

Interviewee: Delvis “Mac” McCadden

Interviewer: Arleen Ollie

AO: I’m Arlene Ollie today is October 30th, and I’m about to interview Delvis Mac McCadden, and we are located at the Gainsboro library. Good-morning.

DM: Good-morning.

AO: Where and when were you born.

DM: I was born on March 20th, 1950, in Roanoke, Virginia at Burrel (??) Memorial hospital.

AO: Alright. Tell me about your parents, brothers, and sisters.

DM: My parents, their siblings?

AO: Yours.

DM: My siblings?

(DM catalogues the birth of his parents and siblings)

DM: The first four years of my life, excuse me three years of my life, we lived in Southwest with my paternal grandparents in a large A-frame home on 13th street in Southwest. My grandparents, maternal grandparents lived about 5 blocks away, on 1100 block of Norfolk Avenue. When we moved to Northwest Roanoke they still lived in the same place so my grandparents, my paternal grandparents passed away in 1958 within a couple months of each other, but my maternal grandparents were always within 2-3 blocks of where we lived.

(DM tells about his activities – played piano, baseball, football, basketball).

AO: Describe your home life. For example, did you gather around the radio in the evening, do you remember when you got a telephone or a refrigerator, that kind of thing.

DM: We always had a refrigerator. The only reason we gathered around the radio was to tune in, fine-tune baseball games where my father and I fought over which teams to listen to. But in terms of, we were for African-American families in Roanoke I guess we were considered middle-class, so we, my first recollection of a television set was in 1954 and the first one we owned was in 1955. And so, my family, my father working night-shift, as a family, and so he was sleeping during the time we would be watching television so we didn’t really gather around it. My mother selected what shows we would watch and we would be in bed by 9, and at that time radio was not the most essential part of our home life. We did get transistor radios, each one of us when we were 10, 11, 12, years of age, so we each had our own pocket-transistor, and so we listened to the kind of music we wanted to listen to, but my mom and my father didn’t generally listen to the radio.

AO: Did you sit on the porch in the evenings?

DM: Yes we did. We did, we sat on the porch, generally because of the streetlights the adults would sit on the porch, and the adults in the neighborhood would sit on the porch, and the kids would play games out under the lights in the evening, especially in the

spring and summer, and in fall, winter – of course we weren't sitting on the porch, but very few get-togethers in the winter time.

(AO asks about stories and DM mentions slavery, but does not go into any description, when prompted to expand he mentions the following:

DM: The only one I remember came from my grandfather's side of the family, they came from Hanover county, about 12 miles from Richmond, north of Richmond, about 6 miles east of Mechanicsville, Virginia, and they talked and told some stories about African-Americans post-slavery days, being chased and raids on homes and on individuals near the Chicahomanee (??) swamp, and unless you're from that area I guess you wouldn't know what a Chicahomanee (??), but I've been by the Chicahomanee (??) swamp and it's currently in Mechanicsville, from what I remember, right near Lee Davis high school, and there seemed to be more, from his standpoint, there seemed to be more acts of violence and prejudice in that area of Richmond than in the western-side of the area.

AO: What is your fondest childhood memory? For example, your favorite holiday event, you favorite family vacation, or a favorite gift you receive?

DM: My favorite memories of my childhood take place in summer, each time it seems like it would take place in the middle of June in summer, and my parents were great baseball fans and my most fond childhood memories are vacations we would take, they would save up enough money so we would get in the car and drive to see a major league baseball game and we would stay two nights and probably see two games, and I found that was the close there ever was, we were not ever, my father's night-shift work, my mother being a teacher, there was very little time for us to get-together and this was the time that I enjoyed the most even though we went to see Dodger's games all the time, I'm not going to hold that against him, but we would go to Cincinnati and Philadelphia, and New York. And then one summer we went to see Baltimore, which I thought was strange because they weren't American League fans, but just to have the opportunity to do that, when most other young folks of color did not have that opportunity, even then I thought that was remarkable.

