make $100,000 and live in Hope Valley. So now it's like, No, I don't want to do that, I want to do this. But now you've got the Hispanic and the Latino community coming in with not having those opportunities, and once they realize where it's getting—once they realize that because you now as an American citizen have rights—and the right to get an education and become the boss and not have to be enslaved all over again. Then they'll start, 'I don't want to do this anymore.'

AR: Right, there will just be a time when—

MD: Exactly—where it is now. So to ask to answer whether they threaten us or not, I don't really think so. But do we really care at this point in time? I don't know. That's sort of a question that has to be polled, because it depends on where you are educationally, where you are economically, where you are with a lot of issues as to whether they are. But this community itself does not serve a number of Latinos or Hispanics, and that's unfortunate, really, because they do live in the area. I mean, they live within walking distance of this building. But they don't come down to share [phone ringing]

AR: Do you want me to pause this?

MD: They don't come in to receive services. I don't know whether it's because they don't know they're here, they don't think they're welcome, or the media and all the other press that's pumped it up to be, 'It's not the place you want to hang out at.'

AR: Interesting. And so because Edgemont Community Center—it sounds like serviced initially whites primarily and then African Americans?

MD: Exactly.

AR: Yeah. And now you all are located here in Few Gardens—

MD: Right.

AR: What's the make up of—racial make up of the—

MD: Multiple diverse; it's quite diverse outside of this area, because there's a whole section of Hispanics that live up in Crossroads, which is up here. They live up there. They live all on the outskirts of this central place here—Few Gardens—because they're all out on Taylor and what not. And so there's a mix. The higher mix is African American and Hispanics. The whites—there's not many whites in this neighborhood.

AR: What about in Few Gardens itself? What's the racial makeup?

MD: 99—97 percent African American.

AR: Wow. And that other three percent—are we talking white, are we talking Latinos?

MD: White.

AR: White. Now Few Gardens has a long history. Wasn't it one of the early developments?

MD: Yes

AR: And—

MD: I think McDougle was first and Few Gardens was second.

AR: So we're back to like—is it late '50s there? Pretty early. I was surprised.

MD: I'm pretty sure yeah. Yeah.

AR: Yeah. Yeah. So we're talking—

MD: Teachers lived here. That's another point. A lot of teachers from the nearby institutions: NCCU, Duke, the Duke hospital. Those people lived in the Few Gardens area at one point in time, when it was Few Gardens and not noted as a housing development. But I do know that. They first came in the community because it was closer to their jobs, and everybody was from that same sector.

AR: So it sounds like that there are just literally—for the people here in Few Gardens that there's not a lot of cross-section; not a lot of interaction probably with the Latino community?

MD: There's not really. Well, the kids go to school with them, but outside of that—Eastway, Neal Middle School and Riverside. But all and all—because there's not a lot of interacting activities and programs even on that level. They go. They're there for that period of time, and then to say, 'That's one of my friends' or to call them up on the phone and do sort of the social interacting that we do amongst each other is very, very limited.

AR: So there's not really much crossover, even like in church settings?

MD: No.

AR: It's probably mostly at school?

MD: If they see them at all.

AR: Now have you done work with Eastway with your work here with Edgemont?

MD: Yeah, most of our kids—all of our elementary kids go to Eastway. So we're there; I'm back and forth there quite a bit.

AR: I had thought Jackie said that you and she worked on a project together and I'm trying to remember now what was.

MD: We've worked on several projects.

AR: Yeah.

MD: We worked a couple of summers ago—we did summer camp together. We built a summer camp program here that included a lot of the kids at Eastway. We were just on the same page about a lot of the issues concerning the African American community. So we do a lot of collaboration whenever she needs, or has an idea or program that comes up. And we converse on what should be done, and how it should be done and how to deal with it. We talk quite a bit.

AR: Yeah, she's done some really good work. So she had also said that Eastway seemed like—that that's where a lot of the cultural issues kind of flared in terms of language challenges and that kind of thing. And that's why she started to try, I think, Baja—the organization that she started or that she and someone else worked on--

MD: Who'd she work on that with? [pause] I can't think of—

AR: Was it Rosie Perez, maybe?

MD: They started, and got people sort of communicating together—African Americans and parents from the Latino community. They did breakfasts and would speak in different languages. The Latinos are trying to speak in the English language; the

African Americans were trying to speak in the Spanish language. Yeah, she did—Perez does sound like a name that she's mentioned before. They started a program that I feel was really, really nice, because it was spring time in the mall—and go different places where they could interact and see the difference in cultures, sort of things. She's done some great work with those people. Not those people, but the Latino people and that organization.

AR: And that's some of what I was talking with George Koontz about—this whole thing. How do you start to build links where you have cultural difference? Where you have language difference and that kind of thing? I wonder as you think about Edgemont Community Center and sort of what it's trying to do, how do you see the possibility for building connections there?