(DM describes his childhood house)

DM: I had other part-time jobs. I delivered newspapers from 1962 'til 1966. I had the morning route so I had to get up at 4:30, quarter to 5, and deliver the papers and I had 100-some customers on my route and I walked it. My parents were very supportive of that. My father, if it was inclement weather would get-up, if he was off that day, and carry-me on that route if it was ice or snow, or other than that I delivered it and they were very supportive. I was very independent, for some reason my parents thought that the two older – myself and my sister next to me – we were probably, they figured, the more responsible of the children and they didn't put a lot of responsibility on my younger brother and sister, but they allowed me to keep my own money and they made enough that I didn't have to give it back to the family. My father worked a couple of jobs, my mother being in education at that time was more prestigious financially than we consider

it to be now, but of course they struggled but it wasn't so bad that all my money had to go into, back to them, that I actually had enough money saved up to buy a car when I was 16, and had enough money to buy a car it cost me \$200 dollars. I paid for my own insurance and my own gas, and I charged kids that I took to school a dime-trip and it paid for my gasoline. So, you know, I was okay.

AO: That was very smart. I was thinking about your newspaper route, was that in your neighborhood?

DM: It was, but because back then Roanoke City had two newspapers – Roanoke Times and Roanoke World News. And Roanoke Times was the morning paper and Roanoke World News was the evening paper and I delivered the Roanoke Times and there weren't as many customer for the Roanoke Times as there was for the Roanoke World News mainly because most people went to work and they weren't there to usually get the paper and have the opportunity to read it. More people took the Roanoke World News but I didn't like delivering paper 4-5 o'clock in the evening. And it was in my neighborhood, but it was a pretty large area 'cause I would go up a block and maybe no one would be taking a paper, so it was more area to cover for my paper route. And that was before they had adults driving their cars delivering papers, so it was a pretty large route. It would take me almost 2 hours to make the delivery.

(DM mentions how he thinks integration changed Gainsboro)

AO: How much schooling did you complete?

DM: I have, you also want to know where I went to school and such things?

AO: Uh-huh,

DM: My first four years were at Gilmer (??) Elementary school, not Gilmer (??), Laudon (??) Elementary school, Gilmer (??) was a possibility but I went to Laudon (??). I walked out the backdoor of my house, up the fire escape and into my classroom. I mean I just crossed over an alley and went right in, I mean I could just leave a minute and a half before school started and I would be there and that's what I did at Laudon (??). I mean I walked outta' the backdoor of my house, crossed the alley, up the fire-escape and right into class. Then they didn't check if you came in the front door or not, shoot you could walk right in the backdoor and it was great. Four years I went to Laudon (??), and my mother was the only African-American home-ec teacher in the Commonwealth of Virginia and she taught home-economics at Harrison Elementary school. My fifth and sixth years I went to Harrison Elementary school and my mother taught Home-Ec and she taught each of us, and she made life hell for each of us in class 'cause she always thought she had to be harder on us than everyone else and I learned to bake, to cook, to sew, and I can still do those things but it was my mother that taught me and it wasn't at home it was at school. And everyone who went to Harrison Elementary school, if you were a sixth grader you took home-ec from my mother and I left there and integration had come to Roanoke, it come in 1960 with three folks in September of '60, and in September of 1962 I went to Monroe Junior High School as a seventh grader and there were seven of us who went in together, African-Americans, and they called us the "Magnificent Seven" 'cause we were also the seven who graduated from William Fleming at the same time. So I went to Monroe Junior High School and I finished, graduated from William Fleming High School in 1968 and graduated on June the 12th and June the 13th I reported for basics

because I had been accepted in U.S. Air Force Academy prep-school and I went to U.S. Air Force Academy for two years. I flunked-out because I couldn't pass math. And then I came back and went that summer to Virginia Western and then that Fall I got enrolled in Virginia Tech and I graduated from Virginia Tech, I finished in '72 but I couldn't get the degree until '73. And then I got my Masters, I took a couple of courses between then and 2000, but in 2001 I enrolled at Radford and completed my Masters in 2002, and so I have a Masters in Educational Leadership.

AO: You said in 1960 Integration started with three people?

DM: Yes, ma'am.

AO: And you were part of a group called "the Magnificent Seven?"

DM: in '62.

AO: '62. Do you know where the three graduated from in '60?