MD: Well, I think a lot of what Jackie is doing—there's an African American woman that has established a rapport with a Hispanic or Latino woman. More of that is going to have to happen, so that if we decide to have a community cross-cultural event—and a lot of places have food things where we introduce you to our foods and back and forth—where they'll start to mingle and pull people together, in addition to inviting them to the table; inviting them to projects and programs to be a part of it so that they can reach their people and bring them in. Rapport is always the first thing, because people are not trustworthy nowadays. This is the '90s. Before, you could probably go up to somebody and they would say--you have to establish a friendship sort of thing where they'll feel comfortable with what you are saying to them. And we don't trust them no more than they trust us. You're talking about a whole different culture that you want me to trust myself with. No, no, no, no. That's taking me out of my comfort zone first of all,

and then you are asking me to do something I don't understand because I don't speak Spanish. That's different. To bridge those gaps is going to have to take people like Jackie and Mrs. Perez and--pockets of people--who are starting to meet each other and greet each other and keep up, be friends and invite them to different cultural events. And then they'll bring their children, and their cousins and their friends to an event because they know it's something that they need, and then you start interacting that way. It's going to be a process, and it's going to take a while because neither culture trusts each other. And that's just because over time it's been just us—just been the African American community, and now here comes this whole wave of people.

AR: Have you noticed these changes in the community over this nine year period?

MD: Well, the people themselves don't know because they don't really interact with the Hispanic community. But I've heard laws and views and things. Some of the things for instance, like granting them opportunities—more opportunities or better opportunities than the African American people have been able to—go into a bank and say Well, I've been, I need a loan. But because you're from a foreign country and there's certain rules and regulations that govern certain things about you—who you are—you are entitled. There are certain rights and entitlements to you. Now when we did it, it was fine for a period of time. And then all of a sudden it became, Well this is discriminating and you can't do that. And there were no provisions made for the African American community. Now we have to learn a second language because these people are here. I mean they're here. I speak to them as these people because I'm just saying generally we have to learn a second language in order to communicate. Ebonics is a language all of

itself, but you're out of you mind or you're just stupid or whatever if you speak in a certain manner. None of this was taken into account. The European community needs to understand and adapt to some of the culture of the African American community. But still, when the Hispanic community showed up, okay. We've got to make a change here, and we've got to make a change. And some new things have got to happen because of this population of people.

AR: So have people felt that there were preferences—

MD: Yes.

AR: —Given to Latino residents that weren't given to African Americans? What are the other issues that come up for people in the community like Few Gardens and Edgemont generally—the long time residents? What are the, like you've mentioned preferences; you've—I'm just trying to think. Are there other issues that have come to the fore that have been expressed to you personally about the presence of Latino culture here?

MD: Well, just the work factor. They're getting the jobs. They're getting the jobs. I mean, like I said before, there are issues with that. Yes there are, and we could get those same jobs if those were the jobs that we chose to go after. But because we know that—we've been in the trenches for so long we don't want to stay there. It's time to grow. They don't expect us to grow; they expect us to stay in that same rut that we've always been in. If I'm due certain rights and opportunities I want them, and I don't want to settle for anything less. The older people in the community are really like, They come in, they get all the jobs. They get all the opportunities and what not. And what about us? We had to struggle so long to just get to where we are to this point, and still we'll walk in

and be denied because of skin color or even limitations of funds. They don't have any money per se. But because they are who they are, they are getting opportunities. There are certain rules and regulations that will help them get what they need.

AR: And that's hard for people to stand by and watch that.

MD: Exactly, exactly. So it's not all that we don't want to do and not just laid back. It's look at history. How long are you supposed to do that?

AR: It's interesting. Out in California they're trying to build sort of black and brown—what they call black and brown alliances, because there the common oppressor, if you will, is white culture. And that rather than—people have been trying to I think ameliorate some of the racial tensions, have been trying to say, 'Look. So we're different cultures here, but a lot of the fundamental needs are the same and we work together.' Do you think there's that potential here?

MD: Well, if it's ever brought in that there seems to be some type of equality then it would. But it always just seems like that we're always sort of like at the bottom of the totem pole. Those at the end that are sort of struggling, grabbing what we can. There's not been too many situations that look like it's trying to be equal.

AR: Yeah, because it takes—to build an alliance you need to feel that feeling of equality. That's really a good point. Are there ways in which, I mean, it sounds like y'all don't serve a lot of the Latino community as it stands. Are there ways in which Edgemont Community Center thinks that the center could play a role? Or is that not an issue or concern?

MD: It's been an issue. It's been definitely a concern over the last couple of years because the Latino population has grown so tremendously, especially in the Edgemont

community. And we, at one point, had been talking about trying to hire a Hispanic or Latino person to come in and to get involved so that that population could get involved. But then you're talking funding or monies. So it's not like we've not discussed or even considering. But soon as we can get funds to do that, we're talking about bringing a person in that can help bring that population in. Because the services are needed; there's common ground across what the needs are. It's just that who's going to provide those needs and where those needs are going to come from.

AR: And where do the funds to address those needs come from.

MD: Exactly.

AR: And you all have—exactly how many people are employed here at Edgemont Community Center?

MD: Right now there is four.

AR: Wow, that's great. You are the director?

MD: No, I am the program director.

AR: The program director.

MD: The executive director is Dr. Beverly Rose.

AR: Does everyone have sort of a different area that they focus on here? It sounds like you are in charge of various programs and things.

MD: Yeah, I oversee all that happens in the center. But then we have Val, who deals with our Senior Citizens and accounting. And she's actually their administrative assistant. So she has a couple of programs that she deals with. And then we have Martha Anderson, who is the coordinator of our daycare. Then there's Beverly, the executive director.

AR: And this fellow out here--

MD: Roderick.

AR: Yeah, Roderick.

MD: He's a part-time person. And Felicia Kane. Actually it's about six maybe. She's a part-timer.

AR: Wow. Does everyone reside in Edgemont in the area?

MD: None of us do. Roderick does. Roderick is the only person who does, that resides in the Edgemont community.

AR: Now didn't you originally—did you move to Few Gardens originally or no?

MD: No.

AR: I thought—I don't know why Jackie had originally told me that you lived in Few Gardens.

MD: No, I've never lived here.

AR: So then you wouldn't have the sense of the sort of immediacy of living right in there in the community?

MD: I've been there, Jesus, from day to night sometimes and for nine years.

AR: So you've been--

MD: So you get to see and know--

AR: So whether or not you're sleeping here, you're here. Exactly. How did you end up coming to Durham from Virginia? What's your story there?

MD: Getting older. I actually graduated from undergrad from Norfolk State in '80 and was looking to continue my education. And I really know, because I've been where a lot of people have been. It took me thirteen years to come to graduate school

because I only thought that white people went to graduate school. It wasn't something that's talked about in the African American community. It's not something that people relish and pump up and initiate. So I was just, 'Oh gosh, it's going to cost me a million dollars and I don't have that.' Well fortunately enough, I went back to talk with my, one of my, professors one day. And he said, "Do you know that there's a program at NCCU, that a grant was written that was accepting people that want to work on their Masters in the area of Adaptive PE—Physical Education—for kids with physical and mental disabilities?" I have always worked with children with some type of disability, emotional or physically or some type. I was like, okay. And he said, "It won't cost you anything. You just need to go and apply." And I couldn't imagine it not costing me anything per se. So I called and made the arrangements. And it was like, 'Could you come yesterday?' And I was like, 'What's going on here?' So that was really weird that it happened that way. So I worked on that degree, and completed it in '94. And then in '98, January of '98, another opportunity came across, because I knew that I wanted to work with children and families. Not on the severe and profound level; not to that emotional level, on that side. But these kids still have quite a few emotional problems, because they experience a lot of different things than most people do. The opportunity came across again for a grant for the human sciences department with emphasis in family studies, and so that came across in January of '98 and I jumped on that. So now I'm working on my second masters, and graduation is in May. Hopefully. Hopefully.

AR: So do you work full-time and go to school?

MD: Yes, yes.

AR: Oh my gosh.

MD: So it's been an experience. I'm really tired now; I'm burning out. I went year round, actually. I started in January and have not taken a break since. Both summer sessions, fall and winter. It's tough. It' hard. It's hard.

AR: What's your plan after you're done?

MD: Actually, I've recently written a program that I implemented here at Edgemont that hopefully will stay here. Or I will become an independent contractor on Last Call. It's a program dealing with children that were suspended from 365 days—long term, 365 days a year—providing an opportunity to hopefully change their perspective on life and school, and what society expects.

AR: That's really a great thing. I think I may have mentioned working on an oral history project in a correctional facility in Anson County. And one of the inmates, a critical year for him was when he got kicked out of school for 365 days.

MD: They have no place to go. There's nothing to do. They just have their--so it's like a person does not have the maturity to be where he needs to be or make mature decisions. You leaving them out there is like a hired gun, God knows; he could explode and do anything at any time. And they're just out there. It's sad because the average age is between fourteen—twelve or thirteen and seventeen years old.

AR: It's a critical time.

MD: Really critical. That's where it's headed, hopefully.

AR: That's great. Good. Yeah. How did you end up getting involved in this kind of work? I always—part of what I end up doing is sort of document an organization, but then people that are drawn to the work. There's usually something interesting behind there.