DM: Sure. The three that went in in 1960, two at Monroe Junior High, one at Melrose Elementary. The one at Melrose Elementary was Roselyn Long, and the next year her brother and younger sister came in there, and the two at Monroe Junior High were Eula Point-Dexter, who I think may still be in the area, and Cecilia Long and she is now Dr. Reverend Dr. Cecilia Long and she is on the board of trustees and she's a Hollins University graduate and on the board of trustees at Hollins University and I think she was a councilor and now also a minister – I don't think she has a church – but her major work is with a church, I think in school ministry in, I think in Houston, but the Long's parents are now deceased. And none of the Long children, the three of them, were of the first five to ever integrate Roanoke City schools but none of them is local right now but I do have a way to contact Roselyn Mitchell, Roselyn Long Mitchell who did integrate at Melrose Elementary.

AO: So do you keep up with the other six of the "Magnificent Seven"?

DM: Yes. Six of the "Magnificent Seven" are still alive, one passed away and we now have a scholarship in her memory at William Fleming. We give a scholarship every year to a student, and last year it was two, at William Fleming High School in her name, and we raise money with a golf tournament and a silent auction and things like that, but we give a \$2500 scholarship to a student from William Fleming High School.

AO: That's fantastic.

DM: And all of the "Magnificent Seven" have done fairly well. One of them, Billy Candidate, is now the state superintendent of the schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. We have one that's a doctor, one who's part-owner in a trucking-firm and so it, and one who's an executive with All State, we have everyone of the "Magnificent Seven," I consider myself mildly successful, but everyone of them, I think, did very well. Everyone of them and that to me says a whole lot. And a major reason I say that – we felt, we didn't at the time because we didn't understand but in the later years we've become a little bit more upset about which ones they picked to go in, at that time it was not forced integration and therefore we had to take a test to see if we were "worthy" of going into the so-called "white school."

AO: Wow.

DM: We were tested. We were tested. And then, after that, if you passed the test to get into the white school it had to be okay with your parents to allow you to go, we had to get

a waiver so we could go to the white school, otherwise we would have gone to Bookatic (??). The problem that we faced after that is that some of us, most of us, were not well received by the black students because we didn't go to Bookatic (??) and to Addison. We did not understand why we were placed, our parents told us but I don't think we understood at 10, 11, why we were going to Monroe, the significance of what we were doing and what it meant not just for us and for education since but for our race. We didn't understand that and I think that later on we did, and I think it caused us to get a little closer together and I think it caused us to look at integration and its results and its effects not just in our schools and in our cities, but it caused us to look at things a whole lot differently than some. I think we had a wider opinion and different view and I think we realized that every white person was not awful and not every white man didn't act like Barney Fiff (??). We went into that situation looking at folks as differently and I didn't understand why I shouldn't be fighting when someone called me a name or especially called my mother a name and I did, I got sent home for the first five days of school for fighting when we integrated 'cause I didn't understand what it is we were trying to do. My father would tell me: "Don't you let anybody call your mama a name" and my mother would say: "Son you don't understand why you have to let that go." And so it was a different atmosphere for us but I'm very proud of what the "Magnificent Seven" did. AO: So am I.

(DM talks about outdoor/indoor malls)

AO: Do you remember the closing of the silk mills?

DM: In '57 and '58, I remember them but I don't, we're talking about the ones in Southeast?

AO: Mhmmm.

DM: I remember when they closed. I remember folks being out of jobs, I remember southeast really going downhill after that. I remember southeast being a fairly vibrant part of our city, of course those kids went to Jefferson High School. I think it was a well-established part of our city. I remember when they did close it was the dearth of Southeast, it caused Southeast to go downhill so quickly. And I mean, it wasn't that it was a gradual thing, it plummeted 'cause most of those folks lived there and worked there and when they closed Visco's plant, those plants, I remember it took an immediate toll – it wasn't gradual – it took an immediate toll not just on Roanoke city but especially Southeast. Then at that point when it took a toll real estate, you know, regressed there and it became the catch-all for anyone who had financial or family problems. That's where they went – to Southeast – because property was cheap and rent was cheap if you had to rent a place. I do remember the impact immediately afterward and for an 8-9 year-old guy, kid, 10 I guess when I saw, 1962 when I really realized what had happened there. I remember playing baseball at Monroe and playing Jackson and the first year, my seventh grade year, I remember that it seemed like a really nice place to go but by my ninth grade year, '64 you could tell the difference. And you could tell how the city looked at it and I don't think our city did enough to save the neighborhood.

(DM talks about Gainsboro library)

DM: I remember . . . my first date was taken a girl in 1965 walking her to the Melrose Branch Library, got my first kiss on the way home (laughs).

AO: Who were some of the strong community leaders, and what role did they play?

DM: Back when I remember strong community leaders I would say my grandfather was the first one I knew of. You are talking of African-American leaders?

AO: Mhmmm.

DM: My very first recollection of a strong community leader was my grandfather who was a pastor at Juism (??) Baptist church and it was before the building of Hurt (??) Park and my grandfather was very instrumental in the school, that school being built and I think it should have been named after him. But at that time there was not a school in the city beyond, no elementary school was named for a person at that time and I remember my mother campaigned for that school to be named after my grandfather – he's the very first one I met – and then my grandfather being a minister at that time so the strong civic leaders I knew about at that time were all preachers, so at that time they had an NAACP in the early 60s, late 50s early 60s, was Reverend R.R. Wilkinson who was the pastor of Hill Street Baptist church before it moved here and I remember him being a really strong influence. A Barns Smith, I remember him, and I remember Lawrence Hammler, those three formed the initiative to help with the smooth integration of the school system. And got there congregations to go along with it. I remember Reverend Burton joining that group and becoming a very strong – he was a very young man than – a very strong contributor to easing the integration movement. I remember when Nole (??) Taylor came to town. Nole (??) Taylor was a very close friend of my grandfather, my grandfather at one point taught at a seminary in Lynchburg and Nole (??) Taylor was one of his students years ago. And I remember when Nole (??) Taylor came to town and he got involved in the civil rights movement as a result of Reverend Wilkinson. There were a lot of things said about Reverend Wilkinson – how he behaved, things he did, why he was not in his church anymore but overall I think Reverend R.R. Wilkinson did more to help with the integration of Roanoke than did any other person of his day, and I mean late 50s early 60s, but that whole group Smith, Wilkinson, Burton, Hunter – my grandfather, and Taylor were, I think, very significant community leaders who helped change what our perception of integration should be and they were very strong. I don't remember any other strong business leaders besides Hammler and Smith, who were the strong economic backbone of the community.

(DM talks about his grandfather's name, birth, marriage and being a Republican)

AO: Is there anything else we didn't cover that you'd like to share with us?

DM: I'd like to say that my brother and sisters, all 4 of us, did go to the so-called white school after we left elementary school. Each one of us, each one of us was taught by my mother in 6th grade and each of us went to the so-called white schools, the last school integrated in Roanoke city was in 1970 and was Patrick Henry high school so we had a disdain for Patrick Henry, a disdain, we despised Patrick Henry because they didn't have any black students there when we were in high school, it was hate. To this day I have something against Patrick Henry, I let people know I'm proud to be a Fleming Kernel but I have a disdain for Patrick Henry because once they started letting blacks in because