MD: I've told people for a long time that you have to have a calling, because God knows they're never paying you enough to make you want to stay and deal with the situations that you encounter in this field of work. And I think that's what has happened. It's not always for me—of course, I would love to be a millionaire and make money and what not—but it's not always been that. It's been a feel for people and a concern in my heart for those who have not had and don't understand why they don't have, because it makes you feel inferior. You grow up thinking that you are less than—your personality depicts what you end up being and how you treat yourself. And I think that's why a lot of people are in the predicament they are in now—because they don't understand that it's not by no means of your cause or reasons why what you've done to put you in the position that you are in. If they look at history all over--and I often say you cannot understand the African American community by looking at yesterday or the day before. You have to look a long ways back and all that stuff plays a part. So I've always had a concern for the underdog—for those people who have not had or trying to provide as much, as many, opportunities that I can to help them see other aspects. To give them a choice. Because when you don't have a choice you are, God knows, a loss. You have to be provided with choice. When you grow up in a community where everything is the same, nothing changes. This is the way it operates, and that's every culture. This is the way things operate, so if you don't know any different then that's how you live. It's sad that it's that way, because they become limited. So we provide many culture activities. Our most recent activity in September, we flew ten kids to New York. They've never flown before. They've never been on the subway. They've never been in a city that large. So we spent four days there. So that was one of the experiences that they will never ever forget. We

put on teen conferences, and they've put together these conferences and stayed out at motels. I mean, just things that average people think that is something that they do. This is not—for this community doesn't see things through that way. Every opportunity is a privilege for them, every opportunity. So again standardized tests, all the SATs and all that stuff. And you expect for them to know the difference when there's a different language. There's a different set of the rules. There's a different everything here. It's a whole new world. It's another world itself. So it's scary.

AR: What had you grown up in that led you in this direction? It sounds like you've gotten a lot of education. Was education really stressed in your family?

MD: Yes, and I grew in the projects. I grew up in the projects [phone ringing]but it's just that the time period, the difference between the times. It's not that my mother had anymore education. She didn't. Actually, my mother didn't even have a high school diploma when I graduated from high school. But she went back to get it; that was something that she was determined to get. But she did know that to move up and out, you had to have an education to advance yourself. And that's something that she pushed through. And we've all done it through all our family—my sisters and my brother. My aunts and uncles and those guys didn't have an education either, but they instilled in their children that it was necessary to have an education. So it went on and on and on, and now—I don't know where it's at now.

AR: So your siblings, did all of you end up going forward with your education?

MD: Actually, yes. Well, we all went to high school. I completed college. One of my sisters has two years of college. I am the only one who really actually went to a post-secondary and higher university. It's been fulfilling. It's been fun. But I wish more

had, and I think what helped me a lot through mine is that African American community of togetherness, of commitment to each other. And prayer—religion is something that we've always lived by. That was our only means of survival for a lot of things. I had a praying grandmother who just prayed and just stayed on her knees, and believed that the children would prosper and not have to be subjected to a lot of the things that they were subjected to during that period of time. So it has all worked out that we've gone forward and done some prosperous things.

AR: So you had support, it sounds like.

MD: Strong support.

AR: From the community? And church, too. Was this in Norfolk?

MD: Yes, in Norfolk.

AR: Was that where you were born actually?

MD: Born in Norfolk.

AR: Around what time?

MD: Raised--1956. Born in 1956 in Norfolk, and grew up there all my life.

AR: What was that like in that time period, Norfolk in the fifties?

MD: Oh the best. Old enough to—not old enough to worry about the issues and concerns and things that were going on at that point in time. But old enough to understand in that there was a purpose for it happening, and it was to strengthen me. It was a good time when we were free. You could go out and do things and not be fearful. Of course, there were always fears in parents eyes to everything. Every era presented some fear, so that my parents were afraid for us to go out still, too. Not that things were like now and then. But they were still afraid that something could happen and dadadada.

But it was a time where children were children and you didn't have to be an adult—you had to do responsible things. Watch your siblings. Clean your house. And all those things were just nurturing things to get you prepared for life. But now kids are spoiled. They let them do whatever they want to do. They make decisions. There's no way in the world that my mother would've asked me to let me help her make a decision. It was her way and that was the only way it was going to be done, and there were no if, ands, or buts about it. Because first of all, she was not going to turn me the wrong way. What parent would? So whatever she said was the gospel. Did we always accept it? It was either that or almost get your teeth knocked out. Punishment was something that I did not endure too well. I was not one of the hard headed kids; I was like, 'Okay if you say so if you say this'll work' until I could see for myself that it didn't work. Now, I was one of those kinds of kids, though. I would do whatever worked. If I knew it didn't work, I wouldn't engage. And when I became old enough to say that my mother started to call me defiant. I started being defiant then, because I was making my own decisions for things that I saw within my sight—in my heart—that was good or not good. But friends and family and community our unity—oh God, I would not trade that time period for anything. Neighbors, you could go hang out with your neighbors if your parents weren't home. If you needed an egg or a cup of sugar—all those little things you could get. It was a fun time when you just felt safe…

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

MD: There was sometimes anywhere between twelve and seventeen kids a day running around that grandma had to watch. She had seven kids, and out of seven five lived in Norfolk. And they all had kids, so that was the spot to dump all your kids off. And we just played all day until our parents came and got us in the afternoon, and then we went home for dinner and all that kind of stuff.

AR: Now you would've been old enough to go through integration in school. What do you remember from that time period?

MD: Always being a doubtful person trying to figure out. I've always been that kind of person—been, 'What's going on here? What makes sense and what doesn't make sense?' And integration at the time I thought was an excellent idea, because I felt like this was movement; this was a step up from where we were. You're going to give us the same opportunities. But in essence it was not wanting to be there, but being given equality and quantity. I enjoyed my African American teachers at the community that I lived in. When I went to elementary school all my kids were black and all my teachers were black. And I wouldn't trade them for the world, and I think that was still—I've gotten lots from that.

AR: Because you were in black schools before white schools?

MD: Yes, before the white schools. Because the white teachers don't understand the culture. They don't understand what [inaudible] I don't want to be a Ph.D. It's a different way of getting there. And that's what made a difference. Doubtful, scared, not sure, not trusting all those things went through during segregation. Because one, after you grow up in a community for so long where your parents were demeaning or

demeaned or taken advantage of or all those negatives. You hear that, you hear it. My mom used to come in—she worked for the Government—and making statements, racial statements about people at work. 'I just don't understand why John didn't get that job, because they know John is better qualified. But because they were white they gave it to them.' Or, 'You wouldn't believe what those devils did today.' And you hear it as children. So you're like, 'What is it these people are all about?' As you grow older and start to interact, you see, I mean there's good and bad in everybody; in all folk. So if you are mature enough to see that you sort of become well rounded where you can accept what you can use and spit out what you don't, and continue to go on and not be so frustrated. Or try not to be. Because it's hard. I've not been a victim per se of racial discrimination to the point where it has altered my life to a real negative side. But I've seen some things happen that I'd be like, 'Yeah, I would be angry too.' But then I've also seen some African American people do some things to other cultures where I would be mad at you, too. But because I also feel personally that people cannot judge an entire race of people. Actually judge an entire race of people by my ways and behavior and felt that I didn't want to be judged by what other people were doing, I started to look at the other cultures in a different way. I can't judge you because of what your forefathers have done or people before you have done. I have to take on with whatever you have to offer. And then if I can deal with it fine and if not, I don't have to. That was a major change in my life as far as cultures were concerned to be able to—and prayer, I just can't leave it out because I think what you pray for—and prayer brings about changes.

AR: What church did y'all grow up in?

MD: We were Holiness. We were at Bethelem Church of God in Christ at one point. We grew older and we continued there through all our childhood and most of our adulthood, and then we split up. Well not, my grandmother; when my grandmother was living we all went, of course. That's where you grow up, and it goes on and on and on. And her church ran into some problems and she moved to another church, and we went there for a little while. And then my grandmother passed and my mother moved and all of us went, the whole family, so we went and sort of grabbed church. And here in Durham, I attend Faith Assembly Christian Center. So we've always been at church. It's about power, not [inaudible]. It's not peace.

AR: So did you find that church community pretty soon after you came on down here?

MD: No, actually I tried another one. I went Baptist, which was totally different than what I had been accustomed to. I enjoyed service. But there's a—you have to be fed a certain way, and even in Christianity you have to be fed a certain way. So now I attend Faith Assembly, and it's where I think I'm going to be. I enjoy the atmosphere.

AR: When you moved down here, you left your family up there? Yeah.

MD: Entire family.

AR: Wow.

MD: That's something that I've been, that my mother has had a problem sort of with me. How I could just move; I could just go. She's more reluctant to do a lot of things. It's been because of her culture, her nature, her background. When you've not had and every penny counts, you can't afford to just take off and go. You have to make sure that everything—and that's not me. I'm not one of those planner's planners. If

people come and say 'Let's go to Kalamazoo today,' okay—if I don't have anything to do then I don't have a problem with it. My mother would just, she would just lose it. She just can't move like that. So when I told her that what I was doing—and she knows that I am a prosperous person; I can't stay. If there's nothing happening there then I can't stay. I'm not that kind of person. I've got to grow. And I told her what I was going to be doing. The first thing she said was that, "You are going by yourself. There's nobody there. You don't know anybody." I was like, "Well, I'll get to know somebody I'm sure." So she was leery, very, very leery. But she knows me and she knows 'I can't tell you anything. You're always going to do what you want to do' and that kind of thing. I always have to hear that. I came not knowing a soul, not a person. Just knew I needed to meet this Dr. Politano who was at Central, and—I needed to meet her. She was the person that was going to set me up with everything that I needed. And I did that; got with the class and started meeting people. I told her I needed a job. She had already had some connections with the Durham Public Schools—I mean the Durham Parks and Recreation—and referred me. And they hired me. And I met people through there and on and on, 'til I have this whole [inaudible]. And that network has been wonderful.

AR: What did you think of Durham when you first came?

MD: I was like, "Oh, how racist." Really. I have been in Durham for this period of time and I declare so many things that go on here. I am like, "Jesus. How can you guys let this happen?"

AR: More so than Norfolk in your opinion?

MD: Yes. Yes. The town is so—that's why I stay. It's quiet, it's nice. It's small enough for me. And I have certain friends. It's not like knowing everybody that you

grew up with all your life, and the phones all the time—and folk dropping by. It's not like this. It's comfortable for me to be here. I like that. But a lot of the issues that go on, especially concerning the white community and the black community—there are some things that I think could make some major differences and changes that people are not making, and it's blatant. It's not hidden, it's blatant. And they don't see. They won't recognize it. And I think Durham is that kind of city. I mean, just school issues.