they were almost forced to, that was the only reason. When those two schools were built, and not many people know this, those two – Fleming High School and Patrick Henry High School were built where they are to prevent integration. When Fleming was built the dividing line between Roanoke City and Roanoke County was Hersherberger road. William Fleming at the time it was built was built on Roanoke County property. It was only annexed in 1976, I think. It was Roanoke county property. It was built where Breckenwiche (??) stands now which was the old Fleming high school ‘cause blacks had moved out that far and they felt they could keep it as long as possible. They knew when they built Patrick Henry High School where they built it that it would never be integrated unless they were forced to do so. That’s why Patrick Henry was built where it is instead of redoing Jefferson downtown or putting it near some other part of the downtown area. It was put there for a reason and when we were allowed to go to Fleming it was because we lived close and could get by there. There were no blacks living out in South Roanoke and Southwest, out in Grandin Court, Raleigh Court, so they didn’t have to integrate Patrick Henry. So we had a disdain, if we played Patrick Henry whatever we could do to do to disrupt Patrick Henry we would do it. We just had a hate for them. And I also had a disdain for students who went to Patrick Henry just because they could when they was integrated. They went there because it was supposed that since Fleming integrated first it wasn’t getting the benefits of education that Patrick Henry was getting. We weren’t getting the same books, you know, the same quality of education that they were getting at Patrick Henry. Therefore, for kids to go there just for that, we had a little disdain for them later on, even after I was an adult, even after I taught at, and I taught at Patrick Henry and I still had a disdain for it. But I think that folks don’t understand that even though we were integrated, the type of integration Roanoke City had was to keep it to going to federal court. Our integration was not forced because Roanoke came-up with a plan to keep it from going to federal court. Had Roanoke’s case been going, gone to federal court, it would have integrated Patrick Henry around 1964. The reason they built those schools with a plan, putting those schools where they were, Roanoke would not be subjected to the mandatory busing law. And that’s why, that’s why they were built there and that’s why it took so long for Patrick Henry to be integrated because Roanoke had a plan – as light as it was – it was a plan that was well thought through, and it was to keep us from integrating and to keep us from busing. And that’s why it was put in place. And I want to say that my thoughts on Gainsboro are probably not as strong as some other folks. But then again I think I’m a little young to know of Gainsboro in its hey-day and to understand fully the significance of its demise. I mean I have strong feelings based on having lived part of my life during that time and having parents and grandparents with strong feelings regarding it. But mine are more post-Gainsboro as it was known back then, than folks older than I.

AO: I thank-you very much for participating, it’s been very enlightening and this will be a good story for eternity (??).

DM: I appreciate it. Yeah, put it in a time-capsule somewhere. Maybe it will go up on a space shuttle or a space suit somewhere – (laughs).

AO: Absolutely. It goes up, you’re with it (laughs).

DM: That’s right.

AO: Thank-you again.

Track Two:

AO: Could you elaborate on your feelings with integration, being one of the first blacks in this area and how it affected you.

DM: I think integration affected me more so, and I don't mean to brag 'cause it's not anything to brag about, but I think it affected me more than it affected anybody else of the seven of us who went to school. My complexion being light that wasn't really accepted by either side. Whites obviously wouldn't accept me because we were something they hadn't seen before and black folks didn't really accept me, I think they were ticked off we were going to the white school and then I'm of light complexion and I wasn't really accepted by them either. I spent my entire middle and high school years trying to be accepted by somebody and I don't think I ever was. And I think it affected my youngest sister more than it affected me because she's really light complex and has blond hair and even to this day, she's 51-years-old, and I think she's suffered the consequence from the reaction of folks to her because of what she looked like. I remember even being an adult it affected me playing baseball. The first nine years of my adult professional life were in baseball – two as a player, seven as an umpire and I remember my very first professional game was in Rocky Mount North Carolina and going to the park with a cap-on when I came out in the dug-out, I mean nobody could tell, they knew I wasn't white, you know, some of the features, but they didn't know what I was. And I remember somebody in the back before the national anthem: "Oh my god they sent us an A-Rab!" (laughs) And I thought "Oh my lord, no!" And then I took off my hat for the national anthem and the same guy screams: "They didn't send us an A-Rab, they sent us a nigger. I went "Oh my lord," and my partner says: "Welcome to professional baseball." They ended up ejecting five players that day, three from one team, two from another. But I think a lot of it was caused by my complexion and so I've had a, it's been a sore spot for me and probably my brother and my sister and I'm in the middle. My sister is lighter complexion, my brother's a little darker, but I would say first off, it probably had a big affect on me and then my younger sister. I don't know if people can appreciate what its like to feel like you aren't accepted by anybody. My mother is one of those light complex people who didn't care, she'd tell how she feels in a heart beat and I think I got a lot of strength from her and in regards to that, and I think it has allowed me to see issues differently than some other folks. I'm bitter probably about some things that some other folks aren't and I'm bitter towards my own folks for not accepting me and sometimes I'm bitter about that, but I'm also more objective about some things 'cause my reason ability has allowed me to see why folks see things they way they do and I think that's been a benefit to me. But I think if I had to take back, I think if the question was: if I had to take back the worst memories I would have of my life as a child in Roanoke?" it would not have been when we integrated the schools so much as as being hurt sometimes and not accepted by anybody. And that's been something that's bothered me for 50 years.

AO: Okay.