AR: Anything in particular that strikes you?

MD: Social issues, drugs and alcohol. Drugs. Communities. You can't tell me that you can dig as much information on Clinton and Monica Lewinski that you can't dig up the folk that's trafficking these drugs in these communities and selling and making it happen. Because truly we are not manufacturing it. We're selling it and distributing it, but we're not manufacturing it. So if you want to do something, you can do it. If you want to make a change—not Governor Hunt, not Ann Denlinger, who is the school superintendent—none of these people live in Few Gardens. Come down here and live for a month or two. You'd fix some things. Those people who make the standardized tests and make up these tests—come down here and live in a community that's not subjected to those kinds of things. Come down here. We've got two computers down here for the entire community. Where most kids go home and sit at the internet, we're not even hooked up to the internet. Hello. You know what I'm saying? Grocery store—people in the grocery store just push and you mean—like what happened to manners? [inaudible] Excuse me, I beg your pardon, or you own everything. It's like, I was like no, no, no, no, no. These are some issues. Schools, now they've taken this entire sector of people. It

takes these kids who ride the bus at least about an hour or so in the morning to get to school.

AR: Durham's not that big.

MD: Thank you. Even if you left here by car, left here—left Edgemont and went Neal Middle School—it'd take you fifteen minutes to get out there, twenty minutes. Now, most of these people here don't even have a car. So how are they supposed to get out there and support a system up out there? You've taken them totally out of their comfort zone and set them someplace that's unfamiliar. And you expect for them to produce [phone ringing] [inaudible]about something you expect for them—it's ridiculous, and you know that can't happen. That can't happen. It's a set up.

AR: A set up.

MD: Yeah, and you can't tell me. How can you explain that? How can you explain giving a kid out here the same test that you give a kid who is not on AFDC? Who does not live in the projects? Who does not live in a system where anything could happen? Who does not live in a concrete building like this—when the heat is on you cannot even get cool so you stay outside 'til three or four o'clock in the morning in the summer months? [door knocking] Could you pause this?

AR: So you're saying that—where were we?

MD: It's blatant. It's dumb. You can't expect these kids with those characteristics and these behaviors behind them—

AR: The tests.

MD: The behavior, the things that go on in the community like this go into a system the next day. With a difference—they go to sleep because it's comfortable for

them right then and there if they spent all night up, not knowing what was going to happen. [phone ringing] All those kind of things matter. But they don't see. And then the language, the language barrier. You call a couch a sofa. I call it a couch. So when I take a test and it says, "Name this item." I say, "couch." I'm wrong because I didn't call it a sofa. [inaudible] Now--

AR: It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that.

MD: Yeah. To understand that.

AR: Yeah.

MD: But it's there. It's sad that it happens and our kids are held accountable for it.

AR: Kids are held back for that.

MD: Exactly.

AR: Or get trapped.

MD: Kicked out.

AR: So, since you've been here then you've seen. Where did you move when you moved? Where'd you move into Durham?

MD: I moved…

AR: Are you in Murphy Central?

MD: Yes. Well, sort of south. I lived about three or four about a half a mile from Central, down 55, down that way. So I moved there when I first came to Durham. And then I moved—they were about—they were boarding, not boarding houses, but they were houses that were owned by people who rent rooms to students. So I moved there—

if you want to call them boarding—a couple of years. Actually, for eight; about seven. Then I moved into my own place in North Durham almost a year or so ago.

AR: So you're not, you don't really reside in Northeast Central Durham per se?

MD: No, I've just only worked here for that period of time.

AR: In your neighborhood do you have Latino neighbors as well as African American and white? What's the mix?

MD: It's a mix. I've only been there about a year so I don't know many people. And with me being in school and working on this end of town, I spend a lot of time here. So, I'm not really there a lot. [door knocking] [laughing, interruption…]

AR: They all called you Coach D, and I'm looking at your basketball shirt there and it mentioned PE here.

MD: Basketball coach and softball coach. I do less now than I've done before. I've taught, coached, actually, on all levels. But a lot of the community programs involve sports activities, and so I'm usually the person that coaches the team and gets them together. And It's another form of rapport building and discipline strengthening and all that kind of stuff. When they see me on all levels then they know what my expectations are. So I get that sort of behavior all the time. It took a while to get them to understand and do some things, but they're there. It just takes time; it just takes time. We do a lot places. We go places. We hang out and do a lot of things together, and they respect me and I respect them. On the same sense that they know I would discipline them wherever it takes place. And I don't wait 'til later. It's right then and there and we correct the problem and go on.

AR: And I imagine that you're a mentor to them as they are coming up.

MD: Yeah, it's quite a bit—and I've had kids that I've had when I first arrived here at seven and eight years old and now nineteen and twenty, seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen.

AR: So you've seen them grow.

MD: Watched them grow. Some of them are doing really well; some are not doing so well; and some are not doing well at all. So it's a mix, but we did help some people along the way and it has been a good feeling to know that at least 'I told you.' At least now you have a choice. [door knocking] [interruption]

AR: I think they just want their time with Coach D. That's what I think. You've seen a lot of changes with children growing up in the community. What are the ways in which the community has changed in a good sense and what are the ways in which it's not made the changes you'd like to see happen? And that could be Durham as a whole or Northeast Central Durham, Edgemont, Few Gardens.

MD: I think as a unit they've come together more over the years. There's less crime; there's less police activity that comes through. At one point in time they were out here four and five times a day. Now you may see them once a week or twice a week. It depends. Something like that. So there are some positive things that have happened. Parents—some parents are starting to get more involved with the children, and the kids are doing a lot of activities. And we're getting the opportunity to provide them with chances—I mean opportunities and stuff—outside the building which gives them morale to build on everything. But the negative is that the majority of the people that are now moving in are younger than the people who used to be here, and that's scary because the average age of a person who is renting an apartment is now probably nineteen. That's

young when they have less than an eighth grade education for many of them and babies—teen moms—because they're rearing kids without all the tools that they need to apply it to their children. And their kids are coming up that way. That's what's scary, and that's what we're fighting—not fighting, trying to deal with—to figure out how to fix that so the children don't suffer in the long run. So we've done a lot of things with the children here. We spend a lot of time with them as much as we can. We don't work on Saturdays and Sundays, thank you Jesus. We try not to, but there's activities. So if we get tickets to a performance, a drama, we'll go—make arrangements to go. We just don't do it every weekend. Then like we just took on a new initiative at the beginning of February that every other Friday night we play bingo with the community. We oversee that, and make sure that happens and runs properly.

AR: And where does that actually take place?

MD: In the building next to us. That's Parks and Recreation building over there. We go over there and set up and run that program over there. So it's—we take a lot of out of town trips on weekends, and do fundraisers. We're planning to take the older teens, like fifteen and up. Those are positive people talking about positive things. Those people are planning a spring break vacation in Myrtle Beach. So we try to get them out and see opportunities and things like that they can know. It's been good to see them grow up. And some—like I said, some are doing well and some are not doing so well. My personal feeling is that once you provide them with tools and opportunities and knowledge, and you chose not to direct your path in a certain way, then you're held responsible for that. Not that in so many ways to look at it—because God knows if I tell you and you're not getting it at home, and you're not getting it at church, and you're not

getting it at school, you're not getting it from every adult that you run into. Sometimes it's not embedded. See when we came up during the day everybody said the same thing; you know, was on the same page. So it's like this can't be wrong, or you didn't think about going in a different direction, because everybody was saying the same thing. Now there's different avenues and different ways—people are everywhere, thinking all sorts of different stuff. That's what's scary.

AR: What do you think makes a strong community? What would you like to see for the community?

MD: I would like to see a more cohesive, a much more cohesive community with emphasis and goals and places they want to go and be and see. And make it happen. That would be the ideal community. Stay here for a little while. Come in and get what you need—get nurtured, or nourishment or knowledge, or whatever it is that you need. Get your GED, your high school diploma, and understand that college probably is a good opportunity. But if it's a trade that you need, then go do it and go after it. The laziness and the more laid back because of technology and everything—someone was telling me the other day that now they have the venetian blinds, blinds that operate by remote control. Jesus—what is next? I mean, if you got to go to the bathroom, the bathroom will come to you. That kind of thing. It's that. Those are viable techniques that they don't have that we have that was in existence at one time. Because you're going to have to be able to make it one way or another, especially in Y2K. Jesus. You have got to be able to survive. I don't know what's going to happen. I'm not even going to sit here and try to predict what's going to happen. But whatever happens, you need to be prepared for it. Not even then but even now, because those same things that you're going to need to

survive with then, you need now. That would be an ideal community—where it was a unison here that people could come out and do and feel free to be about. All of the things that we used to have, because in my community we even slept outside at certain points in time because it got real, real hot. We could sleep outside if we were to take a nap. It was mandatory by my grandmother that we took a nap during the day, when she got tired of you. You had to shut up and lay down. And we would lay on the porch, and—the houses were connected, but there were like two units and then an opening and then another set of units and we would just lay right on the ground and sleep.

AR: George talked about being able to have the windows open. It was safe enough in Northeast Central Durham.

MD: Yeah, because we couldn't afford air conditioning. And depending on if you had a window fan to draw that hot air out, hopefully—so you had to be cooled. We would hang out late at night on the porches talking; our parents would be out there talking with each other and the kids would be playing. Those are some--

AR: It sounds like those are some of the ideals, which are true for all of us, come out of the best of our own childhood. What about for the Latino community? What would you like to see happen in the Latino, in the community including both the African Americans and Latinos?

MD: I would like to see them be neighbors. I would like to actually see them move in and have a respect for each other and appreciate who and what we are to each other. I think we could grow a lot more, be more knowledgeable. We would have an awesome, I think awesome, community if you could include cultures together and they appreciate the next person and help them out and strengthen, because they have some real

strong values—not that I know that much about them through their actions and ways. I don't see very many Latino women without a Latino man somewhere close by. They do the laundry together. They do the shopping together. They do all sorts of things together. That's something that's missing in the African American culture now. There are some values that they bring and we have some values that I'm sure that they would appreciate. So together that would make an awesome unit.

AR: Yeah, it's true. It's like I think—too often I think we forget about what we can learn from other cultures, taking the best of that.

MD: Yeah, instead of one being dominant over the other, since we are supposed to be "created equal". That's me, I'm one person. You're talking about a whole United States of America. Changing meanings, and opportunities and perspectives.

AR: Is there anything we haven't covered? I'm kind of mindful. How are we on time?

MD: It's a little after 4:15.

AR: I'm trying to think if we've covered everything here or not. I think I've covered most of my questions about Edgemont. I think I forgot to ask how many folks you actually serve through these different programs on a monthly basis or yearly basis? Hundreds? Thousands?

MD: On a monthly basis, unduplicated, probably a couple hundred. Duplicated because every day we have programs—every day we serve probably thousands of people.

AR: And it sounds like it's across the age spectrum.

MD: Yeah, it's from five up through—I think the oldest person that we serve that comes into this facility is eighty-two.

AR: And would that be someone that lives in Few Gardens?

MD: No. She lives in one of the high rises. She lives at the mill, the housing mill for elderly people. They have a senior program. She's eighty-three. Ms. Carraway.

AR: When you talked earlier about people staying too long, I wasn't clear if you were talking about Few Gardens or Edgemont Community Center, or which.

MD: Few Gardens the housing development. Too long, it's too long. I mean, you come here—this should be a growing point, a stopping point where you come just for two or three years; maybe four or five if you need to. In that period of time I would like to see this community have a rule of some sort. This is what you're going to do. And there was one that was established when this community first started. It was developed that way, that you only stayed for five years. And then in that five years your rent or whatever was reduced and portions of it were used to save money for you to move into a better place or another place or a different place after five years. Somehow that got broken along the way. Folk could stay for years. I know some people that have been here for twenty-seven, thirty years.

AR: And what about median age. What's the average age of folks that are living here? Do you have any idea?

MD: Probably—the medium now might be eighteen. Because the parents are younger. Majority of the housing developments, apartments are being rented to younger kids—eighteen and twenty years old—and there are some—

AR: It's a young community—

MD: It's young. It's young.

AR: Do people have to qualify in terms of income level or anything like that? What's the story on that?

MD: Yeah, I think it's income, basically. You just apply and they see if you fit the criteria.

AR: Is the housing—housing has been a big issue in Northeast Central Durham.

MD: Yeah, because a lot of it, you know. First of all, they need to fix and work on a lot of them, and then the laws here with housing disturbs me. I know in Virginia you cannot have a broken down car in your driveway, your own personal driveway. Your car has to be on all fours or they will tow or give you a fine. Here you can have a run down house with junk from here—from the front door to the back door, and it won't matter. That's one of the things that needs to be cleaned up, in addition to making people accountable in that house for things that go on in that house. At one point they were talking about tearing the whole thing down and refurnishing it, redoing it and putting in homes or apartments or houses, or however you want to label it. So they could be owned, buy into. But that didn't--

AR: Yeah for ownership. I would think the ownership would make a big difference in terms of--

MD: Need to. A lot of laws needs to be changed. It's laxed. The system has laxed on the rules and regulations making people accountable for a lot of things, and that has hurt the community quite a bit. So they need to beef up some rules. Make them happen; hold them accountable, because it's not like they can't be.

AR: Yeah. Is there substandard housing in Few Gardens along with elsewhere?

MD: Yeah, there's just buildings on Morning Glory and Black Knoll and Gold Leigh and those sort of streets over there. They've started to tear down all those old buildings.

AR: So now if these were built as housing developments then who's responsible for those? That upkeep?

MD: The housing authority.

AR: So the Housing Authority—this is their area and they should be dealing with it.

MD: Exactly.

AR: I think that's some of the [inaudible] that Jackie was showing me.

MD: I'm sure. Yeah, the housing authority right here in Few Gardens, but right outside the city—they too need to beef up some things.

AR: Yeah, that's a huge issue from the sounds of it. Is there anything that we haven't covered here that you think is important, either about Edgemont as a community generally, or the center, or just the changes with the Latino influx?

MD: I don't know how much more—we've talked about a lot of things. I would just like to see them become more active—well, both sides; not just them in this community but us in that community of people, too. That everybody's not—open some eyes. Everybody's not the same way, and there's opportunities to grow. One culture can actually help another.

AR: That would be a nice note to end on. Great. Thanks for the interview. This is the end of the interview with Martina Dunford at Edgemont Community Center February 18, 1999 for the New Immigrants project.

Martina Dunford

END OF INTERVIEW